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Seneca's Challenge

van der Schuur, Marco

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Seneca's Challenge

Genre and Intertextuality in Senecan Tragedy
and Statius' *Thebaid*

Marco van der Schuur

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Seneca's Challenge

Genre and Intertextuality in Senecan Tragedy
and Statius' *Thebaid*

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Promotores

Prof. dr. R.R. Nauta

Prof. dr. M.A. Harder

Copromotor

Dr. H.J. van Dam

Beoordelingscommissie

Prof. dr. D. Rijser

Prof. dr. A.B. Wessels

Prof. dr. P.R. Hardie

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Although this dissertation was finished at a later date than originally intended, it is perhaps fitting that it should have been finished in the midst of a Theban plague and during the presidency of a would-be-tyrant with the appetite of an Atreus and the personality of a Thyestes. If anything, the times in which this dissertation was written have surely proved the timelessness of its subject matter: Seneca's tragedies and Statius' *Thebaid*.

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¹ Ginsberg, L.D./Krasne, D.A. (eds.) (2018), *After 69 CE. Writing Civil War in Flavian Rome*, Berlin/Boston (MA). The material published in *Lampas* is an intertextual analysis of Seneca's reception of the story of Procne in his *Thyestes*, which has found its way into the third chapter of this dissertation, along with some scattered observations on Senecan tragedy and intertextuality in my introduction. The material published in Ginsberg/Krasne (2018) is a discussion of the theme of "civil war on the horizon" in Seneca's *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae* and the seventh book of Statius' *Thebaid*. This discussion has found its way into the passages on civil war in *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae*, as well as some scattered observations on Seneca's *Phoenissae*; most of my analysis of the figure of Jocasta, as well as my analysis of some passages shortly preceding her intervention in the seventh book of the *Thebaid* and some observations on Flavian intertextuality and Statius' Oedipus at the beginning of my first chapter on Statius.

permission to reuse and recast my *Lampas*-material and the editors of *After 69 CE* and *Trends in Classics* for permission to reuse and recast some of the material contained in my contribution to *After 69 CE*.

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INTRODUCTION

I. The Interplay between Epic and Tragedy in Augustan Poetry

Epic and tragedy are two of the most closely related genres in Greek and Latin literary history. Starting with Aristotle, scholars have retrospectively recognized “tragic patterns” in Homeric epic.² The tragedians Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides drew on the epic tradition and alluded to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in their plays, reflecting on heroes and themes central to these epic poems.³ The interaction between both genres intensified in Hellenistic poetry, when Lycophron fused epic and tragedy in his *Alexandra* and when the epic poet Apollonius Rhodius used allusions to Attic tragedy to complicate his epic narrative – most significantly so through the character of Medea.⁴

No wonder, then, that Roman epic and tragic poets were similarly obsessed with the interplay between these two genres of high poetry. This book is a study in this generic interplay. Its most important interpretative tool is intertextuality, its two central poets are Seneca *tragicus* and the epic poet Statius. Over the course of five chapters, I will show how Senecan tragedy responds to the engagement between epic and tragic poetry in the work of his Augustan epic predecessors Vergil and Ovid, and how Statius responds to this Senecan challenge in his *Thebaid*. In the case of the *Thebaid*, I will follow a more or less linear intertextual close reading of the epic, focusing on those points in the poem where the allusions to Senecan tragedy are most strongly present. In the case of Senecan tragedy, I have chosen to focus on four plays from the Senecan tragic corpus that deal most intensely with some of Latin epic’s core concerns: *Hercules Furens*, *Oedipus*, *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae*. This is not to say that Seneca is not responding to Augustan epic in his other plays. But it is with these four plays in particular that Statius engages systematically over the course of his *Thebaid*. And for good reason. As we shall see, these four tragedies offer a sustained and interlocking interpretation of epic poetry, an interpretation that Statius, as an epic poet writing after Seneca, had to come to terms with.

Before we move on to my interpretation of Seneca’s tragedies and Statius’ epic, an overview of my interpretative method is in order. It should be noted that this introduction comes in two parts. In the first part I will discuss the views on

² See e.g. Rutherford (1982); Rinon (2008).

³ Garner (1990).

⁴ For a comprehensive study, see Schmakeit (2003). See also Hunter (1988).

intertextuality and genre that inform my reading of the poetic works that are central to this book; in this part I will also examine the generic interplay between tragedy and epic in Augustan literature. The second part provides the reader with the outlines of my approach to Senecan tragedy. But first, a few words of caution to the reader, to establish what this book is *not* about.

Some preliminaries

This book is an essay in first century Latin intertextuality. This implies that there are several major themes in Senecan and Statian studies with which I will only deal when relevant to the intertextual argument or not at all. The former category includes the influence of Greek poetry on Seneca and Statius and the political relevance of their writings. The latter category includes the performability of Senecan tragedy and the relationship between Seneca's poetic works and his prose works.

This is not to say that I do not consider these subjects worthy of scholarly attention - quite the contrary. But my emphasis here is on these texts as Latin poetry. It is irrelevant to my interpretation of Seneca's plays whether or not they were actually performed; what matters is that they can be read as Latin poetic texts.⁵ My emphasis on Seneca's plays as poetry also implies that I study them as part of the poetic tradition, as a response to the poetry that has come before it and as a body of work that is to be interpreted by poets that come after it. I do not know whether they were meant to support a Stoic message, to contradict one, or something in between. It is certainly true that the Senecan tragic corpus can be read in light of the Senecan philosophical corpus, or *vice versa*, but that would be the subject of another book – and indeed, is the subject of many other books.⁶

Likewise, my emphasis on Statius' and Seneca's texts as *Latin* poetry means that the role of Greek poetry in this book is relegated somewhat to the margins. I do think that Seneca's tragedies can be read as part of a tragic tradition stretching back to Aeschylus and forward to our time, and that it is no futile effort to compare Seneca's plays to Attic tragedy. But it should not be forgotten, as we shall see below, that Seneca's more immediate poetic predecessors, Vergil and Ovid in particular, offered him the most urgent meditation on the role of tragedy in the Latin poetic canon, and

⁵ For more on the matter of performance, see the essays in Harrison/Ahl (2000).

⁶ An intriguing Stoic take is offered by Rosenmeyer (1989). Attempts to integrate the various parts of the Senecan corpus are offered in Volk/Williams (2006). A confrontation between the studies of Schiesaro (2003) and Staley (2010) is also instructive.

it is Seneca's response to this very Roman problem that interests me here.⁷ In the case of Statius, I will devote some more attention to the role that Greek tragedy plays in his allusive project. Over the past few years, the role of Greek literature in Statius' poetry, including tragedy, has received a lot of attention in Flavian scholarship, and rightly so. It has been argued that Statius' response to Greek tragedy in the *Thebaid* forms a counterpoint to his response to Senecan tragedy in the same poem,⁸ and I will of course respond to this interpretation in my chapters on the *Thebaid*.

Another topic to which I will not devote a lot of attention is the political context of Seneca's plays and Statius' epic, because this book is primarily a study in literary technique and tradition. But of course, these poetic texts did not originate in a political vacuum, and they betray a profound interest in tyranny and civil war befitting the political reality in which they were written. Where relevant, I will involve this political reality in my discussion.⁹

Two poems that are probably to be situated between Seneca's tragedies and Statius' *Thebaid* chronologically have so far been absent – Lucan's *Bellum Ciuile* and Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*. These poems are of course important to Statius' conception of epic, and their relevance to Statius' response to the Senecan tragic corpus will be discussed at the beginning of the Statian chapters of this book. It could be argued that these poems, the *Bellum Ciuile* in particular, deserve a larger place in a dissertation on first century epic and tragic intertextuality, but I have chosen to zoom in on Seneca's project of genre-intertextuality and Statius' reception of this project for several reasons. *Medea* is the Senecan tragedy that looms largest in Valerius' *Argonautica*; therefore inclusion of Valerius' *Argonautica* in this book would call for a broader view of Seneca's tragic oeuvre than I have chosen here.¹⁰ The reception of tragedy in Lucan's epic has been thoroughly analyzed in Annemarie Ambühl's monograph on the subject,¹¹ and Statius' reception of Lucan has also received its fair share of scholarly attention.¹² This is not to say that Statius' reception of Senecan tragedy in the *Thebaid* has been completely neglected,¹³ but I do think that there is still

⁷ Compare Littlewood (2004), 1-2.

⁸ Bessone (2011).

⁹ On the Flavian literary response to the civil war of 69, see now the articles collected in Ginsberg/Krasne (2018).

¹⁰ The same is unfortunately true of Seneca's *Troades* and Statius' *Achilleid*.

¹¹ Ambühl (2015)'s emphasis is on Greek tragedy, but she also incorporates discussion of parallels between Seneca's tragedies and Lucan's epic.

¹² See the introduction to the first Statian chapter.

¹³ See again the introduction to the first Statian chapter.

much to be gained from a comprehensive investigation of Statius' use of this particular intertext that also takes Seneca's own intertextual project into account.

A final note: in the pages below, I will quote from the following editions (unless otherwise noted): Mynors (1969) for Vergil; Tarrant (2004) for Ovid; Zwierlein (1986a) for Seneca and Shackleton Bailey (2003) for Statius. Because of the specialized nature of this study and the ready availability of the useful recent Loeb translations of Seneca and Statius, I have chosen not to provide translations.

With these preliminaries out of the way, let us move on to the heart of the matter: intertextuality.

Intertextuality and genre

In the final decades of the twentieth century and in the first decades of the twenty-first, intertextuality has been the subject of a vigorous scholarly debate among Latinists. Central to this debate is the question of authorial intention: are parallels between texts conscious allusions by the author, and is the interpretation of these parallels governed by the author's intention, or is the author's intention impossible to determine and ultimately irrelevant, and are textual parallels to be interpreted by the reader or a community of readers?¹⁴ The various allusive strategies employed by Roman poets have also received ample attention. Because this debate on intertextuality has shaped the way in which we currently read Latin poetry, I will provide a brief overview of this debate, my position in it, and the interpretative techniques that this debate has engendered that I will use throughout this book.

The debate on intertextuality and authorial intention in Latin poetry received a major impulse in Anglo-Saxon scholarship in the 1980s, through the translation of a collection of essays by the Italian scholar Gian Biagio Conte into English¹⁵ and the publication of two articles on poetic technique by Richard F. Thomas.¹⁶ In his book, Conte, following in the footsteps of Giorgio Pasquali's article on allusion,¹⁷ argues for the interpretative riches available to the reader once an allusion to an earlier text is recognized, while at the same time declaring the author irrelevant to the interpretation

¹⁴ Of course, the notion of an author consciously alluding to his predecessors to create meaningful patterns of allusion in his poem is much older than this debate, as is evidenced by major studies on the reception of Homeric epic in the *Aeneid* by Georg Knauer (1964) and in Flavian epic by Herbert Juhnke (1972). For more on their interpretative techniques, see below.

¹⁵ Conte (1986).

¹⁶ Thomas (1982) on Catullus 64 and (1986) on the *Georgics*.

¹⁷ Pasquali (1942).

of this allusion, privileging the competent reader unlocking the poetic text's meaning by recognizing the ways in which it responds to the poetic tradition from which it originates.¹⁸ In the same year, Thomas published his article on the art of reference in Vergil's *Georgics*. This piece, along with Thomas' earlier work on poetic reference in Catullus 64, presupposes authorial intention and tries to establish criteria to distinguish between meaningful and merely accidental parallels. It also articulates the various techniques of poetic reference that Vergil employs in the *Georgics*.

In the following decade, several critics observed the continued dominance of the figure of the author in Conte's writings, who continues to invoke him in his interpretations of specific texts, even though he had dismissed the role of the author in the theoretical pages of his book.¹⁹ Apparently, it remains tempting to make a text's author the source of the meaning of a poetic parallel that we observe in a text, even though we ourselves are doing the reading of the text and thereby constructing its meaning.²⁰ A way out of this paradox is provided by Stephen Hinds in his influential study on Latin intertextuality, as he concludes a careful exploration of the interpretability of some particularly generic and seemingly meaningless parallels with the following solution to our problem:

'[W]hile conceding the fact that, for us as critics, the alluding poet is ultimately and necessarily a figure whom we ourselves read out from the text, let us continue to employ our enlarged version of "allusion", along with its intention-bearing author, as a discourse which is good to think with – which enables us to conceptualize and to handle certain kinds of intertextual transaction more economically and effectively than does any alternative.'²¹

And indeed, Hinds puts this reclaimed "author" to good use in the following chapters of his book.²² The author retains a more stable position in Jeffrey Wills' slightly earlier study *Repetition in Latin Poetry*, in which Wills articulates 'a grammar of allusion'.²³ Wills first articulates the various signs by which an allusion may be marked, ranging from sound-patterns to positional marking.²⁴ He then goes on to show

¹⁸ Conte (1986), 23-31.

¹⁹ See e.g. Farrell (1991), 21-23 and Hinds (1998), 17-21, to whom my contrasting of Thomas and Conte is indebted.

²⁰ The primacy of the reader, or a community of readers, as the creators of a text's (intertextual) meaning is most enthusiastically embraced by Fowler (1997a) and Edmunds (2001).

²¹ Hinds (1998), 50, rearticulated at page 144.

²² Hinds (1998), 52-144. See also below.

²³ Wills (1996), 24.

²⁴ See Wills (1996), 18-24.

how the recognition of a few clear-cut poetic references encourages the reader to hunt for others.²⁵ In a piece dedicated to the question of authorial intention, Joseph Farrell – slightly revising his earlier stance in his monograph on Vergil’s *Georgics*²⁶ – argues that, even though Vergil cannot control each and every recognition or interpretation of a parallel on the part of a reader, the poet himself must have intended for the reader to recognize his large-scale intertextual engagement with Homer and Apollonius.²⁷

My own position in all this, and the one followed in this book, is quite similar to that of Hinds: ultimately, we cannot know the intention of the author for certain, but we can – with Farrell – be sure that the author intended for us to recognize a systematic allusive program running through his poem and we can – with Wills – trace this allusive program by hunting for markers of poetic reference.²⁸ This is particularly true in the case of the longer dramatic and narrative poetry that is the subject of this book. However, the interpretation of the *meaning* of these parallels,²⁹ and the verdict on the interpretability of a less clear-cut parallel,³⁰ is indeed up to the individual reader, in discussion with his fellow-readers.

Now that we have decided to ‘think with’ the author, let us have a look at the various techniques that he employs. An approach to literary allusion preceding the discussion sketched above, is that developed by Georg Knauer in his monograph on Vergil’s allusions to Homer.³¹ Knauer shows that Vergil has systematically reworked all of Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* into his *Aeneid*, and that the poem can fruitfully be read as a sustained form of creative reception of Homer’s epics on Vergil’s part. This technique of a sustained intertextual reading is also employed by Herbert Juhnke on Flavian epicists’ reception of Homer;³² Joseph Farrell on Vergil’s response to several predecessors in his *Georgics*;³³ and by Damien Nelis on Vergil’s reception of Apollonius’ *Argonautica*, frequently in combination with Homeric epic, in his *Aeneid*.³⁴

²⁵ Wills (1996), 24–33.

²⁶ Farrell (1991).

²⁷ Farrell (2005), with reference to Knauer (1964) and Nelis (2001) for the large-scale patterns.

²⁸ This hunt has been made easier now by the development of the *Tesserae* program, which facilitates the search for large-scale allusive patterns, as argued by Coffee/Koenig/Poornima/Forstall/Ossewaarde/Jacobson (2012). In my readings, I have mostly been guided by traditional scholarship to recognize allusive patterns (the commentaries on most of the tragedies and books under discussion here are quite exhaustive) but have used *Tesserae* as a check when necessary.

²⁹ For the distinction see e.g. Wills (1996), 32.

³⁰ On which see Hinds (1998), 25–47.

³¹ Knauer (1964).

³² Juhnke (1972).

³³ Farrell (1991).

³⁴ Nelis (2001).

An influential way of reading Latin poetry that emerged in the 1980s, is that of the poet as a commentator on the work of his predecessors – a technique first observed in scholarship on Greek Hellenistic poetry, and appropriated to the study of Catullus and Vergil by Richard Thomas in the aforementioned articles, and that of post-Vergilian Latin epic by Philip Hardie.³⁵ Thomas has shown how Catullus and Vergil sometimes correct their predecessor's presentation of a story, privileging an alternative in the mythical tradition, sometimes a variant offered by yet another predecessor. Hardie has shown how Vergil's epic successors may allude to multiple Vergilian passages at once, thereby drawing attention to new interpretative possibilities of Vergil's text or laying bare some of the tensions present in Vergil's epic. For example, Ovid alludes to Vergil's history of both Rome and Carthage in his treatment of Thebes in the third and fourth book of his *Metamorphoses*, making the reader more aware of the similarities and differences between both cities in Vergil's epic while bringing another anti-city, Thebes, into play.³⁶ In the following chapters, we will see how Seneca and Statius too employ this combinatorial allusive technique to comment on the work of their epic predecessors and – in Statius' case – on the Senecan tragic corpus.

In addition to this "commentators-approach", Hinds has developed the notion of the 'tendentiously' alluding author. In the final three chapters of his book on intertextuality, he articulates the various ways in which poets tendentiously distort or simplify their predecessors' work, or rather 'appropriate' it to their own poetic needs. In these pages, we discover how Ennius and the neoterics present their predecessors as primitive precursors of their own superior poetry (and thereby influence *our* view on Latin literary history);³⁷ how Ovid – through his tendentious rewriting of the *Aeneid* in *Met.* 13.623-14.582 as a poem of metamorphoses, exploiting moments of metamorphosis present in the *Aeneid* – presents Vergil as a 'hesitant precursor' of his own poetry;³⁸ and how Statius and Martial, by presenting a poetic predecessor in a way that suits their own poetic agenda, restructure Latin literary history.³⁹ In the following chapters, we will also find Seneca and Statius trying to rewrite the poetic tradition on their own terms, responding to the possibilities present in the poetry of their predecessors.

³⁵ Hardie (1989) on Flavian epic, (1990) on Ovid and (1993) on all post-Vergilian epic from Ovid to Silius Italicus. On the classical poet as a reader of the work of his predecessors see also Martindale (1993), 35-54, working along the lines of Bloom (1973).

³⁶ Hardie (1990).

³⁷ Hinds (1998), 52-83.

³⁸ Hinds (1998), 99-122.

³⁹ Hinds (1998), 123-44.

Closely connected to the debate on intertextuality is the debate on genre.⁴⁰ Particularly relevant to our study, which focuses on the interaction between epic and tragedy, is one of the central questions of this debate: how should we read those Latin poems that seem to incorporate more than one genre? Back in 1924, Wilhelm Kroll published his influential chapter on the phenomenon he termed ‘Die Kreuzung der Gattungen’, arguing that Latin poets sought to innovate by crossing existing poetic genres with each other, creating new forms of Latin poetry in the process.⁴¹ In late-twentieth century scholarship, our thinking on genre has become more receptive to not just the crossing of genres as ‘a fait accompli’⁴² in a given Latin poem, but also of the constant generic negotiations taking place in Latin poetry.⁴³ For example, Hinds has argued that – even though women are a constant presence in ancient epic from Homer to Claudian – Latin epic poets from at least Vergil to Statius continue to work with the notion of ‘essential epic’, portraying epic as ‘all war, all male, all the time’, and problematizing the presence of the female in a masculine genre.⁴⁴

In this book I will be working with a flexible concept of my two main genres, epic and tragedy. As emerges from the preceding paragraphs, genres are very real categories to Latin poets, but at the same time, they are continuously reinvented and renegotiated in an endless intertextual process of rewriting that is refined from author to author. This is not to say that generic labels are meaningless, quite the contrary.⁴⁵ But it will not be of much use for me to posit an essentialist definition of “tragedy” or “the tragic” here.⁴⁶ Rather, I will begin by outlining how tragedy *works* as a counter-genre – perhaps even as a kind of “essential tragedy” – in the Latin epic poems preceding Seneca’s tragedies. It is to this generic dialogue that Seneca responds, with use of all the intertextual techniques that I have traced above.⁴⁷

⁴⁰ Conte (1994) and Hinds (1987), (1992) and (2000) have offered fundamental contributions to both debates, and, as Harrison (2007), 16 observes, ‘[g]eneric enrichment is the intergeneric form of intertextuality’. For more on generic enrichment, see below.

⁴¹ Kroll (1924), 202–24.

⁴² Hinds (2000), 222.

⁴³ For an overview of the various positions that have been taken in this debate, see Hinds (2000), 221–23. Hinds (1987), 99–134 introduces the notion of generic negotiation, which is further developed in Hinds (1992) and (2000).

⁴⁴ Hinds (2000).

⁴⁵ Compare Hinds (1987), 99–134.

⁴⁶ On the difficulties involved in defining both concepts see Most (2000). Neither will I take a Brechtian approach to Seneca’s “epic theatre”, on which see e.g. Tietze-Larson (1989) (*non uidi*).

⁴⁷ For recent discussions of genre in classical poetry see Harrison (2007) and Papangelis (2013).

The debates on intertextuality and genre run roughly parallel with another development in Latin scholarship: the revival of interest in long-neglected post-Vergilian poetry. In the aftermath of these developments, several more recent studies have emerged that seek to integrate the study of these poets, following the example set in the 1990s by Denis Feeney's and Philip Hardie's books on Latin epic.⁴⁸ For example, Pramit Chaudhuri traces the theme of the war against god from Homer up to Silius Italicus, including Lucretius and Seneca's tragedy *Hercules Furens*;⁴⁹ Mira Seo approaches the topic of characterization in Latin poetry from Catullus to Statius through an intertextual lens;⁵⁰ Dan Curley shows the crucial position of Ovid in the development of Latin tragedy, looking back to Vergil and forward to Seneca;⁵¹ and Christopher Trinacty shows how the reworking of Augustan poetry is a sustained intertextual project that can be traced through all of the Senecan tragic corpus.⁵² My own book can be seen as a continuation of this trend, and will incorporate these studies into its own program: a thorough assessment of the role of Seneca tragedy in the history of Latin epic.

Roman beginnings: Ennius

Epic and tragedy arrive in Rome more or less simultaneously: both genres, together with comedy, are present at the birth of Latin poetry. As Denis Feeney has recently argued, the Latin 'translation project' that was set in motion from 240 onwards is from the start both very 'comprehensive' and characterized by an 'intense self-consciousness'.⁵³ Poets often work in several genres simultaneously and are very much aware of their belated position in the poetic tradition, following after their Greek and – after Latin literature had acquired a substantial body of poems and plays – Latin predecessors.⁵⁴ Although many Roman poets since Livius Andronicus have written both epics and tragedies, it is impossible to say with any certainty to what extent Livius, Naevius and Ennius set up a generic dialogue between epic and tragedy in

⁴⁸ Feeney (1991) and Hardie (1993).

⁴⁹ Chaudhuri (2014).

⁵⁰ Seo (2013).

⁵¹ Curley (2013).

⁵² Trinacty (2014).

⁵³ Feeney (2016), 157.

⁵⁴ Feeney (2016), 152-78, with reference to further scholarship on the matter.

their poems.⁵⁵ But the comprehensiveness and self-consciousness that Feeney stresses would certainly make this a likely possibility, and for Ennius at least there are indeed strong indications that he explored the tensions between both genres in his *Annales*.

Tragic coloring has been detected in several fragments from the *Annales*, such as the remains of the Pyrrhus narrative of the sixth book⁵⁶ and the fall of Alba Longa in the second.⁵⁷ But the clearest example of the clash between epic and tragedy in the *Annales* is a fragment from the first book, in which Ilia narrates a troubling dream to her sister (*Annales* 34–51). In this dream, Ilia is abducted by a *homo pulcer* (38–39), after which she feels lost and abandoned. Comfort comes through a prophecy uttered by her father Aeneas, who tells her that she will have to suffer first, but that her good fortune will later be restored “from the river” (44–45: *tibi sunt ante gerendae / aerumnae, post ex fluuio fortuna resistet*). The *homo pulcer* is of course the god Mars, who rapes Ilia, an act that will eventually result in the birth of Romulus and Remus. Aeneas’ words refer to Ilia’s ‘punishment, and, very vaguely, her marriage to the river god and the rescuing of the twins’.⁵⁸

Ennius’ story of Ilia’s dream combines epic and tragic elements. On the one hand, it follows the traditional pattern of dreams in Attic tragedy:⁵⁹ the protagonist wakes from a puzzling and distressing dream, which she shares with a confidante. On the other hand, it conforms to patterns found in epic dreams, in which messengers convey divine prophecies through dreams – a role fulfilled by Aeneas here.⁶⁰ In addition to this, Ennius also taps into a poetic tradition of dreams in which seduction results in city-founding.⁶¹ This combination of poetic traditions results in a narrative that is tragic in its attention to personal suffering and epic in its forward glance to the foundation of Rome.⁶² Ennius’ organization of the tensions between tragedy and epic in his tale of Ilia would serve as a starting point for later epic and tragic poets.⁶³ These later poets,

⁵⁵ See Hardie (1997a), 323 for both points.

⁵⁶ Fisher (2014), 126 with reference to earlier literature.

⁵⁷ Hardie (1997a), 323.

⁵⁸ Skutsch (1985), 193, on the dream passage as a whole. See also Krevans (1993), 258.

⁵⁹ But already incorporated in the epic tradition by Apollonius; see Krevans (1993), 261.

⁶⁰ See Krevans (1993), 257; 259–60, with further references and parallels.

⁶¹ Krevans (1993), 264–65.

⁶² Krevans (1993), 265: ‘The multifaceted dream appropriately represents Ilia’s dual role as both tragic heroine and mother of Romulus: she herself will suffer [...] but her child will be the founder of a great race, a great city.’ See also Keith (2000), 42–46 and Elliott (2007), 46–49.

⁶³ Of course, we might also be reading this tension back into Ennius from Vergil. Elliott (2007), 39 and 54 suggests that Vergil’s contrasting epic voices may have been inspired by Ennius’ ‘polyphony’ ‘in embryonic form’.

however, would carry their explorations of these tensions much further than – as far as we can tell from what remains of his poetry – Ennius ever had.

Vergilian tragedy

“The tragic” has long been considered a central aspect of Vergil’s epic poem, the *Aeneid*. The notion that the *Aeneid* is a tragic poem can be traced back to the poem’s ancient readers.⁶⁴ In modern Vergilian scholarship, the tragic coloring of the *Aeneid* has most influentially been emphasized by Richard Heinze.⁶⁵ Much effort has since been dedicated to the tracing of tragic plotlines in the *Aeneid*. Vergilian scholarship of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century has deepened our understanding of the broader generic implications of these tragic narratives and patterns within Vergil’s epic poem. These tragic plots are not just there to invoke the reader’s pity, but also to invite reflection on Vergil’s epic project. It is on this line of thinking that I will mostly draw in this book. Discussions of individual tragic plots in the *Aeneid* will be discussed where they are relevant to my argument on Senecan and Statian intertextuality, but I will not fully discuss them in this introduction.

In modern Vergilian studies, Vergil’s penchant for the tragic has often been connected to his so-called ‘subjective style’.⁶⁶ Vergil is a tragic poet, infusing his epic verse with drama and pathos. This line of thinking has been inaugurated by the work of Heinze mentioned above. In later decades, several scholars have interpreted this tragic coloring as Vergil’s way of lamenting the cost of Aeneas’ and Augustus’ accomplishments.⁶⁷ Some of these scholars have gone further, reading Vergil’s allusions to tragedy as voices within the poem actively undermining these accomplishments.⁶⁸ Although I would not go this far, it is certainly true that the presence of tragic intertexts in Vergil’s epic creates generic tensions and interpretative problems. I will discuss below how Vergil has made these generic tensions an integral part of the structure of his epic. The work of Conte and Hardie will figure prominently in these paragraphs.

Conte has argued that the *Aeneid* is governed by a tension between the “epic norm” on the one hand and the points of view of the characters on the other hand, resulting

⁶⁴ See e.g. Hardie (1997a), 312.

⁶⁵ Heinze (1915³).

⁶⁶ For the term, see Otis (1964).

⁶⁷ Most notably Parry (1963).

⁶⁸ See Lyne (1987) in particular on Vergil’s voices.

in a ‘polycentric [text]’.⁶⁹ Conte defines the “epic norm” as the way in which the “epic code” is interpreted in actual (Latin) epic texts.⁷⁰ This epic norm – in its Roman form as conferred upon Vergil by his epic predecessors – focuses on the Roman glorious march through history under divine guidance.⁷¹ Conte finds this epic norm embodied in the fragments of Naevius’ *Bellum Punicum* and Ennius’ *Annales*.⁷² Vergil’s major generic innovation was to contrast this epic norm with the perspectives or points of view of his various characters, rendering the epic norm ‘relative rather than absolute’.⁷³ These characters provide their own, partial perspectives on the events unfolding in the epic. But these perspectives never actually supersede the perspective of the epic norm, which Conte closely identifies with Fate.⁷⁴ Conte inserts these personal points of view in the scholarly tradition, starting with Heinze, that emphasizes the dramatic or tragic character of the *Aeneid*. Conte does not go so far as to argue that the *Aeneid*’s plot-structure is dramatic: its conflicting viewpoints are not resolved in some climactic moment of crisis.⁷⁵ Rather, they co-exist in the poem to challenge the epic norm but are in the end all kept in check by the authority of the poet.⁷⁶

Conte’s approach has been criticized as too rigid, particularly in its somewhat monolithic presentation of the epic norm as represented by archaic epic.⁷⁷ But his view that the *Aeneid* is an epic poem in which tragic voices create alternative perspectives is a fruitful way to interpret the *Aeneid*, especially if we read Conte’s epic norm as a type of “essential epic” with which Vergil works. As mentioned above, some scholars have wished to go beyond mere complication of epic through tragedy and have argued that these tragic voices actively undermine the poem’s “epic voice”. In later work, Conte would respond to these readings and go somewhat beyond his earlier

⁶⁹ Conte (1986), 141-84, particularly 154-58.

⁷⁰ Conte (1986), 143-44. The “epic code”, in turn, is defined as ‘a source and a storehouse of interconnected values, vividly displayed in the actions of heroes, on which the community can draw as an organic arrangement of its own cultural foundations.’ (Conte (1986), 142) In contrast to the epic norm, Conte defines the epic code as ‘non-committal’ (Conte (1986), 144).

⁷¹ Conte (1986), 144.

⁷² Conte (1986), 144-46.

⁷³ Conte (1986), 150-51.

⁷⁴ Conte (1986), 161.

⁷⁵ Conte (1986), 158-62 with n. 14 on the scholarly tradition.

⁷⁶ Conte (1986), 163-72. See also more recently Conte (2007), 23-57 – with page 27, 34-35, 44, 46, 49 and 50 in particular on the tension between epic and tragedy in Vergil’s poem.

⁷⁷ See for example the review of Feeney (1989). It should be noted that Conte himself seems to be aware of the danger of over-interpreting the fragments of Naevius and Ennius. Still, Feeney is right to adduce the dream of Ilia as an example of Ennius’ openness to perspectives differing from the norm. Elliott (2007) uses Conte’s work to search for other ‘voices’ in the *Annales*.

conclusions, stating that '[t]he epic narrative finally takes on the pattern of drama, by proposing not an entrenched truth, but the search for truth: it no longer aims only to catechize and edify its readers, it wants to distress them, to agitate them, perhaps even transform them, by associating the positive with the negative, certainties with doubts. This is a strategy, therefore, very close to that set in motion by tragic poetry.'⁷⁸ Nevertheless, Conte remains keen to emphasize that tragedy in Vergil is still subjected to the supremacy and objectivity of Fate, which 'prevents the poem from collapsing into tragedy'.⁷⁹

The delicate balance between epic and tragedy in Vergil's *Aeneid* is also explored in the work of Philip Hardie, who has written extensively on the role of tragedy in the *Aeneid* in various articles and books during the 1990s. In these works, Hardie has argued that some of the *Aeneid*'s central concerns are derived from, or at the very least shared with, Attic tragedy. Having analyzed the *Aeneid*'s all-embracing cosmic scope, crucial to Vergil's conception of the epic genre,⁸⁰ Hardie is able to offer a particularly thoughtful series of answers to the question of how Vergil incorporates tragedy into these cosmic structures.

Hardie alerts his reader to several important similarities between the *Aeneid* and the tragic genre. First of all, the *Aeneid* shares its cosmic scope with Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. Both poetic works explore the interaction between the forces of order and chaos, the establishment of a new order under the guidance of Jupiter/J Zeus and the accommodation of older, chthonic forces – the Dirae/Eumenides – within this order.⁸¹ Vergil's *Aeneid* and Aeschylus' *Oresteia* also share an interest in the theme of sacrifice 'pure, inverted, and perverted'.⁸² Finally, Vergil's epic – as well as other Greek and Latin epics – and Greek tragedy share an interest in the ways in which heroes move up and down between the realms of man, beast and god, a theme that will also feature in my discussion of Seneca's Hercules.⁸³

Hardie discusses Vergil's response to Greek tragedy most fully in his 1997 chapter of the *Cambridge Companion to Virgil*. In this chapter he considers the

⁷⁸ Conte (2007), 166. This statement forms part of an evaluation (Conte (2007), 150-69) of the claims of the "European school" and the "Harvard school" in Vergilian studies.

⁷⁹ Conte (2007), 50.

⁸⁰ Hardie (1986).

⁸¹ Hardie (1991) and (1993), 71-72.

⁸² Hardie (1991), 34; see also more generally Hardie (1993), 19-56 on sacrifice in the *Aeneid* and later Latin epic poetry.

⁸³ Hardie (1993), 68, with ns. 20 and 21 referring to the work of Feeney (1991), 94-98, 155-62, 194-98, 360-61 on epic and Segal (1986), 26-31 on Greek tragedy.

various aspects of “the tragic” available to Vergil in composing his epic. Hardie seizes on a shift in emphasis in the scholarship on Greek tragedy from the personal to the political: Greek tragedy served as a medium for literary reflection on the changes that the city-state of Athens underwent in the fifth century BCE, and Vergil likewise uses his tragic intertexts to comment on the changes that the Roman Republic experienced in the first century BCE. Central to Hardie’s argument is the notion, derived from the work of Vernant and other scholars of Greek tragedy,⁸⁴ that tragedy is a genre uniquely fit to explore moments of crisis, be they personal or political, and that Vergil made this aspect of tragedy integral to his own method of epic composition. Like Conte, Hardie argues that the incorporation of tragedy into his epic allows Vergil to turn the *Aeneid* into a ‘problematic text’.⁸⁵

Sometimes tragedy’s competing perspectives come dangerously close to derailing Vergil’s epic project. The most forceful tragic counter-perspectives can be found in the fourth and seventh books, where Vergil presents the tragic cities of Carthage and Laurentum. Both of these cities are instruments of Juno’s fruitless efforts to thwart the plan of Jupiter. Vergil describes the fates of both of these cities and its queens in particular, Dido and Amata respectively, in decidedly tragic terms.

The literature on the tragic nature of the story of Dido is of course vast.⁸⁶ But the most perceptive reader of Dido as a potentially destabilizing and even destructive figure in Vergil’s epic is Alessandro Schiesaro. In two major publications, Schiesaro has developed the argument that Dido presents a major challenge to the poem’s teleological drive in two different ways. On a very practical level, Dido poses a threat to Aeneas’ continued existence. Schiesaro shows that Dido does not just express the desire to kill Aeneas after he has already left (*Aen.* 4.600-06), but that this desire is also present beneath the surface in some of her other utterings in the poem. Most suggestively, Schiesaro reads Dido’s wish for the *tempus inane* (*Aen.* 4.433) that Aeneas should grant her to come to terms with his eventual departure as an allusion to Medea’s request for μίαν ... ἡμέραν (*Eur. Med.* 340) to prepare her departure from Corinth. Of course, Medea would use this day to plot her revenge against Jason. Schiesaro alerts

⁸⁴ Vernant/Vidal-Naquet (1988).

⁸⁵ Hardie (1997a), 313. The views of Conte and Hardie on the role of tragedy in the *Aeneid* have been influential in recent scholarship. For example: Galinsky (2003) picks up on the tragic confrontation between different perspectives; Panoussi (2009) develops the themes of sacrificial crisis and the tragic hero crushed by the plan of Jupiter; Rebeggiani (2016) further develops the idea that tragic *furor* is an instrument of Jupiter and Aeneas – and (in a civil war context) Augustus – necessary to bring about order and peace.

⁸⁶ See Panoussi (2009), 5 n. 5 for a relatively recent overview of the literature. Giusti (2018), on the role of Carthage in the *Aeneid*, appeared too late for me to properly incorporate.

the reader of Vergil's text to the possibility that, likewise, Dido may intend to use her *tempus inane* to plot her revenge against Aeneas.⁸⁷

On a more metaphysical level, Dido, her city Carthage and her patron goddess Juno are representative of a different conception of history and time than the one guiding Jupiter's plan for Aeneas and Rome. Aeneas' stay in Carthage tempts him to give up on his mission, which would have resulted in an altogether different trajectory of history than the one Jupiter has in mind, and the mixing of two nations – Carthaginians and Trojans – that should not be mixed.⁸⁸ Similarly, Dido's psyche is possessed by the desire to reverse her personal history: she desires to return to her dead husband Sychaeus; she wishes that she had killed Ascanius and Aeneas (*Aen.* 4.600-06); most extremely, at one point she expresses a longing for a life free from the constraints of civilization (*Aen.* 4.550-52), thereby placing herself at odds with Jupiter's linear, teleological view of history.⁸⁹ But this longing for the reversal of history should not be limited to Dido, Carthage and Juno alone, even though they find their clearest expression there. Schiesaro observes that Aeneas himself, too, expresses a longing to reverse history: if he were free to choose, he would return to the site of Troy and re-found the city (*Aen.* 4.342-44). Moreover, the Trojans' journey to Italy is also a journey to their original homeland, and not simply a journey to a new world.⁹⁰

Dido, Carthage and Juno share this anti-teleological drive with what is probably Greek tragedy's most haunted city: Thebes. As Froma Zeitlin has argued in an influential article, Thebes was the city that served as a counter-point to democratic Athens, the tragic *locus* where the Attic playwrights could safely consider a *polis* and its rulers gone astray, where personal identity collapses and the biographies of rulers turn in on themselves, particularly in the case of Oedipus, who always must return to his origins.⁹¹ Moreover, Thebes is the city of Dionysus, the god who in Euripides' *Bacchae* tests the structures of the *polis* to the breaking point and destroys Pentheus' *oikos*.⁹²

⁸⁷ Schiesaro (2008), 61-66. Schiesaro's discussion of this allusion is part of a vast exploration of possible violent undertones in Dido's speech and thoughts, which incorporates a lengthy discussion of post-Vergilian poets responding to the latent violence in Vergil's portrayal of Dido, comparable to that of a Medea or a Procne.

⁸⁸ Schiesaro (2005), 86-88. As Schiesaro points out, the eventual solution to Juno's enmity at the end of the *Aeneid* also involves the mixing of nations: Trojans and Latins.

⁸⁹ Schiesaro (2005), 88-103, who considers these passages in a broader framework of parallels from the *Aeneid* and other Latin poets.

⁹⁰ Schiesaro (2005), 103-04. See Reed (2006) on the journey to Italy as simultaneously a return-journey and a journey away from Troy.

⁹¹ Zeitlin (1990).

⁹² See e.g. Segal (1982).

As Schiesaro observes, Carthage is ‘the Romans’ own Thebes, a world of ill-defined boundaries, incestuous tensions, blurred gender identities, a household (and a land) *ambigua* (1.661) both because potentially untrustworthy and disturbingly confused.’⁹³ And indeed, Vergil writes about Dido and Carthage in distinctly Theban terms, just as he will develop Amata and Laurentum along Theban lines. As is well known, Bacchic vocabulary figures prominently in Vergil’s description of Dido’s madness in two similes. Dido’s emotions upon hearing that Aeneas is about to leave her are compared to the madness of a Theban Maenad (*Aen.* 4.300-03, which mentions the Theban Mount Cithaeron specifically). And as her madness increases, Dido is visited by nightmares that Vergil compares to, among other things, the madness of Pentheus shortly preceding his tragic demise (*Aen.* 4.469-70).

Vergil picks up this Theban imagery again in his treatment of Laurentum’s queen Amata and of the Rutulian hero Turnus, Aeneas’ primary human antagonists in the second half of the *Aeneid*. Just as Juno had tried to make Aeneas stay in Africa to throw his mission off course, so she now tries to use Amata and Turnus to frustrate Aeneas’ mission. In order to achieve this, she summons the Fury Allecto from the Underworld to drive Amata, Turnus and most of Latium into a frenzy of hatred against Aeneas and the Trojans (*Aen.* 7.323-640). Allecto first maddens Amata, by tearing a poisonous snake from her hair and thrusting it into the queen’s lap. As a result, Amata first protests against the plans of her husband, king Latinus, to marry their daughter Lavinia to Aeneas (*Aen.* 7.357-72). As these pleas fall on deaf ears, and Amata is further possessed by the venom of Allecto’s snake, she spirits her daughter away to the mountains in Bacchic frenzy, urging the Latin mothers to follow her (*Aen.* 7.373-405).

In this particular passage, Vergil establishes strong parallels with both his description of Dido’s madness and with the tragic tradition on Bacchus’ takeover of Pentheus’ Thebes. Like Dido, Amata storms through the city in Maenadic frenzy: compare *immensam sine more furit lymphata per urbem* (*Aen.* 7.377, of Amata), with *saeuit inops animi totamque incensa per urbem / bacchatur* (*Aen.* 4.300-01, of Dido). In both cases, Vergil uses the vocabulary of Maenadic madness (*lymphata* and *bacchatur* respectively); moreover, he also stresses the connection with the city through the words *per urbem*. Like Dido’s Carthage, Amata’s Laurentum takes on the role of a tragic, Theban, city within Vergil’s epic. The Theban connection is reinforced by the allusions to Euripides’ *Bacchae*. As many commentators have observed, Vergil’s

⁹³ Schiesaro (2008), 97. The word *ambigua* occurs as part of Venus’ characterization of the Tyrians to herself as she considers the dangers that surround Aeneas in Carthage.

description of Amata's Bacchic rites (*Aen.* 7.394-405) is heavily indebted to Euripides' description of these same rites in his *Bacchae*.⁹⁴

Vergil continues his Bacchic and Theban imagery throughout the rest of his account of the madness of war spreading across the country, first possessing Turnus and finally possessing all of Latium. Vergil particularly stresses this Theban connection through allusions to tragic versions of the story of Ino and Athamas, Bacchus' foster-parents that were driven mad by a vengeful Juno.⁹⁵ Amata's demise has a Theban coloring to it as well. In the epic's twelfth book, when the queen realizes all is lost and the Trojans are at the walls of the city, she hangs herself (*Aen.* 12.595-603). This particular form of suicide calls to mind the suicide of Oedipus' mother and wife Jocasta.⁹⁶

Finally, the Theban intertexts have a broader thematic relevance to the second half of the *Aeneid*. As has often been observed, Vergil casts the second half of his epic as a proto-civil war, because the war between Trojans and Latins is one between nations that are destined to eventually become one.⁹⁷ The civil strife, even fratricide that runs through Theban history – from the fratricidal soldiers springing from the dragon's teeth that Cadmus sows at Thebes' founding, to the war between Oedipus' sons Eteocles and Polynices – is a recurring metaphor in Latin literature for the Romans' own penchant for civil strife that stretches back to Romulus' slaying of his brother Remus at the moment of Rome's foundation.⁹⁸ As Laura Bocciolini Palagi shows, allusions to Greek and Roman tragedies about Thebes do not just occur in the seventh book of the *Aeneid* – although this is where they are most clearly present – but are a constant feature of the Iliadic half of the poem, infusing Vergil's war narrative with the disturbing undertones of Theban tragedy.⁹⁹

So far, I have discussed Vergil's tragic cities and its queens as forces inspired by Juno, endangering Aeneas' mission either through violence threatened and implied (Dido) or real (Amata); or by offering an alternative to the teleological worldview of Jupiter (Dido). Both Carthage and Laurentum, as we have seen, are portrayed as Roman reincarnations of Athens' quintessential "other city", Thebes. However, Vergil also frequently emphasizes how similar Aeneas' city-founding destiny is to that of

⁹⁴ See e.g. Horsfall (2000) *ad loc.* On the *Bacchae* as a major intertext for the *Aeneid* see Bocciolini Palagi (2007) and Mac Gorain (2013).

⁹⁵ See Bocciolini Palagi (2007), 154-56.

⁹⁶ See also Mac Gorain (2018) on these and other Sophoclean intertexts in the *Aeneid*.

⁹⁷ For a recent discussion of the theme of civil war in the second half of the *Aeneid*, see Pogorzelski (2009), with bibliography.

⁹⁸ See Petrone (1996) on the Roman rhetoric of civil war.

⁹⁹ Bocciolini Palagi (2007), 147-56.

Dido. We have already seen that Dido's regressive perspective on history is tempting to Aeneas (*Aen.* 4.340-44), and he has come dangerously close to realizing the alternative course of history that Juno has envisaged for him: Mercury finds him co-founding Carthage in Punic attire (*Aen.* 4.259-64). Carthage presents a very real temptation to Aeneas, 'a real alternative to his life's business',¹⁰⁰ particularly because Dido's fate of forced exile and city-founding seems to mirror his own, and he only gradually comes to realize the full meaning of his mission.¹⁰¹

To summarize: Vergil does not just allude to Greek and Latin tragedy to add tragic *pathos* to his epic. Tragic intertexts serve as a way to complicate and interrogate the poem's *telos*: Aeneas' and the Trojans' safe arrival in Italy under Jupiter's guidance, paving the way for the foundation of Rome and, ultimately, the rule of Augustus. As I have mentioned above, I do not believe that these complications and interrogations are the "real" message of the poem, in opposition to the poem's epic voice. But the tensions that they create are real, and later poets did not hesitate to respond to them. The first poet to do so was Ovid.

Ovid: tragedy as commentary

Ovid's "coming after" Vergil has always been central to Ovidian scholarship. For a long time, the fact that Ovid began his poetic career after Vergil had concluded his has been viewed as a disadvantage for Ovid: coming after Vergil's grand achievements, how could he not be a lesser poet than his predecessor? In this view, Ovid was either humbly aware of his necessarily inferior status, avoiding Vergil's lofty heights, or the harbinger of all the decadent vices of Silver Latin.¹⁰² But with the Ovidian renaissance, a more subtly self-conscious poet emerged. This new Ovid is a sophisticated commentator on the poetic tradition and his own oeuvre, laying bare interpretative problems in the texts of his predecessors – Vergil in particular – while continuously rewriting and rereading his own poetry. This new Ovid occupies an equally pivotal position in the history of Latin poetry as the old one, but rather than inaugurating its decline, Ovid shows Latin poets the way forward beyond Vergil.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Schiesaro (2005), 86.

¹⁰¹ See Fletcher (2014), with pages 142-62 on Aeneas in Carthage. See also Reed (2007), 73-100 and 129-47 on Dido and Carthage as foils to Aeneas' mission. Unlike Fletcher, Reed, in a thorough analysis of the various cities and ethnicities that Vergil compares with Rome and Aeneas' Trojans in his epic, argues that Vergil and Aeneas never arrive at a clear-cut definition of Romanness.

¹⁰² On Ovid as the harbinger of the Silver Age, see Williams (1978), reevaluated by Hinds (1998) and Hardie (2002a).

¹⁰³ Compare Hardie (2002a) and Seo (2013), 16-18 with references.

The entire Ovidian corpus can be read as a systematic response to Vergil's oeuvre. This is evident both from overtly programmatic passages in Ovid's poetry as well as from Ovid's continuous allusion to Vergil's poetry. The most explicit programmatic statement can be found in Ovid's *Remedia Amoris*, in which he states that his achievement in elegiac poetry is comparable to that of Vergil in the hexameter (395-96): *Tantum se nobis elegi debere fatentur, / quantum Vergilio nobile debet epos*. Significant too is the opening of his *Amores*, which has *arma* as its first word, calling to mind the first word of Vergil's *Aeneid*. Like Vergil, Ovid begins in a small genre (compare his *Amores* with Vergil's *Eclogues*), and then moves up to didactic (compare his *Ars Amatoria* with Vergil's *Georgics*). Ovid would then proceed to write no less than three poems that could be said to occupy the position in his oeuvre that the *Aeneid* occupies in Vergil's: his lost tragedy *Medea*, his epic *Metamorphoses* and his great aetiological poem *Fasti*. The many poetic allusions to Vergil's work that can be found throughout Ovid's poetic output, combined with these programmatic statements and the hyper-Vergilian structure of his poetic career, suggest to Ovid's reader that one way to interpret his oeuvre is reading it as a sustained response to Vergil's.¹⁰⁴

In the preceding discussion of Vergil, we have seen that the *Aeneid* can be read as an epic with one poetic and political vision, but also containing a multitude of potentially destabilizing tragic intertexts. Ovid's oeuvre betrays a similarly profound interest in the tragic genre and its relationship with epic.¹⁰⁵ Having written a tragedy *Medea* relatively early in his career, Ovid would take a more indirect approach to the genre in the rest of his oeuvre – the *Heroides* and *Metamorphoses* in particular – never writing actual tragedies again, but incorporating tragic intertexts and tropes throughout his epistolary and epic poetry.¹⁰⁶ Being a poet prone to rewriting and revision,¹⁰⁷ Ovid treats tragedy in an equally oblique way, setting up an intratextual network of tragic tales throughout his oeuvre, which all comment on each other while never offering a final word on the themes and problems raised in these stories.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ On Ovid's career in relation to Vergil's career see Tarrant (2002b); Harrison (2002); Farrell (2004); Hardie/Barchiesi (2010).

¹⁰⁵ On Ovid's response to tragedy throughout his oeuvre and his investigation of tragedy's relationship with epic as a continuation of and commentary on Vergil's reception of tragedy, see Curley (2013) *passim*, but 4 and 221-25 in particular.

¹⁰⁶ Curley (2013).

¹⁰⁷ See Tarrant (2002b) and Martelli (2013).

¹⁰⁸ On Ovid's tragic intratextuality see Curley (2013), 177-216, further developing a way of thinking also found in Larmour (1990), Newlands (1997) – who emphasizes Ovid's elusiveness – and Gildenhard/Zissos (2000). On Ovid's gradually shifting development of themes and stories as a means of narrative organization in the *Metamorphoses* see Wheeler (2000).

There are two of these tragic networks in the *Metamorphoses* that are particularly relevant to us here, as they would exercise a strong pull on the tragedian Seneca: the Theban cycle and the “Medean cycle”, to which *Heroides* XII (Medea’s letter to Jason) and Ovid’s lost tragedy *Medea* are of course also pertinent. The Theban cycle begins with Cadmus’ foundation of Thebes at the beginning of the third book of the *Metamorphoses* and ends with his transformation into a snake some way into the fourth book, in the meantime treating the fates of his grandsons Actaeon and Pentheus, while also incorporating that of the Boeotian youth Narcissus. The Medean cycle starts with the story of Procne, Tereus and Philomela (covering most of the second half of the sixth book) – closely linked to the story of Medea through the element of infanticide –, then moves on to the actual tale of Medea in the seventh book – treating her adventures in both Colchis and Greece, but giving short shrift to her abandonment by Jason and her murder of her own children in revenge – and is concluded with a string of stories revisiting Medean themes in a different key.¹⁰⁹ Both of these story-cycles can be interpreted as a commentary on Vergil’s treatment of tragedy in the *Aeneid*. In the paragraphs below, I will offer a brief discussion of the generic dynamics involved in the Theban stories and the – for my purposes – most important of the Medean stories: that of Tereus and Procne.¹¹⁰

Ovid’s Theban stories further develop Vergil’s themes of city-founding and epic teleology. We have already seen how Carthage, Laurentum and Thebes figured prominently in the *Aeneid* as tragic anti-cities, offering dark alternatives to the destiny of Aeneas, Rome and Augustus under the guidance of Jupiter. Ovid’s Theban cycle has been compellingly read as a deconstruction of the teleological drive of the *Aeneid*. Philip Hardie has shown how Ovid, in his narrative of Cadmus’ foundation of the city and in his tale of the destruction of Ino and Athamas by Juno, fuses allusions to Aeneas and Rome with allusions to the fates of Carthage and Laurentum, erasing the differences and emphasizing the similarities between Vergil’s cities.¹¹¹ Further developing Hardie’s notion of the Theban books as a commentary on the *Aeneid*, Micaela Janan has argued that the capricious, violent gods and despots and troubled identities that populate Ovid’s Thebes reveal the true face of Jupiter’s plan in the *Aeneid*: Theban – and, consequently, Roman – civilization is founded upon the arbitrary violence of gods

¹⁰⁹ See Larmour (1990) and Newlands (1997) in particular.

¹¹⁰ Where necessary, these Ovidian stories will be discussed in greater depth in the relevant Senecan chapters.

¹¹¹ Hardie (1990).

and despots, and the paradox that order is achieved through violence and disruption cannot be resolved.¹¹²

The Medean cycle deals with the other major problem that tragedy forms in Vergil's epic: the disruption of the epic narrative through tragic violence, often brought about by a woman. In the *Aeneid*, it was Dido and Amata in particular who presented this challenge to Vergil's epic, and we have seen that Vergil's treatment of Dido has been particularly influenced by the figure of Medea in earlier Greek epic and tragedy. Ovid further explores the challenge that frenzied tragic women pose to the epic genre. The poem's most dangerous episode is probably the story of Procne, Philomela and Tereus (*Met.* 6.424-674), in which the Thracian king Tereus marries the Athenian princess Procne, but falls in love with and rapes his wife's sister Philomela, pulling out her tongue as she curses him. Philomela manages to smuggle out a message to her sister, woven on a tapestry, informing her of Tereus' crime. Procne then liberates her sister, using the Thracian rites for Bacchus as a cover. As the two sisters deliberate over the right punishment to match Tereus' crime, Procne – overcoming her own maternal feelings – convinces herself to kill her son by Tereus, Itys, and feed his remains to his father at a ghastly meal. As both sisters reveal their terrible revenge-crime to Tereus – Philomela thrusting Itys' head at Tereus – and Tereus begins to pursue Procne and Philomela, all three of them are transformed into birds.

This terrible story has a long and venerable history before Ovid on both the Greek and the Roman stage.¹¹³ As we have seen above, Vergil had already hinted at its disruptive potential in an epic by having Dido allude to it in her fantasies of unfulfilled revenge against Aeneas (*Aen.* 4.602). As Charles Segal has observed, Ovid's vengeful Procne now channels the Bacchic *furor* of Vergil's Dido and Amata, as well as that of the Greek tragic tradition of Bacchic violence preceding both Roman poets.¹¹⁴ By infusing the already unsettling tale of Procne with these intertexts, Ovid alerts his readers to the fact that Latin epic has gone a long way towards incorporating tragedy's darkest strains. In order to drive home this point, Ovid goes beyond Vergil in temporarily expelling the Olympic gods from his epic, in an extension of the godless world that was portrayed in his description of the Iron Age (*Met.* 1.128-50).¹¹⁵

¹¹² Janan (2009). On Ovidian Thebes see also Feldherr (1997) and Gildenhard/Zissos (2000).

¹¹³ Both Sophocles and Accius had written a tragedy on Tereus and Procne.

¹¹⁴ Segal (1994), 274. On Ovid's invocation of *Aeneid* 7 in the tale of Procne, see also Gildenhard/Zissos (2007). On the contemporary Roman relevance of this exotic tale to Ovid's reader see Feldherr (2010), 199-239.

¹¹⁵ On the connection between the universe of the Iron Age and that of the tale of Procne in the *Metamorphoses*, see Tarrant (2002a). On the godless nature of Ovid's Thrace – Bacchus and the forces of Hell aside – see Segal (1994) and Gildenhard/Zissos (2007) in particular.

Although Vergil and Ovid are often viewed as vastly different poets, what they do share is an interest in the problems involved in the incorporation of tragedy in epic. In the end, tragedy derails neither the *Aeneid* nor the *Metamorphoses*, but in both poems the tragic intertexts severely test the capability of the epic genre to incorporate them. In the case of Ovid, this often takes the form of a reinterpretation of the *Aeneid* or a move beyond Vergil. A poetic successor to Vergil and Ovid could do worse than select tragedy as the genre in which he could best mount a challenge to these two epicists. This is precisely what Seneca would do.

II. Senecan Tragedy as a Poetic Oeuvre and the Dating of the Tragedies

Seneca's tragedies abound not just in allusions to earlier poetry, but also in allusions to each other. Parallel phrases and settings can be found throughout the tragic corpus. This suggests that Seneca's tragedies should be read as a tightly knit oeuvre, in which one tragedy elucidates or complicates our reading of the other, or that themes or patterns can be seen to be developed by Seneca from one tragedy to the other.¹¹⁶ Unfortunately, the direction in which parallels between tragedies should be read often remains unclear because of the uncertainty surrounding the absolute and relative dates of the tragedies. All that we can say with absolute certainty about Seneca's plays is that they are post-Augustan and pre-Flavian. Beyond that, nothing is certain, although some things have become more probable over the years. My own reading of Senecan tragedy as a poetic oeuvre takes its cue from some of these probabilities, although it is not wholly dependent on them.¹¹⁷

The most secure absolute date that we possess is a *terminus ante quem* provided by Seneca's satire *Apocolocyntosis*, composed in 54 following the death of Claudius. This satire contains an appearance of the god Hercules, speaking in tragic language echoing that of the hero Hercules in *Hercules Furens*. It is generally considered more plausible that the satire parodies the tragedy than that the tragedy draws on the

¹¹⁶ Compare Boyle (1997), 155-200 on Senecan tragedy as 'palimpsestic tragedy'.

¹¹⁷ For an overview of the debate, see Dingel (2009), 1-11 and Marshall (2013).

satire.¹¹⁸ This would mean that, of the eight tragedies securely ascribed to Seneca,¹¹⁹ *Hercules Furens* at least was written before 54.¹²⁰ Slightly less secure, but plausible nonetheless, is Robin Nisbet's case (based on references to historical events beyond the Roman Empire's borders) that *Thyestes* should be dated to the final years of Seneca's life, possibly 62.¹²¹

The notion that *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae* should be considered late plays, is supported by two major studies on the relative dates of the tragedies: an article by John Fitch and a monograph by Joachim Dingel.¹²² Fitch uses two methods to establish an order of composition within the tragic corpus. The first method is an analysis of the frequency with which sense-pause in Seneca's iambic trimeters does not coincide with line-endings. Fitch observes that this frequency is the highest in *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae*, the lowest in *Agamemnon*, *Phaedra* and *Oedipus*, with *Hercules Furens*, *Troades* and *Medea* sitting in between. Secondly, Fitch shows that the frequency of Seneca's use of the shortened final -o is much higher in *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae* than in the other plays.

Fitch's observations have mostly been accepted, or at least not altogether challenged.¹²³ The most extensive response to Fitch's grouping of the tragedies is offered by Dingel, in his monograph on the relative dating of the tragedies. Dingel uses a quite different method, and arrives at a somewhat different chronological sequence: *Hercules Furens*, *Oedipus*, *Phaedra*, *Medea*, *Troades*, *Agamemnon*, *Thyestes*, *Phoenissae*. Dingel bases his method on the aforementioned verbal and topical parallels within the Senecan tragic corpus. For each parallel, Dingel argues which one he deems earlier, based on the criterion of 'expectability' of a phrase, i.e. the degree to which a phrase makes more sense in one context than in the other.¹²⁴

¹¹⁸ But see Pfundstein (2006), 364 n. 25 for a note of caution.

¹¹⁹ Kohn (2003) casts doubt on Seneca's authorship, but does not offer conclusive proof that the tragedies were not written by Seneca the Younger. In this dissertation, it is assumed that *Hercules Furens*, *Troades*, *Phoenissae*, *Medea*, *Phaedra*, *Oedipus*, *Agamemnon* and *Thyestes* are Seneca's. *Octavia* is generally considered a post-Senecan work. The case has been made that *Hercules Oetaeus* is also Seneca's, but this seems unlikely (for an overview of the debate, see Marshall (2013), 40 and Littlewood (2014), 515).

¹²⁰ For discussion of the parallels between *Apocolocyntosis* and *Hercules Furens* see Fitch (1987), 50-53 with references. Allusions to *Troades* have also been discovered in Seneca's satire – see e.g. Dingel (2009), 126 with n. 8.

¹²¹ Nisbet (1990).

¹²² Fitch (1981) and Dingel (2009) respectively.

¹²³ Compare the overview in Dingel (2009), 6-8, who does offer an elaborate critique of Fitch's method. Generally, the "shortening of the final -o"-criterion has been deemed more or less conclusive evidence for a late date for *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae*.

¹²⁴ Dingel (2009), 10: 'Erwartbarkeit'.

This criterion is of course open to the charge of subjectivity,¹²⁵ and a full evaluation of Dingel's method would require a parallel-by-parallel discussion of all his parallels. Fortunately, only part of the debate on relative dating is relevant to the plays discussed in this dissertation: Dingel's method, like Fitch's, has resulted in a late date for *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae*. Dingel's most important adjustment to Fitch's grouping is his moving of *Hercules Furens* to the first position and of *Agamemnon* to the sixth position. As Eric Dodson-Robinson observes in his review of Dingel's monograph, much of Dingel's argument hinges on his comparison of two passages in *Hercules Furens* describing Hercules' labors (*HF*. 215-48 and 527-68) with the choral ode in *Agamemnon* on the same subject (*Ag*. 812-66).¹²⁶ Dingel argues that the descriptions of the labors in *Hercules Furens* are narrated more smoothly and unambiguously than those in *Agamemnon*, but Dodson-Robinson is right to point out that some of these differences may equally well be explained from the generic and metrical demands of *Agamemnon*'s choral ode.

Of course, Dingel's argument to place *Hercules Furens* first also involves it being earlier than *Phaedra* and *Oedipus*, the other tragedies that make up Fitch's "first" group, together with *Agamemnon*. Much of Dingel's chapter on *Hercules Furens* is involved with proving that this play is earlier than *Oedipus* and *Phaedra*. *Hercules Furens* is strongly linked to *Oedipus* through the plays' shared emphasis on the Underworld and both plays' Theban setting; the figure of Theseus connects the worlds of *Hercules Furens* and *Phaedra* – Theseus has just been rescued from the Underworld by Hercules in both plays. The three plays also share an interest in effeminate gods and heroes: Hercules' subjugation to Omphale is mentioned in both *Hercules Furens* and *Phaedra*, Bacchus' feminine beauty is described in both *Oedipus* and *Hercules Furens*.

I do not think all of Dingel's arguments for the higher 'expectability' of a phrase or motif in *Hercules Furens* than in *Oedipus* and *Phaedra* are equally convincing. I find it tempting to join Dingel in reading the references to Theseus' escape from the Underworld in *Phaedra* as references to *Hercules Furens*, but it is equally possible that Seneca has incorporated references to *Phaedra* in *Hercules Furens* to undermine Theseus' redemptive role in the latter play.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Dingel (2009), 10 himself is aware of this. See also the brief review by Fitch (2011).

¹²⁶ Dingel (2009), 38-42; discussed by Dodson-Robinson (2011), 521.

¹²⁷ Indeed, it has been argued that the allusions to Seneca's *Phaedra* at the end of Statius's *Thebaid* are intended to undercut Theseus' seemingly redemptive role at the end of the *Thebaid* – see Sacerdoti (2008). Wilson (2004), 234 n. 57 observes the similarity in structure between *Hercules Furens* and the *Thebaid*.

I am even less convinced that we can state with any certainty that *Hercules Furens* precedes *Oedipus*. Dingel opens his argument for *Hercules Furens*' priority with a comparison between the phrases *tenetque Thebas exul Herculeas Lycus* (*HF*. 274) and *hac transierit ciuile nefas, / illa Herculeae norint Thebae / proelia fratrum* (*Oed*. 748-50). It is true that calling Thebes 'Herculean' makes more immediate sense in *Hercules Furens* than it does in *Oedipus*. But, as Dingel admits in his discussion of the descriptions of the Underworld in both tragedies, it can likewise be argued that the appearance of the daughters of Cadmus makes more sense in a Theban Underworld (*Oed*. 615-18) than in a Herculean one (*HF*. 758), and that we should therefore consider *Oedipus* the earlier play. Also, Dingel observes, one might argue that the unexpected mention of Phineus (*HF*. 759) is a reminiscence of the more expected mention of Pentheus (*Oed*. 617-18).

Dingel claims that the cumulative weight of the outcome of the other comparisons, which all point to *Hercules Furens* as being the earlier play, argues against this. Of course, this is only true if one accepts Dingel's conclusions at every turn. But Dingel's logic in some of his comparisons can easily be reversed. For example, Dingel states that the relative restraint and Theban-centredness of the Underworld scene in the *Oedipus* is evidence that this scene is later than the more expansive one in *Hercules Furens*, because it is unlikely that Seneca of all poets would start from restraint.¹²⁸ But it can just as easily be argued that Seneca started out with a more moderate treatment of the Underworld, focused on Thebes to drive home the point of his Thebes as an inversion of Vergil's Rome and the Roman Underworld in the sixth book of the *Aeneid*, and then moved on to a more expansive treatment of the Underworld in his more expansive play *Hercules* – a big Underworld for a big hero. To assume that Seneca would not start from restraint just because he is Seneca does not constitute proof of any kind.¹²⁹

In short: although I find Dingel's approach intriguing and sometimes convincing, I find it difficult to unequivocally subscribe to his proposed order of the plays, which relies too heavily on a subjective interpretation of the 'expectability' of a certain phrase. I therefore remain in aporia on the matter of the precise relationship between *Hercules Furens* and *Oedipus*, but throughout this dissertation I will assume that *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae* are Seneca's latest plays. Dingel's conclusion that *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae* must be late plays is corroborated by Fitch's findings regarding the length of Seneca's

¹²⁸ Dingel (2009), 25-26.

¹²⁹ This paragraph looks forward to some of the characteristics of *Hercules Furens* and *Oedipus* discussed in the chapters dedicated to these plays. For a briefer evaluation of Dingel's chapter on *Hercules Furens* see Dodson-Robinson, who also finds Dingel's discussion of 'Herculean Thebes' more compelling than that of the two Underworlds.

final -os and Nisbet's meticulous discussion of historical parallels, which I *do* find convincing at every turn.

However we may judge his individual readings, Dingel's approach does serve to remind us of the importance of the many cross-references that tie the Senecan tragic corpus together. It also reminds us of the temptation to read the Senecan tragic corpus in a sequence that takes these cross-references into account and makes interpretative sense of them.¹³⁰ Dingel himself refers to Christoph Schubert's argument that the order in which the plays have been transmitted is the correct one, and that Seneca gradually increases the cruelty and depravity of his tyrants throughout this sequence.¹³¹ We may also compare Berthe Marti's attempt to read the tragedies, in the order in which they have been transmitted (and including *Hercules Oetaeus*), as a linear course in Stoic philosophy.¹³² If nothing else, these readings confirm the openness of the Senecan tragic corpus to a reading that transcends the individual play.

The omnipresence of parallels in the Senecan tragic corpus is exemplary of Seneca's more general obsession with repetition.¹³³ This obsession with repetition is symptomatic of Seneca's status as a belated author, returning to the familiar tragic myths in the wake of the all-embracing oeuvres of Vergil and Ovid. But Seneca always manages to "make it new", shocking his reader all anew with stories that this reader may have thought could not shock him anymore.¹³⁴ With Trinacty, we may assume that Seneca is not all that bothered with his belatedness, but rather that he revels in it, eagerly appropriating the riches he found in the works of Vergil, Ovid and Horace.¹³⁵ It has become common to read Senecan tragedy as a self-conscious and self-assured poetic response to Augustan poetry, and to the epic genre in particular.¹³⁶ In the following chapters, I will argue that *Hercules Furens*, *Oedipus*, *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae* should be viewed as a sustained and interlocking intertextual commentary on Augustan epic, and that Seneca's epic successor Statius was aware of and responded to Seneca's intertextual project.

¹³⁰ Preferably a kind of sense that goes beyond 'expectability', but of course the aim of Dingel's project is not to provide such a reading.

¹³¹ Schubert (1998), 174-212.

¹³² Marti (1945).

¹³³ As Gunderson (2017), 118-19 observes. On repetition in Senecan tragedy, see especially Schiesaro (1997) (reworked in Schiesaro (2003), 177-220) and Gunderson (2017).

¹³⁴ Gunderson (2017).

¹³⁵ Trinacty (2014), *passim* – but see the introduction in particular.

¹³⁶ Schiesaro (2003) and Trinacty (2014) offer the most comprehensive accounts. See also Morelli (2007), 31 for an intertextual approach similar to my own, particularly where Seneca's response to the *Aeneid* and Ovid's oeuvre is concerned.

In his monograph on *Thyestes*, Schiesaro has shown that Senecan tragedy in general, and *Thyestes* in particular, inverts the epic teleological plot and explodes the tragic *nefas* that epic barely managed to contain.¹³⁷ The ways in which Vergil and Ovid conceptualized the struggle between epic and tragedy in the *Aeneid* and the *Metamorphoses* have been discussed in the introduction. In the following three chapters I will take this idea of Schiesaro further and show that the “narrative” of Seneca’s intertextual response to these epic tensions can be traced through *Hercules Furens*, *Oedipus*, *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae* in minute detail through a careful reading of the aforementioned parallels and repetitions. I will argue that the two sides to Schiesaro’s interpretation of Senecan intertextuality – the inversion of epic teleology and the explosion of tragic *nefas* – should be read as a struggle within Seneca’s tragic oeuvre. Because of the sustained reversal of epic teleology, the reader may be under the impression that Seneca wants to turn the epic genre in on itself and finish it off by deconstructing its governing narrative principle. On the other hand, the tragic *nefas* that the epic poets had sought to contain becomes the most promising source for poetic renewal.

The chapter on *Hercules Furens* shows what is at stake in Senecan tragic intertextuality. The play emerges as a careful and comprehensive reading of the tragic fissures inherent in the epic genre as Seneca had inherited it, and is positively Ovidian in its intertextual ironies and nuances. *Oedipus* offers the most systematic inversion of epic teleology, *Thyestes* the most enthusiastic embrace of creative *nefas*. The two poles of the Senecan tragic oeuvre are most clearly at war in the apparently unresolved *Phoenissae*. If *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae* are indeed Seneca’s final tragedies, Seneca’s tragic enterprise ends on a most radical and uncompromising note.

The notion that the Senecan tragic corpus is governed by a struggle between these two poles is loosely related to Gerhard Müller’s distinction between “tragedies of Fate” and “tragedies of Passion”, in which either divine Fate or the characters’ passions are the driving force between the tragic action.¹³⁸ The tragedies in which epic teleology is most obsessively inverted – *Troades* and *Oedipus* – are also obsessed with Fate (epic teleology’s manifestation in the lives of the protagonists); in *Thyestes*, Atreus’ passions manifest themselves in the execution of a *nefas* that overwhelms the cosmos. Of course, Müller’s distinction is too schematic, because the struggle often takes place within individual tragedies,¹³⁹ but it is a useful tool to think with.

¹³⁷ Schiesaro (2003).

¹³⁸ Müller (1972), 395.

¹³⁹ Müller himself is partially aware of this, calling *Agamemnon* ‘eine eigenartige Mischung’.

This dissertation does not go into *Agamemnon*, *Troades*, *Medea* and *Phaedra*. This does of course not mean that these tragedies are irrelevant to the study of Senecan intertextuality or even Seneca's engagement with epic. *Agamemnon* and *Troades* complement *Oedipus*'s reversal of epic teleology, but in a Trojan rather than a Theban setting.¹⁴⁰ Because of the Theban focus of this dissertation, which is also determined by Statius' *Thebaid*, *Oedipus* and *Phoenissae* will suffice.¹⁴¹ *Medea* and *Phaedra* complement *Oedipus* as an exercise in "returning Ovid to tragedy", culling Ovid's fragmented and elusive tragic narratives from the *Metamorphoses* and the *Heroides* and turning them into terrifyingly destructive tragedies. Seneca's intertextual technique in these plays has been well discussed in recent years, and I feel no need to add a reading of my own, especially because these plays seem to be more preoccupied with the intricacies of Ovid's oeuvre than with the faultlines of the epic genre.¹⁴²

The precise nature of Seneca's intertextual technique will emerge as we go along: my chapter on *Hercules Furens* is largely programmatic for what follows. But I do feel that a word about Seneca's precise place in the epic tradition is in order here. In recent years it has become common to read Seneca *tragicus* as a successor of Ovid. The wave of Ovidian readings of Senecan tragedy started with Rainer Jakobi's vast collection of Ovidian parallels;¹⁴³ it gained momentum with the studies of Alessandro Schiesaro and Cedric Littlewood, who both privileged Augustan intertexts in their readings of Senecan tragedy;¹⁴⁴ and hit its peak in the '10s, with studies by Stephen Hinds, Dan Curley, Christopher Trinacty and Mira Seo offering detailed readings of Ovidian intertextuality in Seneca.¹⁴⁵

Ovid emerges from all of these studies as a poet who was fundamental to Seneca's conception of his tragic oeuvre. Hinds observes that the all-encompassing nature of Ovid's epic of transformational myths implied that 'for any formal Roman poet of the

¹⁴⁰ On the engagement of these plays with epic teleology, see especially Schiesaro (1997) (on both plays); Zissos (2009) (on *Troades*); Schiesaro (2014) (on *Agamemnon*).

¹⁴¹ This does of course not mean that the other tragedies are irrelevant to the continuation of the epic tradition. Compare Lucan's intense reflection on both Theban and Trojan tragedies in his *Bellum Civile* (see Ambühl (2015)) and Statius' reception of *Troades* in his *Achilleid* (Fantham (1979)). Clearly Statius perceived *Troades* as a tragic challenge to the epic genre just as worthy of his attention as *Oedipus* and *Phoenissae*.

¹⁴² For compelling intertextual readings of these plays, see e.g. Littlewood (2004), 259-301 (on *Phaedra*); Hinds (2011), 7-8 (on *Phaedra*) and 22-28 (on *Medea*); Trinacty (2014), 62-126. *Medea* is more relevant to this dissertation than *Phaedra*, as it is a companion to *Thyestes* as a tragedy on the poetics of *nefas*. I will therefore briefly go into *Medea* in my chapter on *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae*.

¹⁴³ Jakobi (1988).

¹⁴⁴ Schiesaro (2003) and Littlewood (2004).

¹⁴⁵ Hinds (2011); Curley (2013); Seo (2013); Trinacty (2014).

mid to late 1st century CE, the whole system of Greco-Roman myth must have had an important and inescapable post-Ovidian dimension'.¹⁴⁶ Equally significant for Seneca is the fact that – as we have seen in the introduction – Ovid treated many of these myths in tragic fashion in both his *Heroides* and his *Metamorphoses*, examining the tensions and synergy of the tragic genre with the genres into which he had incorporated it, following after Vergil and paving the way for Seneca.¹⁴⁷ Particularly relevant for our purposes is the fact that Ovid has woven a web of tragic tales throughout his oeuvre, which echo each other and have to be read together for the reader to grasp their full significance.¹⁴⁸ As I have just discussed, this is also true of Seneca's tragic oeuvre: Seneca's 'palimpsestic tragedy', then, is also an Ovidian inheritance.¹⁴⁹

Seneca is Ovid's poetic successor in other ways as well. Most importantly, Ovid's poetic technique served as an example for Seneca of how a poet might engage with the work of a predecessor who has made his mark with a seemingly all-encompassing oeuvre. In Ovid's case, this predecessor is Vergil; for Seneca, the challenge is a double one, posed by both Vergil *and* Ovid. Ovid had shown Seneca that a poet could respond to such a body of work by embracing his own belatedness wholeheartedly: the very fact that a poet "comes after" many other versions of the story he wants to tell, implies that he possesses a heightened awareness of the constructedness and of the generic codes inherent to these stories, and that poetic renewal can be found in self-consciously commenting on the inherited tradition and presenting alternative versions of the same story or character simultaneously. Ovid shares this heightened self-awareness with many Latin poets, but his oeuvre may be viewed as the one in which this heightened self-awareness is most clearly manifest.¹⁵⁰ Indeed, as Hardie has shown, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is but the first epic in a long series of epic poems commenting on the

¹⁴⁶ Hinds (2011), 9.

¹⁴⁷ Curley (2013), who views Ovid as a fundamental part of the 'bridge' between 5th century Attic tragedy and Senecan tragedy, and argues that Vergil, Ovid and Seneca should be read in succession as poets that explore the relationship between epic and tragedy.

¹⁴⁸ Curley (2013), 177-216.

¹⁴⁹ Hinds (2011), particularly on page 11 (within a single play: 'The habit of reading one mythological episode by exploring systems of linkage and parallelism with other, cognate episodes is of course built into the very structure of myth; but in Seneca's staging of Oedipus' Thebes, it is also a peculiarly post-Ovidian habit.') and 22 (in the tragic oeuvre as a whole: 'Seneca's tragedies generate a great deal of energy between and among one another: with issues of dating set aside, every protagonist in the *oeuvre* can be felt by the reader to gather momentum from every other protagonist in the *oeuvre*.').

¹⁵⁰ This paragraph is based on Seo (2013), 17-23, who distills an "Ovid code" from previous scholarship. Seo deems this "Ovid code" exemplary of the poetic techniques in her monograph, which includes the work of Seneca *tragicus*.

themes and tensions governing the *Aeneid* and the epic genre in general.¹⁵¹ One of the things I will argue in the following chapters is that Seneca's tragedies should be read as part of this tradition of reflection on the epic genre, but from the vantage point of tragedy.¹⁵²

As we have seen above, one of the most important intertextual tools of the (post-) Ovidian poet is that of tendentiously fashioning his predecessor's work as a 'hesitant precursor' of his own. Allusions in the *Metamorphoses* to scenes of transformation in the *Aeneid* cast Vergil as a reluctant poet of metamorphosis, to be surpassed by Ovid; allusions in Senecan tragedy to tragic scenes in the *Metamorphoses* cast Ovid as an imperfect tragic poet, to be surpassed by Seneca, who writes tragedy properly.¹⁵³ I will argue that, if we assume that *Hercules Furens* and *Oedipus* are earlier than *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae*, Seneca's vision becomes more pronounced as the years progress: more "starkly Senecan" and less "subtly Ovidian".

¹⁵¹ Hardie (1993).

¹⁵² Compare Schiesaro (2003), 243-51.

¹⁵³ The term 'hesitant precursor' is derived from Hinds (1998), 106. Curley (2013), 221-33 applies this way of reading to Seneca's reception of Ovid. On Seneca as a poet returning Ovid's tragic tales to the genre in which they properly belong, see Curley (2013), 229 and Trinacty (2014), 65-66.

PART I

SENECA

CHAPTER 1

HERCULES FURENS AND THE LIMITS OF EPIC¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ Coincidentally, this chapter shares part of its title with that of the chapter in Chaudhuri (2014) on Capaneus in Statius' *Thebaid*.

Hercules Furens is Seneca's longest play. Because of the attention that it pays to Hercules' labors at the edges of the world and his pacification of the whole world, it is geographically all-embracing like no other Senecan tragedy.¹⁵⁵ Its protagonist is the quintessential epic hero, moving between Heaven and Hell but not yet to be identified with either.¹⁵⁶ As the play whirls to its climax, however, we witness a tragedy within the house, a family drama with which Hercules proves unable to cope.¹⁵⁷ As a tragedy of epic proportions, *Hercules Furens* is a fitting place to start our investigation of Seneca's treatment of the tensions between both genres.

I will begin by providing the reader with a general outline of the ways in which Seneca signals metapoetically that generic concerns are central to his *Hercules Furens*. I will then move on to a close intertextual reading of the parallels between *Hercules Furens* and Augustan epic, in which we will see Seneca short-circuiting some famous epic tensions and paradoxes. The most important thread running through all of these sections is Seneca's reflection, through the figure of Hercules, on a problem inherent to the very nature of Augustan epic: the relationship between Jupiter and Juno and the more general themes – closure and openness, order and chaos, epic and tragedy – associated with them. Significantly, Seneca treats these themes in a tragedy, a genre always below the surface in Augustan epic when these themes are at stake. I will conclude with an examination of the play's end, a tragic limbo in which Seneca examines the consequences of the generic experiment he has conducted, and tentatively looks forward to the future of both genres.

Hercules Furens between epic and tragedy

Hercules is one of the most flexible characters in Greek and Latin literature. As Denis Feeney has put it: '[Hercules] is the ultimate expression of Greek virility, and spends a year as the slave of a woman, the Asiatic Omphale. He is physical strength incarnate, and also a philosopher's paradigm of intellectual resource and self-control.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Fitch (1987), 22 and *ad HF.* 30-32, 37-38, 833 and 955-57 on the 'global' significance of Hercules' exploits.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Hardie (1993), 65-71 on Hercules and his successors moving up and down along the vertical axis in epic, a discussion to which I will return.

¹⁵⁷ Fitch (1979). The tension between the epic universe – involving Heaven and Hell – of *Hercules Furens*, which is mostly located off-stage, and the tragedy taking place on-stage, is well discussed by Von Glinski (2017).

He is the great civilizer, who wears the skin of an animal.¹⁵⁸ Hercules is at home in almost any role and consequently in almost any literary genre, but because of this he is also always a problematic character.¹⁵⁹ Hercules' very flexibility is a frequent point of reflection in Greek and Latin poetry.¹⁶⁰ In the Greek tragedies dedicated to Hercules, Sophocles' *Trachiniae* and Euripides' *Hercules Furens*, Heracles is an 'interstitial figure', both human and divine, whose superhuman qualities prove disruptive to the plays in which he appears as the protagonist: both plays are oddly structured and Hercules' superhuman character presents a challenge to both poet and audience.¹⁶¹ In Hellenistic and Roman literature, a metapoetic dimension is added to the character of Hercules in poems that involve his participation in the Argonautic expedition, as he becomes the symbol of a type of essentialized epic that the poet longs to leave behind.¹⁶² In Apollonius' and Vergil's epics, Hercules' journey from man to god is frequently reflected upon. Characters in these epic poems either fall short of Hercules' example or manage to approximate it (most notably Aeneas himself).¹⁶³ Latin poets after Vergil continue the tradition of exploring the interstitial spaces between beast, man and god that are associated with Hercules.¹⁶⁴ Scholars have also begun to recognize the importance of Seneca's tragedy *Hercules Furens* to a proper appreciation of the Herculean dynamics of these epics.¹⁶⁵ In this chapter, I will read *Hercules Furens* as a sustained metapoetic meditation upon Augustan epic.

Hercules Furens opens with an angry monologue by Juno (*HF*. 1-124). The goddess expresses her frustration about the catasterisms of Jupiter's *paelices* and his extramarital offspring (*HF*. 1-18); Hercules' unlimited successes, culminating in his conquest of the Underworld (*HF*. 19-63); and Hercules' impending deification (*HF*. 63-74).¹⁶⁶ Juno's monologue is heavily indebted to the monologues of Juno in *Aeneid*

¹⁵⁸ Feeney (1986), 52.

¹⁵⁹ On Hercules' moral ambiguity see e.g. Fitch (1987), 15-20 and Papadopoulou (2004).

¹⁶⁰ On the treatment of Hercules in classical literature through the centuries see Galinsky's foundational study (1972).

¹⁶¹ Silk (1985), with 6 on Heracles as an 'interstitial figure' and 19 on Heracles' disruptive qualities.

¹⁶² On the metapoetic use of Hylas and Hercules in Apollonius, Theocritus, Propertius, Valerius Flaccus and Statius see Heerink (2015), a study taking its cue from the concept of "essential epic" developed by Hinds (2000).

¹⁶³ Feeney (1986).

¹⁶⁴ Hardie (1993), 65-71, with references and links to Greek tragedy, Apollonius and Vergil.

¹⁶⁵ Compare Littlewood (2004), 107-27 and Morelli (2007) in particular. For a different Vergilian take, incorporating the *Georgics*, see now also Littlewood (2017).

¹⁶⁶ On the wider thematic significance of the catasterisms, see Pfundstein (2006).

1 and 7, in which she expressed her anger at the Trojans. Seneca does not only signal his engagement with epic through these allusions (to be discussed below), but his Juno also employs decidedly epic vocabulary, repeatedly using forms of the word *bellum*.¹⁶⁷

Juno begins by proclaiming that her savage anger will wage eternal warfare on Hercules: *saeuus dolor / aeterna bella pace sublata geret* (HF. 28-29). She then goes on to retrospectively cast all of Hercules' preceding labors as wars (HF. 30-32): *Quae bella? quidquid horridum tellus creat / inimica, quidquid pontus aut aer tulit / terribile dirum pestilens atrox ferum, / fractum atque domitum est*.¹⁶⁸ It is not just the word *bella* that is significant here. Fitch observes the emphasis on the 'universal scope' of Hercules' labors in this passage, which is common in the Herculean tradition.¹⁶⁹ But tripartite divisions of the cosmos such as this one – between earth, sea and sky – are equally central to Roman epic, the *Aeneid* in particular.¹⁷⁰ An even more pronounced tripartite division, that between Heaven, earth and Hell, is articulated by Juno as she goes along, moving from describing Hercules' labors on earth (HF. 37-46) to expressing her concern about Hercules' recent conquest of the Underworld (HF. 46-63) and her fear that he will assault the heavens (HF. 64-74). At the beginning of these sections, Juno emphasizes the fact that Hercules has crossed the boundary between earth and Hell (HF. 46-48: *Nec satis terrae patent: / effregit ecce limen inferni Iouis / et opima uicti regis ad superos refert*.) and – at the beginning of the second section – that he might now cross the boundary between earth and Heaven as well (HF. 63-65: *Leuia sed nimium queror; / caelo timendum est, regna ne summa occupet / qui uicit ima: scepra praeripiet patri*.). In both passages, Juno emphasizes the threat that Hercules has posed or might pose to the god that rules this particular realm – Pluto and Jupiter respectively.¹⁷¹

Having considered various options, Juno realizes that the only thing that she can do to stop Hercules, is turn his own force against himself (HF. 84-85). Once again, this thought is clothed in epic rather than tragic terms (HF. 85): *bella iam secum gerat*.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁷ It is well known that *arma* serves as a signifier of epic and/or the *Aeneid* in Latin metapoetic vocabulary – I see no reason why we should treat *bellum* differently – compare Hinds (2000) on essential epic. After all, even more clearly than *arma*, the word *bellum* signifies war, the quintessential epic subject. On the metapoetics of *arma* see e.g. Hinds (1992); on *arma* intertextually triggering the *Aeneid* in Imperial poetry see Fowler (1997a), 20. For more on *arma* and *bellum* in the *Aeneid*, see below.

¹⁶⁸ On Hercules' labors as *bella*, see Fitch (1987) ad HF. 85.

¹⁶⁹ Fitch (1987) ad loc.

¹⁷⁰ Hardie (1986), 313-25.

¹⁷¹ See also Chaudhuri (2014), 124-26 on the theomachic threat that Juno perceives in these lines.

¹⁷² But there is more to this line, as I will discuss later on.

Juno then goes on to summon the Furies from the Underworld to drive Hercules insane so that he will kill his own children, and even to drive Juno herself insane so that she may punish Hercules properly (*HF*. 86-122). The penultimate line of Juno's monologue once again emphasizes the epic element (*HF*. 123-24): *Mouenda iam sunt bella*.

Seneca's reader may be forgiven for being under the impression that he is reading an epic rather than a tragedy. But what Seneca is in fact doing, is emphasizing how inextricably intertwined the two genres have become by the time that he is writing his own tragedies. The final line of Juno's speech forms a nice illustration of this principle: the play opens at daybreak, as tragedies should: *clarescit dies / ortuque Titan lucidus croceo subit* (*HF*. 123-24).¹⁷³ But the adjective *croceo* is directly derived from the Greek and Latin epic tradition.¹⁷⁴ Also, Juno's first monologue in the *Aeneid*, to which Juno's monologue here is heavily indebted, is in its turn inspired by the opening monologues of wronged divinities in Greek tragedy.¹⁷⁵ Seneca reclaims this monologue for tragedy.

Similarly ambiguous are the Furies that Juno summons to drive Hercules insane. These Furies are of course well-known tragic forces. As we have seen, the Latin epicists of the Augustan age were aware of the tragic connotations that these Furies carried with them, as is evident from Vergil's comparison of Dido in her insanity to the maddened tragic heroes Orestes and Pentheus, haunted by Furies on the stage (*Aen*. 4.465-73). Vergil had made these Furies part of the Latin epic inventory as well: in the seventh book of his *Aeneid*, Juno unleashes the Fury Allecto to set the war between the peoples of Latium and the Trojans in motion. Although the anger of Juno had been a fundamental characteristic of Latin epic from Naevius onward,¹⁷⁶ Vergil provided it with a strong tragic coloring through his use of the Fury Allecto.

The figure of Allecto is based on the character Lyssa from Euripides' tragedy *Hercules Furens*.¹⁷⁷ In this play Lyssa drives Heracles insane. She is compelled to do so by Iris, who has received orders from Hera (*Eur. HF*. 822-74). Heracles' madness will result in the killing of his wife and children. As we have seen in the introduction, Vergil's Allecto starts her work within the family, in proper tragic fashion, by pitting family members of the house of Latinus against each other. Gradually the tragic

¹⁷³ Cf. Fitch (1987), 117 and Billerbeck (1999) *ad HF*. 123-24.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Fitch (1987) and Billerbeck (1999) *ad loc*.

¹⁷⁵ See e.g. Heldmann (1974), 23 and Feeney (1991), 132.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Feeney (1991), 116-17, 125-28, 130-37, 147-52 for an overview from Naevius to Vergil.

¹⁷⁷ See e.g. Otis (1964), 324.

madness engulfs the whole city of Laurentum and the countryside as well. But from the start it is clear that Vergil has introduced Allecto to spread war, not just family strife. She is introduced as *luctificam Allecto ... / ... cui tristia bella / iraeque insidiaeque et crimina noxia cordi*. (*Aen.* 7.324-26), and Juno gives her the following orders (*Aen.* 7.338-40): *fecundum concute pectus, / dissice compositam pacem, sere crimina belli; / arma uelit poscatque simul rapiatque iuuentus*.¹⁷⁸ The words *bellum* and *arma* obviously carry strong metapoetic overtones in the *Aeneid*. Vergil begins his epic by proclaiming that he sings of *arma uirumque*, and the second half of the epic he is ready to move on to his *maius opus* (*Aen.* 7.45), which is all about *arma* and *bella* (*Aen.* 7.41-45): *dicam horrida bella, / dicam acies actosque animis in funera reges, / Tyrrhenamque manum totamque sub arma coactam / Hesperiam*. In the second half of the *Aeneid* then, a tragic Fury is needed to inaugurate this quintessentially epic event, war, creating tragic disorder in the house and the city along the way.

In a striking move of generic confidence, Seneca reclaims Juno's maddening intervention in Vergil's epic for tragedy – and not just any tragedy, but a *Hercules Furens*, from which Vergil had derived it in the first place.¹⁷⁹ But even so, traces of the epic into which Vergil had appropriated it, remain. Or rather, the generic tension between epic and tragedy inherent in Vergil's version of Juno's anger is equally present in Seneca's tragedy. Hercules has conquered the entire world with his epic labors, and the only thing that Juno can conceive of to bring him down is striking him with the madness that is familiar to us from tragedy, turning his violence inwards rather than outwards (*HF.* 85): *bella iam secum gerat*.¹⁸⁰ But at the same time, this tragic violence is still conceived of in epic terms, as the prominence of the word *bella* in this tragedy makes clear.

¹⁷⁸ Forms of *bellum* and *arma* recur frequently in Allecto's assault on Turnus (*Aen.* 7.406-74), the conversation between Juno and Allecto (*Aen.* 7.540-71) and Juno's opening of the gates of war (*Aen.* 7.572-640). Forms of *bellum*: *Aen.* 7.444; 455; 461; 482; 541; 545; 549; 553; 572; 583; 604; 607; 616; 622; 637. Forms of *arma*: *Aen.* 7.441; 453; 460; 468; 472; 551; 554; 625.

¹⁷⁹ Compare Littlewood's observation (Littlewood (2004), 6) in his discussion on the relationship between Attic and Augustan predecessors in Senecan tragedy: 'In some cases we can see Seneca apparently reading Euripides through Latin poetry. Angry Juno at the opening of *Hercules Furens* owes something to Ovid, but something also to Juno's summoning of Allecto in *Aeneid* 7. This in turn is modeled on Hera's summoning of Lyssa in Euripides' *Hercules Furens*. That Seneca should adapt the Vergilian characters for a Hercules tragedy suggests a recognition of Euripides in the background.'

¹⁸⁰ Compare also the phrasing of *in se semper armatus Furor* (*HF.* 98). On the tension between the tragic, destructive and dominant, role that Juno strives for in the prologue and the risk that Hercules' epic labors will reduce her to an ultimately ineffective role, comparable to her role in the *Aeneid*, see Chaudhuri (2014), 122-23 and 125-26. On the very Roman civil war connotations inherent in Seneca's treatment of Hercules' madness, see Littlewood (2004), 117 and 121, with references to the epic tradition.

Seneca continues to exploit the generic tension between epic and tragedy throughout the play. Hercules is often associated with war by other characters, and he himself too likes to construct his own identity in epic terms. According to Amphitryon, Hercules is always off to yet another war (HF. 211: *aliud iussus ad bellum meat*); the chorus wonders if *Alcmena genitus bella per omnia / monstris exagitet caeliferam manum?* (HF. 527-28); shortly after his return, Hercules is off again to kill Lycus: *me bella poscunt* (HF. 638); in his madness afterwards he imagines a Gigantomachy either led by himself (HF. 967-68: *bella Titanes parent, / me duce furentes*) or on the Giants' own initiative (HF. 976: *Quid hoc? Gigantes arma pestiferi mouent.*). As he slaughters what he thinks are Lycus' children, Hercules remarks that another, greater war awaits him (HF. 996-98): *maius mihi / bellum Mycenis restat, ut Cyclopia / eversa manibus saxa nostris concidant*.¹⁸¹ This vocabulary of generic ascent is present elsewhere in the play as well. In the second act, Amphitryon remarks that Hercules, as he killed the two snakes that were sent against him when he was a baby, *prohusit hydrae* (HF. 222). The reader may recognize here a reference to the poetic *ludus* preceding more serious literary pursuits.¹⁸² In addition to this, Amphitryon expects that Hercules will return *qualis ex omni solet / labore, maior* (HF. 312-13).

In spite of this obsessive linking of Hercules to epic, the play inevitably ends in tragedy: it ends in violence within the house, against the protagonist's family, and finally in a crisis within the protagonist himself. But before we arrive at this tragedy, Seneca has brought some of the epic genre's central tensions and paradoxes to a crisis. Indeed, it is this generic crisis that brings the tragedy about.

Dissolving oppositions: Juno's prologue and Seneca's intertextual technique

Let us return to Juno's summoning of Allecto and its consequences, the tragic moment in Vergil's epic that Seneca evokes in the prologue of his *Hercules Furens*. As I have discussed in my introduction, this summoning of Allecto is one of the most important points of crisis in the *Aeneid*. In the seventh book, a tragically colored Juno presents her strongest threat yet to Jupiter's plans with Aeneas. Juno's summoning of Allecto from Hell is the goddess's biggest challenge to the dominant plot of the *Aeneid*,

¹⁸¹ The instances of *bellum* are collected by Fitch (1987) *ad HF.* 85. On the *maius*-motif in Senecan tragedy and its overtones of poetic and generic ascent, see especially Seidensticker (1985) and Hinds (2011), 22-27. See also now Cowan (2017).

¹⁸² On the *ludus poeticus* in Latin literature, see the relevant essay in Wagenvoort (1956).

the plan of Jupiter, which is the settling of the Trojans in Italy, and – eventually – the establishment of Roman and Augustan world rule. Allecto's tragic civil war constitutes Juno's most impressive attempt to at the very least delay the realization of Jupiter's plan as long as she can, to insert epic *mora* into the narrative. It is significant that the Junonian opening of Hell follows closely upon Aeneas' descent into the Underworld. Aeneas' *katabasis* is one of the most important forward-looking parts of the epic, finally revealing to the hero the true *telos* of his quest. Only one book later Juno summons a creature *from* the Underworld to make sure that this *telos*, which will only be truly reached in Vergil's own time, is delayed as long as possible.¹⁸³

One of the steps along the way between the time of myth and Vergil's own in the *Aeneid* is the deification of Aeneas, predicted by Jupiter (*Aen.* 1.259-60, 12.794-95) along with that of Caesar and/or Augustus (*Aen.* 1.289-90).¹⁸⁴ Ovid, Vergil's epic successor, further develops this idea of deification as epic *telos* in his *Metamorphoses*. Quite unlike Vergil, Ovid's epic carries the narrative from the beginnings of the cosmos down to his own time. Because of this, Ovid can fulfill Vergil's prophecy and go even further. The deifications of Aeneas (*Met.* 14.595-608), Romulus and his wife Hersilia (*Met.* 14.805-15), Hippolytus (*Met.* 15.531-46), Caesar (*Met.* 15.745-851) and – prospectively – that of Augustus (*Met.* 15.861-70) and Ovid himself (*Met.* 15.871-79) constitute a significant part of the closural movement of the epic's final books.¹⁸⁵

If the Jovian narrative finds closure in apotheosis, it achieves this closure through elimination of the blockades that Juno puts in the way. In some cases, this may entail the destruction of an entire city and its royal house. To bring about the triumph of Aeneas and Rome, Carthage and Laurentum must yield, and their queens Dido and Amata must die. In imitation of the Greek tragedians, Vergil has woven his own tragic anti-cities Carthage and Laurentum into his epic. Ovid would further develop these themes of doomed cities, Junonian anger and deification in his stories of Thebes, a cycle that is concluded in the fourth book when Juno enters Hell to unleash Tisiphone to drive her enemies Athamas and Ino insane.¹⁸⁶ Athamas kills his son Learchus by swinging him above his head and crushing his skull. Ino manages to escape by jumping

¹⁸³ Compare Hardie (1993), 74 and 76 on the similarities and differences between Vergil's two Underworlds in *Aeneid* 6 and 7. For further discussion, see below.

¹⁸⁴ Whether Vergil means Caesar, Augustus or both in these lines is a longstanding philological discussion. For recent discussion of the deification of the Caesars in Vergil and Ovid, see Gladhill (2012).

¹⁸⁵ See especially Wheeler (2000), 137-51 with n. 138 for further reading on the topic.

¹⁸⁶ Compare Hardie (1990).

off a cliff with their other son Melicertes, after which both are deified – a story highly relevant to Hercules' plight in this tragedy, as we shall see.

In *Hercules Furens* Seneca plays off these basic epic concerns against each other. On the one hand, there is the Jovian drive for closure through deification; on the other, the Junonian impulse to begin again, open things up again. Most obviously, of course, Seneca appropriates this Junonian element from epic in the prologue. The play opens with Juno expelled from Heaven, which is now occupied by Jupiter's *paelices* and their offspring (*HF*. 1-5):

*Soror Tonantis (hoc enim solum mihi
nomen relictum est) semper alienum Iouem
ac templa summi uidua deserui aetheris
locumque caelo pulsa paelicibus dedi;
tellus colenda est, paelices caelum tenent[.]*

5

The first two lines immediately show that Seneca's portrait of Juno is indebted to Vergil and Ovid: *hoc enim solum mihi / nomen relictum est* echoes *Met.* 3.265-66: *si sum regina, Iouisque / et soror et coniunx – certe soror*, spoken by Juno as she complains about Jupiter's affair with Semele. This line is in itself a reworking of Juno's self-description as *dium ... regina Iouisque / et soror et coniunx* (*Aen.* 1.46-47) at the beginning of Vergil's *Aeneid*.¹⁸⁷

This simultaneous allusion to both Augustan epicists in the play's opening lines sets the tone for Seneca's engagement with the *Aeneid* and the *Metamorphoses* throughout the play. At the very beginning of his tragedy, Seneca reminds us both of the theme of Juno's anger in the *Aeneid* and of Ovid's most sustained reworking of this theme: Juno's assaults upon the Theban royal house in *Metamorphoses* 3 and 4. One of Seneca's most significant intertextual techniques in this tragedy is the fusion of Juno's struggle against the Trojans in the *Aeneid* with her struggle against Jupiter's *paelices* in general and the Theban royal house in particular in the *Metamorphoses*.¹⁸⁸ The reasons for Juno's anger in the *Hercules Furens* are more narrowly defined than they are in the *Aeneid*: their primary source is Jupiter's adultery, as it is in the *Metamorphoses*, and the destiny of a people is hardly at stake. But on the other hand,

¹⁸⁷ Discussed in more recent years by e.g. Heldmann (1974), 24; Lawall (1983), 6; Fitch (1987), 115-17 and *ad locc.*; Billerbeck (1999), 184-85 and *ad locc.*

¹⁸⁸ On Juno's anger in the *Metamorphoses* see Wheeler (2000) (in which the development of Juno's anger is an important structuring device for Ovid) and Janan (2009), 87-113 (on Thebes).

from the start Juno's anger possesses a cosmic significance familiar from the *Aeneid*.

The idea that Juno has abandoned Heaven because of Jupiter's adulterous conduct can be traced back to another passage from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in which Juno has abandoned the heavens after Jupiter has turned Callisto and her son into a constellation. She descends from Heaven and visits Tethys and Oceanus, claiming to have been driven away by Callisto (*Met.* 2.508-13):

*Intumuit Iuno postquam inter sidera **paelex**
fulsit, et ad canam descendit in aequora Tethyn
Oceanumque senem, quorum reuerentia mouit* 510
*saepe deos, causamque uiae scitantibus inquit:
'quaeritis aetheriis quare regina deorum
sedibus hic adsim? pro me **tenet** altera **caelum**.*

As a look at the bold words shows, this passage has clearly influenced the fifth line of Seneca's *Hercules Furens*: *tellus colenda est, **paelices caelum tenent***. We may also note the echo of *pulsa ... Iunone* (*Met.* 2.525, later on in Juno's speech) in Seneca's *caelo pulsa* (*HF.* 4).¹⁸⁹ However, Juno's situation in Seneca's play is quite different from that in Ovid's epic: in the latter case permanent exile from Heaven is only imagined as a worst-case scenario (*Met.* 2.525-26): *cur non et pulsa ducit Iunone meoque / conlocat in thalamo socerumque Lycaona sumit?*), in the former it is the harsh reality.¹⁹⁰ The contrast is further emphasized by the fact that, as soon as Ovid's Juno has received the guarantee from Tethys and Oceanus that Callisto and her son will be forbidden to set into the sea, she ascends to Heaven again (*Met.* 2.531-32). Seneca's Juno will only descend further, until she has fully identified herself with Hell (*HF.* 109-12 – Juno's call on the Furies to drive her insane).

Seneca's Juno expands upon the Ovidian notion of *paelices* occupying the skies in the lines that follow (*HF.* 6-18). Her catalogue opens – as it should, given the close engagement with Ovid's story of Callisto in the two preceding lines¹⁹¹ – with Callisto herself, in a benevolent role (*HF.* 6-7): *hinc Arctos alta parte glacialis poli / sublime classes sidus Argolicas agit*. More disturbing is the presence of Orion (*HF.* 12): *ferro*

¹⁸⁹ Lawall (1983), 8.

¹⁹⁰ Heldmann (1974), 26-27.

¹⁹¹ See also Zwierlein (1986b) *ad loc.*

*minax hinc terret Orion deos.*¹⁹² The mention of Bacchus, Semele and Ariadne (*HF.* 16-18) brings us to the supreme threat to Juno's status as queen of the gods, the city of Thebes (*HF.* 19-21): *una me dira ac fera / Thebana tellus matribus sparsa impiis / quotiens nouercam fecit!* She then zooms in on Alcmene and her son Hercules. Deification has already been promised to the latter (*HF.* 23: *astra promissa*) but Juno suddenly expresses her unrelenting desire to fight Hercules' deification whenever the opportunity presents itself (*HF.* 27-29): *non sic abibunt odia; uiuaces aget / uiolentus iras animus et saeuus dolor / aeterna bella pace sublata geret.*

Up until this point, Seneca's engagement has primarily been with Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and he has portrayed Juno as the spurned wife so familiar to us from this epic. But the wording of lines 27 to 29 calls to mind the cosmic power of Vergil's Juno, and provides the theme of cosmic dislocation through catasterism with far greater significance than we might have suspected before. Juno's words here echo Vergil's description of Juno's anger and her opening monologue from the beginning of the *Aeneid*.¹⁹³ In the epic's ninth line Juno is described as *dolens*, and in its eleventh line Vergil wonders *tantaene animis caelestibus irae?* More significant is Vergil's phrase *necdum etiam causae irarum saeuique dolores / exciderant animo* (*Aen.* 1.25-26) and Juno's declaration that *una cum gente tot annos / bella gero* (*Aen.* 1.47-48). Fitch observes that Seneca's *aeterna* (*HF.* 29) may be indebted to *Iuno aeternum seruans sub pectore uulnus* (*Aen.* 1.36).¹⁹⁴ In addition, we may also note a reminiscence of the sense of *Aen.* 1.25-26 in Seneca's *non sic abibunt odia*, and Seneca's *animus* takes up Vergil's *animo*. After this passage, and in fact already in this passage,¹⁹⁵ Seneca shifts from the Juno of the first book of the *Aeneid* to the Juno of the seventh book, who sends war and madness. But the fact that the clearest allusions in these first Vergil-indebted lines are to the Juno of the first book of the *Aeneid*, suggests that Seneca presents his tragedy as a challenge to Vergil's epic as a whole, rather than merely as a reworking of the frenzy with which its second half begins.

Many critics have already noted that the rest of Juno's speech is modeled on her angry monologue in the seventh book of the *Aeneid*. In the *Aeneid* Juno complains

¹⁹² The mention of Orion here, no lover or adulterous offspring of Jupiter, has caused confusion. For discussion, see Owen (1968); Pfundstein (2006); Chaudhuri (2014), 120 and the commentaries *ad loc.* Chaudhuri's reading of Orion as a theomachic prefiguration of Hercules is convincing.

¹⁹³ Lawall (1983), 7.

¹⁹⁴ Fitch (1987) *ad loc.*

¹⁹⁵ Cf. *Aen.* 7.291: *stetit acri fixa dolore* (of Juno) and *Aen.* 7.297-98: *at, credo, mea numina tandem / fessa iacent, odiis aut exsaturata quieui.*

that her previous efforts have been useless against Aeneas, and so have the powers of sea and sky and the monsters Scylla and Charybdis (*Aen.* 7.293-303). In *Hercules Furens*, Juno complains that all of the monsters that she has sent against Hercules have been conquered by him, and that her anger has only made him stronger (*HF.* 30-36). Hercules has safely returned from the Underworld (*HF.* 46-63), just as the Trojans have safely arrived in Italy (*Aen.* 7.303-04). Both Junos summon Furies from the Underworld (*HF.* 86-112; *Aen.* 7.312), knowing very well that they can only delay Jupiter's plans (*HF.* 23, 121-22; *Aen.* 7.313-22).¹⁹⁶

Interestingly, Seneca also alludes to the actions that follow Juno's speech in the seventh book of the *Aeneid*, particularly in the following passage (*HF.* 100-06):¹⁹⁷

<i>Incipite, famulae Ditis, ardentem citae</i>	100
<i>concutite pinum et agmen horrendum anguibus</i>	
<i>Megaera ducat atque luctifica manu</i>	
<i>uastam rogo flagrante corripit trabem.</i>	
<i>hoc agite, poenas petite uiolatae Stygis;</i>	
<i>concutite pectus, acrior mentem excoquat</i>	105
<i>quam qui caminis ignis Aetnaeis furit.</i>	

A comparably deliberate confusion between the fire of torches and fire as a metaphor for insanity can be found in Vergil's description of Allecto driving Amata and Turnus insane (*Aen.* 7.354-56; *Aen.* 7.456-57 and 462-66), as Fitch notes *ad loc.* Fitch also notes allusions here to one of Juno's orders to Allecto (*Aen.* 7.338: *fecundum concute pectus*) and to Vergil's description of Amata shortly before the Fury's onslaught (*Aen.* 7.344-45: *quam* (referring to Amata) *super aduentu Teucrum Turnique hymenaeis / femineae ardentem curaeque iraeque coquebant.*).¹⁹⁸

In short, we see Seneca combining allusions to several portraits of Juno as we know them from Vergil and Ovid to paint his own picture of the goddess. There is one intertext to which I have not yet drawn full attention. Scholars have observed that the notion of Juno summoning a Fury from Hell to drive an enemy insane must not only

¹⁹⁶ This overview is based on Lawall (1983), 8. See also Heldmann (1974), 22; Zwierlein (1984), 15-17.

¹⁹⁷ For discussion of the question whose *pectus* is concerned in line 105 (Juno's, Hercules', the Furies', or all of the above) see recently Trinacty (2014), 133.

¹⁹⁸ Fitch (1987) *ad HF.* 105.

have come from Vergil, but also from Ovid's story of Ino and Athamas,¹⁹⁹ a major model for Seneca in his own description of Hercules' madness. But interestingly, Seneca's first significant allusion to this story – to its beginning, fittingly – points to an important Ovidian conflation of Vergilian intertexts. As Seneca's Juno summons the Furies, she goes on to summon several personifications from the Underworld as well (*HF.* 95-99):

educam et imo Ditis e regno extraham 95
quidquid relictum est: ueniet inuisum Scelus
suumque lambens sanguinem Impietas ferox
Errorque et in se semper armatus Furor –
hoc hoc ministro noster utatur dolor.

The concept of personifications accompanying a Fury out of the Underworld is derived from *Met.* 4.481-85:²⁰⁰

Nec mora, Tisiphone madefactam sanguine sumit
importuna facem fluidoque cruore rubentem
induitur pallam tortoque incingitur angue
egrediturque domo; Luctus comitatur euntem
et Pauor et Terror trepidoque Insania uultu. 485

In Hardie's words, Tisiphone '[takes] with her some of the personifications that are stabled at the threshold of the Vergilian Underworld'.²⁰¹ And indeed, *Luctus* is the first to be mentioned by Vergil in his catalogue of personifications (*Aen.* 6.273-81). This is only one of the instances in his "katabasis of Juno" in which Ovid has combined the theme of Juno's descent to the Underworld, familiar from the seventh book of the *Aeneid*, with allusions to Aeneas' katabasis from the adjacent sixth book. In fact, he has most obviously done so by making Juno fetch Tisiphone – whom *Aeneas* had encountered during his descent (*Aen.* 6.555-56) – instead of Allecto.²⁰² Apparently the two Aeneadic descents into the Underworld cannot be so easily separated, and the Jovian hero's opening of the Underworld results in a Junonian Hell on earth.²⁰³

¹⁹⁹ Lawall (1983), 8; Fitch (1987) *ad HF.* 86ff.; Billerbeck (1999) *ad HF.* 99ff.

²⁰⁰ Cf. Lawall (1983), 8-9; Fitch (1987) and Billerbeck (1999) *ad HF.* 96-98.

²⁰¹ Hardie (1990), 233.

²⁰² See Hardie (1990), 233 with n. 46 for Ovid's use of this technique.

²⁰³ Seneca's provocative conflation of Aeneas' and Juno's katabaseis in this passage is noted by Morelli (2007), 34-36.

Up until this point, we might have said that Seneca's Juno is a rather straightforward reworking of her Vergilian and Ovidian counterparts, with Seneca's tragedy venerating the footsteps of Augustan epic. But this particular allusion, which responds to Ovid's conflation of Aeneas' and Juno's *katabasis*, brings us to the heart of my intertextual argument in this chapter. Through this allusion to Ovid, Seneca betrays his awareness of the possibility to deconstruct the opposition between the Jovian (represented by Aeneas' *katabasis* in the sixth book of the *Aeneid*) and the Junonian narrative (represented by Ovid's Tisiphone, a variation on Vergil's Allecto) in Augustan epic. At its core, Seneca's *Hercules Furens* is the story of a Jovian hero whose "epic" plot of apotheosis is delayed into the unforeseeable future by a tragic Junonian intervention at Thebes. In Seneca's tragedy, Juno manages to achieve victory on a scale unimaginable in Vergilian epic: actually bringing down the epic hero *himself*, instead of his foes, distracting women or anti-cities. In the following section, I will show how Seneca employs this technique in his description of Hercules' descent into the Underworld as well, and discuss its implications. As Hardie has shown, the fusion of Vergil's two different Underworlds was an intertextual technique favored by Lucan and the Flavians.²⁰⁴ If my conclusions are sound, it was the tragedian Seneca who made his epic successors fully aware of the possibilities inherent in this intertextual technique.

The katabasis of Hercules

The first speaker to bring up Hercules' expedition to fetch Cerberus is the goddess who had ordered him to do so, Juno (*HF*. 46-63). In speaking about Hercules' expedition and its consequences, Juno emphasizes Hercules' entry by force (*HF*. 47: *effregit*; 57: *rupto*), his conquest of the Underworld (*HF*. 48: *opima uicti regis*; 51: *Dite domito spolia*; 54: *capto*) and the dissolution of the boundary between the world of the living and the world of the dead (*HF*. 49: *foedus umbrarum perit*; 54: *en retegīt Styga!*; 56: *sacra dirae mortis in aperto iacent*). Because of this, the powers of the Underworld are already making themselves felt on earth, as both the Sun and Juno recoil with horror at the sight of Cerberus (*HF*. 60-63).

Of course, this is Juno's account, and it is therefore necessarily partial. Theseus' description of Hercules' visit to the Underworld will hardly contain *this* much violence.²⁰⁵ However, the notion that a way between the Underworld and the upper

²⁰⁴ Hardie (1993), 76-87.

²⁰⁵ See Fitch (1987) *ad HF*. 47-57.

world has been created by force through Hercules' visit persists in other allusions to this visit throughout the play.²⁰⁶ In fact Juno, as she summons the Furies, presents her attack upon Hercules as confusion between earth and Hell (*HF*. 90-91): *iam Styga et manes, ferox, / fugisse credis? hic tibi ostendam inferos*. Hercules brought this upon himself because of his invasion of the Underworld (*HF*. 104: *poenas petite uiolatae Stygis*, Juno demands of the Furies), and we could say that this invasion of the upper world by Hell is in fact the logical consequence of his creation of a path between the two realms.

In Theseus' description of Hercules' *katabasis*, Seneca combines allusions to Aeneas' *katabasis* in the *Aeneid* with allusions to those of Juno in the *Metamorphoses* and the *Aeneid*. In doing so, he shows that any entering of Hell is also an opening of Hell, and that the creation of a way in is also the creation of a way out. In the impact of his deeds, if not in his intentions, Hercules, the son of Jupiter whose deification is supposed to be at hand, is eerily similar to his archenemy Juno. After all, how innocent is entering Hell following the *Aeneid*, even if you are a Jovian protégé destined for apotheosis just like Aeneas, if you do it on Juno's orders?

From the moment that Amphitryon begins his interrogation of Theseus, it is evident that we are meant to read Hercules' *katabasis* as a response to Vergil's *Aeneid*. Amphitryon asks Theseus to tell him about Hercules' expedition to the Underworld (*HF*. 646-49), but Theseus' response is reluctant at first (*HF*. 650-53):

Memorare cogis acta securae quoque 650
horrenda menti. uix adhuc certa est fides
uitalis aurae, torpet acies luminum
hebetesque uisus uix diem insuetum ferunt.

Amphitryon nevertheless encourages him to tell everything – after all, recollection of past suffering is often pleasant (*HF*. 654-57):

Peruince, Theseu, quidquid alto in pectore
remanet pauoris neu te fructu optimo 655
frauda laborum: quae fuit durum pati,
meminisse dulce est. fare casus horridos.

²⁰⁶ Fitch (1987) *ibidem*.

Theseus finally proceeds, and prefaces his narration with a short prayer (*HF*. 658-61):

*Fas omne mundi teque dominantem precor
regno capaci teque quam toto inrita
quaesiuit orbe mater, ut iura abdita
et operta terris liceat impune eloqui.* 660

In this short scope we can already detect three prominent allusions to the *Aeneid* – and they have indeed long been detected.²⁰⁷ The first passage recalls Aeneas' reluctance to tell of the fall of Troy at the beginning of the second book of the *Aeneid*, particularly *Aen.* 2.3 (*infandum, regina, iubes renouare dolorem*)²⁰⁸ and *Aen.* 2.12 (*quamquam animus meminisse horret luctuque refugit*). Is it mere coincidence that Seneca has directed our intertextual memory to a passage that introduces the story of *Troiae supremum ... laborem* (*Aen.* 2.11), just as Theseus is about to speak of Hercules' final labor? Amphitryon's encouragement to Theseus is similarly indebted to the *Aeneid*, when Aeneas encourages his men on the coast of Africa after their shipwreck, just having recalled previous suffering at sea which they have also survived (*Aen.* 1.203): *forsan et haec olim meminisse iuuabit*. In a clever intertextual move, Seneca turns Aeneas' words against him, playing off his reluctance to tell of his past suffering against his earlier claim that the recollection of past suffering can actually be pleasant.

But there is more to this dialogue than allusive joking around. Both Theseus' and Amphitryon's words allude to Aeneas retelling terrifying but heroic events. Arguably Aeneas' greatest exploit was his descent into the Underworld, which, once it had properly begun, Vergil had introduced with the following prayer (*Aen.* 6.264-67):

*Di, quibus imperium est animarum, umbraeque silentes
et Chaos et Phlegethon, loca nocte tacentia late,
sit mihi fas audita loqui, sit numine uestro
pandere res alta terra et caligine mersas.* 265

²⁰⁷ I derive the bare verbal parallels from Fitch (1987) *ad loc.* The elaboration and interpretation are my own.

²⁰⁸ Notice how the vowels of *memorare* match those of *renouare*.

In close succession to each other, Seneca alludes to both the epic hero and his poet as narrators of epic deeds. In fact, Aeneas himself, as he tells of the fall of Troy and his subsequent wanderings, is viewed as an epic bard by the most important member of his audience, Dido, who exclaims afterwards (*Aen.* 4.14): *quae **bella** exhausta **canebat!***²⁰⁹ Appropriately, Seneca merges Vergil's poetry about a real descent into Hell with Aeneas' poetry about the hellish landscapes which abound during the fall of Troy.²¹⁰

Seneca wants us to expect an epic and Aeneadic *katabasis*, and this is what we will get, with a vengeance. Interestingly, Seneca does not establish this connection between Aeneas and Hercules out of nothing, but does so in response to Vergil, as Fitch has noted.²¹¹ Hercules' *katabasis* is always present in the background in Vergil's *katabasis* of Aeneas, and forms a foil against which Aeneas' descent should be read.²¹² Aeneas himself explicitly makes the comparison before the actual descent begins, as he begs for entrance to the Underworld (*Aen.* 6.119-23):

si potuit manis accersere coniugis Orpheus
Threicia fretus cithara fidibusque canoris, 120
si fratrem Pollux alterna morte redemit
*itque reditque uiam totiens. quid **Thesea**, **magnum***
*quid memorem **Alciden**? et mi genus ab Ioue summo.*

There are many oblique allusions to Hercules' descent along the way, which may partially derive from a lost archaic epic on Hercules.²¹³ Another explicit allusion to Hercules' *katabasis* can be found in the confrontation between Charon and the Sibyl. Aeneas and the Sibyl want to cross the Styx, but Charon questions them about their motives first, in light of his bad experience with previous living visitors such as Hercules and Theseus and Perithous, who had used force. It is worthwhile to quote both Charon's speech and the Sibyl's response in full, to appreciate how strong the contrast is that Vergil establishes between Aeneas and his heroic predecessors (*Aen.* 6.385-407):

²⁰⁹ For a systematic discussion of Aeneas as an epic poet see Deremetz (2001).

²¹⁰ On the infernal aspects of *Aeneid* 2, see Putnam (1965), 30-48.

²¹¹ Fitch (1987), 318.

²¹² See e.g. Labate (2009), 140-44, on whose discussion this paragraph is based.

²¹³ Cf. Norden (1903), 5; Lloyd-Jones (1967) and Boardman (1975) – referenced by Labate.

<i>nauita ...</i>	385
...	
<i>sic prior adgreditur dictis atque increpat ultro:</i> <i>'quisquis es, armatus qui nostra ad flumina tendis,</i> <i>fare age, quid uenias, iam istinc et comprime gressum.</i>	
<i>umbrarum hic locus est, somni noctisque soporae:</i>	390
<i>corpora uiua nefas Stygia uectare carina.</i> <i>nec uero Alciden me sum laetatus euntem</i> <i>accepisse lacu, nec Thesea Pirithoumque,</i> <i>dis quamquam geniti atque inuicti uiribus essent.</i>	
<i>Tartareum ille manu custodem in uincla petiuit</i>	395
<i>ipsius a solio regis traxitque trementem;</i> <i>hi dominam Ditis thalamo deducere adorti.'</i> <i>quae contra breuiter fata est Amphrysia uates:</i> <i>'nullae hic insidiae tales (absiste moueri),</i> <i>nec uim tela ferunt; licet ingens ianitor antro</i>	400
<i>aeternum latrans exsanguis terreat umbras,</i> <i>casta licet patruī seruet Proserpina limen.</i> <i>Troius Aeneas, pietate insignis et armis,</i> <i>ad genitorem imas Erebi descendit ad umbras.</i> <i>si te nulla mouet tantae pietatis imago,</i>	405
<i>at ramum hunc' (aperit ramum qui ueste latebat)</i> <i>'agnoscas.'</i>	

Unlike Hercules and Theseus, Aeneas will not violently invade the Underworld, try to break it open and steal something from it. He can pass through because of his piety, not because of his arms, and will leave everything untouched, returning with superior knowledge about the destiny of his descendants.

In the context of Seneca's *Hercules Furens*, Charon's monologue here should be carefully studied. It is not just *nefas* to ferry the living across the Styx. In spite of their divine descent (*Aen.* 6.394), Charon considers Hercules' demand that Cerberus should be chained an outrage (note the emphatic *ipsius a solio regis* (*Aen.* 6.396)), and the same goes for Theseus' and Pirithous' attempt to abduct Proserpina. The Sibyl in turn labels these deeds *insidiae* (*Aen.* 6.399) and stresses that Aeneas will leave everything as it was. Seneca's most obvious allusion to the *katabasis* of *Aeneid* 6 is precisely to this

scene, in his own version of Hercules' confrontation with Charon. Having described Charon in language highly similar to Vergil's,²¹⁴ Theseus describes the confrontation between Hercules and the ferryman (*HF*. 769-77):

hic onere uacuu litori puppem applicans
repetebat umbras; poscit Alcides uiam. 770
*cedente turba dirus exclamat Charon:*²¹⁵
'quo pergis, audax? siste properantem gradum.'
non passus ullas natus Alcmene moras
ipso coactum nauitam conto domat
scanditque puppem. cumba populorum capax 775
succubuit uni; sidit et grauior ratis
utrimque Lethen latere titubanti bibit.

Reading this passage in Seneca's tragedy, we understand why Vergil's Charon considered Hercules' invasion of the Underworld such a traumatic experience. No peaceful and respectful request here on behalf of the living intruder, and the overwhelmed Charon gets to speak one line only. Jo-Ann Shelton rightly points out: '[In the *Aeneid*] Charon has control over the situation and is a truly frightening and grotesque figure. In the confrontation between Hercules and Charon, Hercules appears rough and brash as he pushes his way through the crowd and ignores Charon's shouts. Charon comes out the worst in this contest.'²¹⁶ In addition, Hercules overpowers Charon with his own punting-pole. Fitch is certainly right to remark that the contrast between Hercules and Aeneas could not have been made more evident by Seneca.²¹⁷

The allusions to the Charon scene continue in what follows. Having overpowered Cerberus by clubbing him into submission (*HF*. 797-804), Hercules is permitted to leave the Underworld with Cerberus and Theseus (*HF*. 804-06): *extimuit sedens / uterque solio dominus et duci iubet; / me quoque petenti munus Alcidae dedit*. Fitch remarks that *solio* is an allusion to Vergil's *a solio* (*Aen.* 6.396) from the passage

²¹⁴ *HF*. 764-68, cf. *Aen.* 6.298-304. For discussion see Shelton (1978), 54 with n. 12 and Fitch (1987) and Billerbeck (1999) *ad locc*.

²¹⁵ For *HF*. 770-71 I adopt the punctuation proposed by Fitch (1987) *ad loc.*, who interprets *HF*. 770 as Hercules trying to make his way through the crowd. Fitch is right to observe that Charon is 'reacting to Hercules' movements' rather than to any requests – which, in addition, would also fit *non passus ullas ... moras* (*HF*. 773) better.

²¹⁶ Shelton (1978), 54.

²¹⁷ Fitch (1987), 318.

quoted above.²¹⁸ There is an interesting alteration to be observed, however: Pluto and Proserpina order Hercules to carry Cerberus away after they have been intimidated by Hercules' strength. The fact that Dis *orders* Hercules to carry Cerberus away after the beast has already been conquered without permission, suggests that the frightened god wants to be rid of Hercules as soon as possible, before he can do more damage. Hercules does not even have to ask anymore, as he had in the *Aeneid* (*Aen.* 6.395: *petiuit*). Having gained Cerberus without asking, Hercules asks for Theseus instead (*HF.* 806: *petenti*). Given Seneca's brevity, one suspects that this request is granted almost in the same breath.²¹⁹

This short comparison between Hercules' and Aeneas' *katabasis* shows that Hercules' descent into the Underworld is perceived by its inhabitants as far more violent and disruptive than that of Aeneas. But Seneca employs more subtle allusions as well, that show that Hercules' descent is not just different from that of Aeneas, but actually similar to that of Juno. He does so by combining allusions to Aeneas' *katabasis* in the sixth book of the *Aeneid* with allusions to those of Juno in the seventh book of the *Aeneid* and in the fourth book of the *Metamorphoses*. This begins as early as in the middle of Theseus' Vergilian invocation, in which Theseus calls Pluto's realm *regno capaci* (*HF.* 659). Fitch has remarked that this phrase is reminiscent of Ovid's description of the city of Dis as *mille capax aditus et apertas undique portas / urbs habet* (*Met.* 4.439-40), and that Seneca – again like Ovid – emphasizes Hell's ability to absorb countless numbers of souls (compare *HF.* 667 and 673-74 with *Met.* 4.440-42).²²⁰ One might say that a shared allusion to Hell's all-devouring nature is not a particularly striking similarity between Seneca and Ovid.²²¹ But this Junonian incursion will prove to be the first of many.

Already far more significant is Seneca's description of the entrance to Hades (*HF.* 662-67):

*Spartana tellus nobile attollit iugum,
densis ubi aequor Taenarus siluis premit;*

²¹⁸ Fitch (1987) *ad HF.* 805.

²¹⁹ In light of the preceding discussion, Lawall's argument (Lawall (1983), 12) that Cerberus and Theseus are magnanimously given away by Dis, the latter on Hercules' polite request, and that Hercules 'exercised his *virtus* in the underworld with remarkable restraint and respect' can hardly be maintained.

²²⁰ Fitch (1987) *ad loc.*

²²¹ Fitch also notes that a fragment of archaic Latin tragedy already calls the Underworld *capax*.

hic ora soluit Ditis inuisi domus

***hiat**que rupes alta et **immenso** specu*

665

***ingens uorago faucibus** uastis patet*

latumque pandit omnibus populis iter.

Fitch notes that this passage is indebted to two Vergilian passages (words that Seneca has borrowed from Vergil have been rendered bold here).²²² The first comes from Vergil's description of the entrance of the Underworld through which Aeneas and the Sibyl are about to pass (*Aen.* 6.237-38):

*spelunca alta fuit uastoque **immanis** **hiatu**,*

*screpea, tuta lacu nigro **nemorum**que tenebris*

The other is from Vergil's description of the gateway through which Allecto returns to the Underworld after she has done her evil work, which I will quote in full (*Aen.* 7.563-71):

est locus Italiae medio sub montibus altis,

nobilis et fama multis memoratus in oris,

Amsancti ualles; densis hunc frondibus atrum

565

*urget utrimque latus **nemoris**, medioque fragosus*

dat sonitum saxis et torto uertice torrens.

hic specus horrendum et saeui spiracula Ditis

*monstrantur, ruptoque **ingens** Acheronte **uorago***

*pestiferas aperit **fauces**, quis condita Erinys,*

570

inuisum numen, terras caelumque leuauit.²²³

Seneca's forest is paralleled in both passages. *hiat ... immenso ...* is derived from Vergil's *immanis hiatus*, and the *ingens uorago* with its *faucibus* is inspired by the second Vergilian passage.²²⁴ Closer study reveals that Seneca is combining passages that are already somewhat similar in themselves. Both Vergilian entrances exhale toxic

²²² Most of the parallels observed by Fitch can of course also be found in Billerbeck's commentary. Reference here is primarily to Fitch.

²²³ In preferring *leuauit* to *leuabat* I follow Horsfall's text instead of Mynors'.

²²⁴ Fitch (1987) *ad HF.* 663 and 665-66.

vapors (compare *Aen.* 6.240-41: *talis sese halitus atris / **faucibus** effundens supera ad conuexa ferebat* with *Aen.* 7.570 *pestiferas fauces*). Both the entrance at Taenarus as well as the two Vergilian entrances are surrounded by forests (*HF.* 663: *siluis*; *Aen.* 6.238: *nemorum*; *Aen.* 7.566 *nemoris*). At the beginning of his first *katabasis* and at the end of his second one, Vergil has placed entrances to the Underworld that are remarkably similar to each other. Seneca, picking up the hint, has combined the two, emphasizing that there is no real difference between the entrance of a hero and the entrance of a Fury. Neither will there be a difference between their exits – Hercules leaves the way he came (*HF.* 813: *est ad oras Taenari uentum*).²²⁵

The rest of the descent itself continues in predominantly Vergilian fashion, even though we still find Ovidian coloring from passages other than the one that interests me here.²²⁶ In Theseus' subsequent description of various regions of the Underworld, Seneca mainly reworks Aeneas' tour of the Underworld. But often enough he fuses Aeneas' *katabasis* in the *Aeneid* with details familiar from Juno's *katabasis* in the *Metamorphoses*. Theseus' *palus inertis foeda Cocyti iacet* (*HF.* 686) is a fusion of (most importantly) Vergil's *Cocyti stagna alta uidet Stygiamque paludem* (*Aen.* 6.323) and Ovid's *Styx nebulas exhalat iners* (*Met.* 4.434).²²⁷ Seneca's *taxum imminet* (*HF.* 690)²²⁸ is inspired by Ovid's *est uia decluius funesta nubila taxo* (*Met.* 4.432)²²⁹ introducing Juno's *katabasis*, an Ovidian tree among predominantly Vergilian personifications inhabiting Seneca's Underworld (*HF.* 68-96).²³⁰ Seneca employs a similar technique of inserting an Ovidian element in a Vergilian context later on. The geographical surroundings of the palace of Dis (*HF.* 717-22) are inspired by Vergil's description of Rhadamanthus' castle (*Aen.* 6.549-51),²³¹ but the phrase *Ditis regia* (*HF.* 717) is once again derived from Juno's *katabasis* in the *Metamorphoses* (*Met.* 4.438).²³²

The sequel to Hercules' *katabasis* is even more explicitly Junonian. In the following act Hercules will slaughter one of his children in Athamas-like fashion, by swinging him above his own head and crashing his son's skull, as his frenzied wife flees from him with another son, just as Ino had (*HF.* 1002-09 – spoken by Amphitryon):

²²⁵ As Fitch observes *ad HF.* 662-67 and 813.

²²⁶ Cf. Fitch (1987) *ad HF.* 671-72, 675.

²²⁷ Fitch (1987) *ad loc.*

²²⁸ I accept Leo's conjecture.

²²⁹ Fitch (1987) *ad loc.*

²³⁰ Cf. Fitch (1987) *ad loc.* on the sources of these personifications.

²³¹ Fitch (1987), 305.

²³² Fitch (1987) *ad HF.* 717-20.

En blandas manus
ad genua tendens uoce miseranda rogat.
scelus nefandum, triste et aspectu horridum:
dextra precantem rapuit et circa furens 1005
bis ter rotatum misit; ast illi caput
sonuit, cerebro tecta disperso madent.—
at misera, paruum protegens gnatum sinu,
Megara furenti similis e latebris fugit.

This passage is clearly inspired by the following passage from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (*Met.* 4.515-23):²³³

utque ferae sequitur uestigia coniugis amens 515
deque sinu matris ridentem et parua Learchum
brachia tendentem rapit et bis terque per auras
more rotat fundae rigidoque infantia saxo
discutit ora ferox. tum denique concita mater,
seu dolor hoc fecit seu sparsum causa uenenum 520
exululat passisque fugit male sana capillis
teque ferens paruum nudis, Melicerta, lacertis
'euhoe Bacche!' sonat;

Of course, Hercules' madness is only an indirect result of his visit to the Underworld. But because of the density of allusions to passages from Augustan epic in which the sequence *katabasis*-tragic madness does contain a causal connection, it is hard not to connect Hercules' opening of the Underworld with the fact that Furies will follow him out of it shortly afterwards. In the prologue, Juno had promised Hercules, on his way from earth to Heaven after his escape from Hell, that she would show him Hell on earth (*HF.* 89-91):

i nunc, superbe, caelitum sedes pete,
humana temne. iam Styga et manes, ferox, 90
fugisse credis? hic tibi ostendam inferos.

²³³ Lawall (1983), 9 and Fitch (1987) *ad HF.* 1002-07 and 1009. The madness scene contains a wide variety of allusions to various Ovidian stories, however, as a glance at the commentaries will reveal.

And indeed, in his madness Hercules witnesses an Erinys, and next Tisiphone, as if they had followed him out of Hell (*HF*. 982-86):

*Flammifera Erinys uerbere excusso sonat
rogisque adustas propius ac propius sudes
in ora tendit; saeua Tisiphone, caput
serpentibus uallata, post raptum canem
portam uacantem clausit opposita face.*²³⁴ 985

Juno's wish has been fulfilled, but at a price – the boundaries between earth and Hell have been opened permanently. As Hercules gradually recovers from his madness in the final act, and beholds the corpses of his children, he wonders whether he may still be in the Underworld after all (*HF*. 1143-46):

*certe redimus – unde prostrata ad domum
uideo cruenta corpora? an nondum exiit
simulacra mens inferna? post reditus quoque
oberrat oculis turba feralis meis?* 1145

Hercules' capture of Cerberus has not resulted in a conquest of Hell and Hercules' deification, but rather in confusion between the boundaries between Hell and earth. Read against the background of the *Aeneid*, the Jovian hero's *katabasis* is quite Junonian in its tragic results. In the following and final section of this chapter, I will move beyond the *katabasis*, and provide a more general interpretation of Seneca's fusion of Jupiter and Juno within the figure of Hercules.

The problem of closure in Hercules Furens

What are the implications of Seneca's short-circuiting of epic opposites in *Hercules Furens*? It is tempting to read the end of the play as a straightforward triumph of Juno, with the forces of Hell unleashed and the Jovian hero cut down to mortal size. But in fact, *Hercules Furens* is more complex than that. The play's climax certainly is Junonian: a family brought down by infernal madness, the Jovian plot delayed. But

²³⁴ Fitch (1987), *ad HF*. 982-84 (tentatively) and Billerbeck (1999) *ad HF*. 982-86 (more firmly) connect this passage to Juno's summoning of the Furies in the prologue.

a Junonian ending is nothing if not open-ended.²³⁵ Indeed, Juno herself seems to be aware of the possibility that the deification plot may still be open to Hercules at the end, even though she has tainted it forever with her assault (*HF*. 121-22): *scelere perfecto licet / admittat illas genitor in caelum manus*.²³⁶ This is precisely what *Hercules Furens* is all about as an intertextual commentary on epic: its aim is not to annihilate the Jovian plot, but rather to discredit it beyond repair.

Of course, the *Aeneid* ends in somewhat similar fashion: Jupiter and Juno are reconciled, and as Aeneas puts an end to Turnus' resistance he is overtaken by madness and anger (*Aen.* 12.946-47: *furiis accensus et ira / terribilis*), the very forces that Juno had manipulated to set her plot of delay in motion.²³⁷ The epic is brought to an end, but the violent energy that had fuelled it has hardly been spent.²³⁸ And just because it ends in this way, the *Aeneid* provides future poets with the possibility to begin all over again.

But the *Aeneid* is also open-ended in a different sense. Yes, the Jovian hero is overwhelmed by Junonian forces. But because the epic breaks off at precisely this point, it is impossible to say whether the story does indeed continue along these Junonian lines, whether Aeneas remains in this frenzied state or not, whether Junonian anger might not be tamed after all. After all, the poet *does* offer us the reassuring picture of Furor in chains at the Augustan end of history (*Aen.* 1.291-96). Disturbing though the end of the epic may be, the poem also features an ending outside of the plot, projected into the distant future, which is quite different from the actual ending.²³⁹

Quite unlike the *Aeneid*, *Hercules Furens* dwells upon the consequences of the fusion between Jupiter and Juno at the end of Vergil's epic, and tries to answer the question: "What's next?"²⁴⁰ In this section, I will return to the metapoetic discussion with which this chapter opened, to show how Seneca himself reflects upon his genre experiment. We will find that Seneca himself has qualified the extent to which his tragedy can put an end to epic's paradoxes. He even suggests new roads that the other

²³⁵ Vergilian scholarship of the last decade of the 20th century has examined the tension between Jupiter's clausal drive – his desire to bring the epic plot to its *telos* – and Juno's tendency to open things up again. The most pertinent observations are made by Feeney (1991); Quint (1993); Fowler (1997b) and Hershkowitz (1998a). The latter complicates the binary opposition between Jupiter and Juno.

²³⁶ Chaudhuri (2014), 128 reads these lines as proof that Juno wants to use Hercules' madness to prevent his deification altogether, but I am not sure we should go that far.

²³⁷ The similarity in plot between Vergil's epic and Seneca's tragedy is observed by Putnam (1995), 254-55 and further developed by Trinacty (2014), 137-39, particularly the ending of both poems.

²³⁸ See Hardie (1997b), 147 on the inconclusiveness of ending an epic with anger and fury.

²³⁹ On the double ending of the *Aeneid*, see Hardie (1997b), 142-44.

²⁴⁰ Compare Trinacty (2014), 138.

high genre might take. But some other roads have been closed for good. In this way, the tragedian has set the terms for epic's continuation. We will see that this is a technique that Seneca employs in other tragedies as well.²⁴¹

In order to fully appreciate how Seneca has woven his closural reflections into the fabric of his play, we have to zoom out for a while before we turn to the final act, where my discussions of closure and genre merge. Because I have already dealt at length with Juno's role in the prologue and with the merging of Jovian and Junonian elements in the third act, I will focus my discussion here on the second and fourth act. In these acts, Seneca deconstructs the opposition between Jupiter and Juno several times. In the process, he emphasizes Jupiter's powerlessness to perform his traditional epic closural role in a tragic universe.²⁴²

As the second act opens, the reader already knows from Juno's opening monologue that Hercules has succeeded in fetching Cerberus from the Underworld (*HF*. 46-63). But on the mortal plane, we find Hercules' human father Amphitryon and Hercules' wife Megara under threat from the evil tyrant Lycus, who has just taken over control of Thebes. They anxiously await the return of Hercules, who has gone off to fetch Cerberus. They lament the fact that, now that Hercules is off to the Underworld, such criminality as that of Lycus goes unpunished, and fear that Hercules might not return from what should be his final labor.

The first words spoken by Amphitryon are a desperate call upon Jupiter to exert his traditional closural power (*HF*. 205-09):

<i>O magne Olympi rector et mundi arbiter, iam statue tandem grauibus aerumnis modum finemque cladi. nulla lux umquam mihi secura fulsit: finis alterius mali gradus est futuri.</i>	205
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²⁴¹ For one, we find a comparable inconclusiveness at the end of *Oedipus* (Fitch (1987) *ad HF*. 1221) and the first half of *Phoenissae* – like the end of *Hercules Furens* – is concerned with the question of the hero's continued survival (Wessels (2014), 106). On the theme of the overliving of the tragic hero in Greek, Latin and English literature, see Wilson (2004).

²⁴² A comparable dynamic can be discerned in Euripides' *Hercules Furens*, a play that similarly teases the reader with seemingly closural moments. This dynamic is discussed by Dunn (1997). I would like to thank Paul van Uum for drawing my attention to this parallel between Seneca's and Euripides' tragedy on Hercules. Particularly interesting are Dunn's observations concerning the struggle for control over Herakles' destiny between Zeus and Hera in Euripides' tragedy, in which Zeus fails to assert ultimate control over Herakles' fate. Jupiter is similarly absent in Seneca's *Hercules Furens*, compare Von Glinski (2017), 223. The fact that Jupiter is conspicuously absent in both *Hercules Furens*-plays is noted by Li Causi (2008), 107-09. Chaudhuri (2014), 150 observes that the absence of the gods at the end of *Hercules Furens* is comparable to the absence of the gods at the end of Statius' *Thebaid*.

This call upon Jupiter for a *finis*, following a clear manifestation of Juno's unrelenting anger, is structurally quite similar to the opening of the *Aeneid*. The action of that epic began with an angry monologue by Juno followed by a storm hitting the Trojan fleet. After Aeneas and his men have been shipwrecked on the African coast, Venus calls upon Jupiter, ruler of the heavens, to put an end to her son's troubles, deprived as the Trojans seem to be of their promised destiny (*Aen.* 1.229-53). Likewise, Amphitryon calls upon Jupiter to put an end to the suffering of "their" son (both Amphitryon and Jupiter being Hercules' father in a sense). Venus' question *quem das finem, rex magne, laborum?* (*Aen.* 1.241) is particularly close in its wording to the beginning of Amphitryon's speech quoted above, which calls for an end to Hercules' labors (*HF.* 205-78). The parallelism is further strengthened because both Venus and Amphitryon suffer as a result of their son's suffering.²⁴³ But there is an important point of contrast between the epic and the tragedy. Jupiter immediately responds to Venus' plea with a reassuring prophecy of Aeneas' and Rome's future greatness (*Aen.* 1.257-96), of which we will see part fulfilled in the epic. But of course, there follows no reply from Jupiter in Seneca's play, and Amphitryon's pronouncement that every *finis* to one evil is merely a *gradus* to a future evil will prove only too true.

Throughout the act, both on their own as well as in their confrontation with the tyrant Lycus, Amphitryon and Megara look forward to liberation from Lycus' tyranny by Hercules as an end to their suffering. At the same time, they look forward to Hercules' deification as the *telos* of his labors, which becomes evident at the end of Amphitryon's speech, as he speaks of Thebes as a god-creating city (*HF.* 265-67: *haec quae caelites / recepit et quae fecit et – fas sit loqui – / fortasse faciet*). Amphitryon's expectation of Hercules' deification thematically continues Juno's fear of Hercules' assault on Heaven.²⁴⁴

When Hercules himself arrives upon the scene in the next act, his thoughts are not directed towards closure of any kind, but rather to continuation of his labors. Having elaborated upon his capture of Cerberus, he states (*HF.* 613-15):

*quid restat aliud? uidi et ostendi inferos:
da si quid ultra est, iam diu pateris manus
cessare nostras, Iuno: quae uinci iubes?*

615

²⁴³ Compare *Aen.* 1.238-39 (*hoc equidem occasum Troiae tristisque ruinas / solabar fatis contraria fata rependens*) and *Aen.* 1.250-53 (*nos, tua progenies, caeli quibus adnuis arcem, / nauibus (infandum!) amissis unius ob iram / prodimur atque Italiam longe disiungimur oris. hic pietatis honos? sic nos in sceptris reponis?*), in which Venus identifies herself with the Trojan cause, with *HF.* 208-09.

²⁴⁴ Compare Chaudhuri (2014), 128-29.

Hercules soon finds out that his next challenge will be the killing of Lycus. A challenge hardly worthy of his valor, but a labor all the same (*HF*. 634-35): *mactetur hostis, hanc ferat uirtus notam / fiatque summus hostis Alcidae Lycus*. But not even Lycus' death will prove to be the end.

When Hercules returns from killing Lycus and sacrifices to the gods, Amphitryon bids him to pray to Jupiter for an end to his labors (*HF*. 924-26): *Finiat genitor tuus / opta labores, detur aliquando otium / quiesque fessis*. But once again, Seneca does not allow Jupiter to fulfill his closural role. Just a few lines later, Juno will assume total control. But first, Seneca directs our attention to one of Jupiter's less successful performances in Latin epic, and once again emphasizes the god's powerlessness in his tragedy. Hercules responds to Amphitryon's suggestion by praying for a return to the Golden Age (*HF*. 926-39), a prayer he introduces with the words *Ipse concipiam preces / Ioue meque dignas* (*HF*. 926-27). Fitch notes the phrase's indebtedness to Ovid's *dignas Ioue concipit iras* (*Met*. 1.166), said of Jupiter shortly before the supreme god unleashes the Flood at the beginning of the *Metamorphoses*.

A highly ironic allusion to be sure, as it invites us to compare Seneca's Hercules to Ovid's Jupiter – hardly a god who brought about a return to the Golden Age in the passage to which Seneca alludes.²⁴⁵ Now that Seneca has brought the Ovidian Flood to mind, Hercules' wish that *nulla tempestas fretum / uiolenta turbet, nullus irato Ioue / exiliat ignis, nullus hiberna niue / nutritus agros amnis euersos trahat* (*HF*. 931-34) becomes more problematic than it would have been otherwise. The words *irato Ioue*, together with Hercules' prayer that river and storms may be kept in check, strengthen the connection with a passage in the *Metamorphoses*, featuring an angry Jupiter, in which just the opposite had happened. But the allusion carries a wider significance as well. Having recovered from his madness in the final scene, Hercules *will* ask for an angry Jupiter to hurl his thunderbolt (*HF*. 1202-05):

*Nunc parte ab omni, genitor, iratus tona;
oblite nostri, uindica sera manu
saltem nepotes. stelliger mundus sonet
flammasque et hic et ille iaculetur polus*

1205

But there is no celestial father to assist the hero in this tragedy.

²⁴⁵ Littlewood (2004), 113.

Hercules' prayer for a return to the Golden Age breaks off as he is invaded by madness. He sees the constellations in disorder (*HF.* 939-52) and his thoughts turn to his deification, which should now be at hand (*HF.* 955-59):

Perdomita tellus, tumida cesserunt freta, 955
inferna nostros regna sensere impetus:
immune caelum est, dignus Alcide labor.
in alta mundi spatia sublimis ferar,
petatur aether: astra promittit pater.

This ambition is quickly transformed into a desire for Gigantomachy should Jupiter refuse Hercules deification (*HF.* 960-74 – note *bella Titanes parent, / me duce furentes* (*HF.* 967-68) in particular), just as Juno had predicted. Employing the same technique as the one he had used in the *katabasis* passage, Seneca shows here how easily Jovian closure through deification can be transformed into its opposite, a hellish revolt against Jupiter, where Hercules is concerned.²⁴⁶ Hercules then goes on to kill his own children and wife, believing in his madness that he is slaying the family of Lycus²⁴⁷ and foresees a *maius bellum* in which he will level Mycenae to the ground (*HF.* 996-98). Both in real life and in the world of his delusion, Hercules' labors are far from over.

Long before the actual ending, Seneca has established closure as a central theme in this tragedy, all the while connecting this theme to Jupiter and Juno, just as the Augustan epic poets had. In *Hercules Furens*, Seneca abolishes the distinction between Jupiter and Juno – at first sight a rather final intertextual gesture from the Augustans' tragic successor. But the fact that Seneca also emphasizes that it is as good as impossible to put an end to Hercules, in traditional "Jovian" fashion at least, suggests that even this tragedy is not the end of the story. And indeed, Seneca has provided this generic experiment with an epilogue in which its consequences are explored. From the beginning to the end, this epilogue is concerned with Hercules' generic position between *arma* and *furor*, epic and tragedy, and thereby with the relationship between Latin epic and tragedy in general. Indeed, the abundance of forms of generically marked words such as *arma*, *bellum*, *furor* and *ira* in this scene is telling, as we shall see below.

²⁴⁶ Chaudhuri (2014), 140-44 offers a rich discussion of this passage in relation to Phaethon, Longinus' *On the Sublime* and Seneca's own *Thyestes* and *Medea*. For discussion of *Hercules Furens* in relation to the story of Phaethon and the work of Longinus, see Littlewood (2004), 120-27.

²⁴⁷ *HF.* 987-91, 996-97, 1001-02, 1035-38.

The final act is very much about Hercules' inability to truly cope with a situation that does not fit his world of "essential epic". Fitch has admirably shown how Hercules continues to conceive of his situation in heroic terms, a labor to be accomplished, even though the aftermath to a tragedy hardly calls for this kind of response.²⁴⁸ One of the anxious questions that Hercules asks as he awakens from his insanity is (*HF*. 1153-54): *ubi tela? ubi arcus? arma quis uiuo mihi / detrahare potuit?*²⁴⁹ Barely recovered from his tragic *furor*, the epic hero longs for his *arma* again. Much of the debate in this final scene on the course of action that Hercules should take after what he has done in his madness, centers on his weapons. Fitch points out that, for a moment realizing that he has to renounce his previous heroism to be able to move on, Hercules decides to destroy his weapons (*HF*. 1229-35):

huc arcum date,
date huc sagittas, stipitem huc uastum date. 1230
tibi tela frangam nostra; tibi nostros, puer,
rumpemus arcus; at tuis stipes grauis
ardebit umbris; ipsa Lernaëis frequens
pharetra telis in tuos ibit rogos:
dent arma poenas. 1235

But it only takes Hercules a few lines to revert to a more familiar response: 'violent retribution, elimination of the evil' (*HF*. 1242-45):

arma, arma Theseu, flagito propere mihi
subtracta reddi. sana si mens est mihi,
referte manibus tela; si remanet furor,
*pater, recede: mortis inueniam uiam.*²⁵⁰ 1245

Violent retribution, the elimination of evil – it is as if we are witnessing Aeneas' final punishment and sacrifice of Turnus,²⁵¹ only this time the epic hero wishes to

²⁴⁸ Fitch (1979).

²⁴⁹ The reader knows that Amphitryon had ordered his servants to take Hercules' weapons away, lest he would use them again in another attack of his frenzy (*HF*. 1053).

²⁵⁰ This paragraph summarizes Fitch (1979), 244-45. The selection of passages and the emphases are mine.

²⁵¹ On the importance of sacrificial language in the madness scene, see Putnam (1995), 256.

eliminate himself together with his *arma* (HF. 1235-36: *dent arma poenas. uos quoque infaustas meis / cremabo telis, o nouercales manus*). And as soon as his weapons have been returned to him (HF. 1295: *Reddo arma*, Amphitryon says) Hercules prepares to direct them at himself (HF. 1296-1300) to put an end to his epic career that has been tragically derailed – striving for a finality comparable with that of Aeneas as he brings the epic that bears *his* name to an end with a single sword-blow. Hercules continues to wage war with himself in this final scene (HF. 85: *bella iam **secum** gerat*), as Amphitryon notes (HF. 1220-21): *mutauit **iras**, quodque habet proprium **furor**, / **in se ipse** saeuit*.²⁵² *ira* fuels both epic and tragedy, the only difference is its direction.

In short: in spite of his transformation into a tragic hero, Hercules continues to conceive of his identity as an epic one. Even though Amphitryon and Theseus refuse, Hercules continues to demand his *arma* (HF. 1271, 1284), which he needs to accomplish an appropriately epic *ingens opus, labore bis seno amplius* (HF. 1282). After Amphitryon has managed to dissuade his son from suicide in the end by threatening to take *his* own life, Hercules finally decides that survival should be his thirteenth labor (HF. 1315-17).²⁵³

Even so, Hercules remains obsessed with death, asking Theseus to return him to the Underworld (HF. 1334-41, HF. 1338: *redde me infernis, precor* in particular). But Theseus promises his friend salvation instead, in the closing words of the play (HF. 1341-44):

*Nostra te tellus manet.
illic solutam caede Gradiuus manum
restituit armis: illa te, Alcide, uocat,
facere innocentes terra quae superos solet.*

Interestingly, the prospect of epic and epic closure remains at the end – even though the ending itself, with its move from Thebes to Athens, is quintessentially tragic.²⁵⁴ Theseus invites Hercules to Athens, where Mars was purified from killing Neptune's son, to return to his proper sphere: *arma* (HF. 1342-44). Within the scope of the tragedy, Juno is indeed triumphant, as she often temporarily is in the tragic parts

²⁵² A passage that also evokes *in se semper armatus Furor* (HF. 98). Putnam (1995), 255 also links Amphitryon's observation to these lines spoken by Juno. Hercules' inner civil war is also discussed in Littlewood (2017).

²⁵³ Fitch (1979), 247.

²⁵⁴ Zeitlin (1990).

of Latin epic. But even in a tragedy in which he has tested the epic genre to its limits, Seneca seems to suggest that this can only happen in tragedy itself, and leaves open the possibility that all may be well again once this story is returned to epic. But a more pessimistic reading of Theseus' invitation is offered by Emily Wilson, who considers the invitation to Athens 'a regressive move, back to the past' in this Roman play, and adds the following wry observation: 'The suggestion that Hercules is like Mars hardly implies that his hands will ever become clean of blood. Rather, in taking Hercules with him to Athens, Theseus is taking the same old bloodshed and violence back to his own city.'²⁵⁵

Where does all of this leave us? *Hercules Furens* ends with an epic hero whose violent powers have been turned inward. And even after his madness has vanished, he remains tragically at war with himself. Nevertheless, his desire for a proper epic identity remains, and Theseus seems to be able to give him this return to epic, although we cannot be sure. Throughout this scene, Hercules remains obsessed with the Underworld, and both Jovian closure and closure through punishment are denied to him. Seneca's grand tragic experiment of short-circuiting the epic poles of Jupiter and Juno remains open-ended: the road towards epic has not been cut off, but it is now considerably narrower than it had been before. Every epic successor will have to come to terms with Seneca's reflection on epic's traditional structures. But he will also have to come to terms with Hercules' generic identity crisis: if Seneca's generic experiment ends with the epic hero at war with himself, the only possible return to war will be a return to civil war.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁵ Wilson (2004), 111.

²⁵⁶ I thank Alessandro Schiesaro for emphasizing to me the importance of the theme of civil war in *Hercules Furens*. The assessment of the precise nature of this importance is my own. Compare Trinacty (2014), 139: 'One wonders if [Hercules] will be able to forgive himself for his actions or if his brand of heroism necessitates the rage and anger problematized in the tragedy.'

CHAPTER 2

OEDIPUS AND THE REVERSAL OF THE EPIC PLOT

Although *Oedipus* shares with *Hercules Furens* an interest in the tragic protagonist's position in the cosmos and his relationship to the gods, there is a considerable difference between both plays in the way in which Seneca develops these themes. In *Hercules Furens* we see a hero shifting between Hell, earth and Heaven and back. Two important German articles on *Oedipus* have defined this play as Seneca's quintessential *Fatum* tragedy: Oedipus' crimes and his gradual discovery of his own identity have all been predetermined by Fate.²⁵⁷ This interpretation has been encouraged by the play's final choral ode on Fate (*Oed.* 980-93), which can all too easily be interpreted as providing the moral of the story.²⁵⁸ If *Oedipus* is indeed governed by Fate, this Fate rather takes the shape of a capricious *Natura* who carelessly perverts the laws of the cosmos she should govern (*Oed.* 942-44), producing an Oedipus guilty from the moment of his first breath (*Oed.* 877-78).²⁵⁹

A description of the cosmos of Seneca's *Oedipus* like the one offered in the preceding paragraph is not exactly revolutionary. In this chapter I will examine it from an intertextual perspective. I will argue that Seneca's *Oedipus* further develops Ovid's tragic Theban cosmos from the third and fourth book of the *Metamorphoses*. The story of the doomed Oedipus, beset by a vindictive Phoebus, is shown by Seneca to be the true essence and culmination point of Ovid's Theban tales. We will see that the figure of Oedipus exerts a gravitational pull on all Theban stories, and that Seneca forcefully extracts the Oedipal reading implicit in Ovid's Theban stories from the work of his predecessor. In addition to this, Seneca further develops Ovid's conception of Thebes as an anti-Rome²⁶⁰ through pointed allusion to several key passages from the sixth book of the *Aeneid* in particular. Ovid's elusive and multifocal Theban commentary on the *Aeneid* becomes considerably more focused when read through the lens of Oedipus. Finally, *Oedipus* can be compared and contrasted with *Hercules Furens* in illuminating ways. In the latter tragedy, Seneca had fused the forces of Heaven and Hell within the figure of Hercules. But in the malevolent universe of *Oedipus*, Heaven and Hell conspire to bring the tragic protagonist down. In *Hercules Furens*, Hercules' all-conquering epic energy is tragically moved inward; in *Oedipus*, the tragic protagonist sucks the epic plot into his black hole, as a Roman teleological narrative is turned back on itself and transformed into its opposite.²⁶¹

²⁵⁷ See Schetter (1972) and Müller (1972) in particular.

²⁵⁸ For a reconsideration of the Stoic nature of this ode see Sklenář (2007-08).

²⁵⁹ Poe (1983), who also starts from Schetter and Müller. On Oedipus' guilt in relation to Fate, see also Davis (1991).

²⁶⁰ Cf. Hardie (1990) and Janan (2009), discussed in the introductory chapter.

²⁶¹ On Seneca's reversal of Vergilian teleology in *Oedipus* and other plays, see again Schiesaro (1997), reworked in Schiesaro (2003), 177-220.

The second coming of Cadmus

At the heart of Seneca's *Oedipus* – both structurally as well as thematically – stands a scene of necromancy supervised by Tiresias (*Oed.* 530-658), which is narrated by Creon. During this necromancy, Laius is summoned, who accuses Oedipus of being the cause of the plague destroying Thebes (*Oed.* 626-58). Oedipus is shocked (*Oed.* 659-67) and accuses Creon of plotting with Tiresias to overthrow him so that Creon can become king (*Oed.* 668-70). He subsequently has Creon locked up (*Oed.* 707). The chorus responds to these actions with an ode about Cadmus and Actaeon (*Oed.* 709-63), that starts out with the following words (*Oed.* 709-12): *Non tu tantis causa periclis, / non haec Labdacidas petunt / fata, sed ueteres deum / irae secuntur ...* These lines absolve Oedipus of blame for the disaster befalling Thebes, placing the cause for this disaster further back in Theban history and making the plague part of a larger sequence of divine anger. This explanation stands in direct contrast to the words uttered by Laius as he accuses his son (*Oed.* 630-31): *patria, non ira deum, / sed scelere raperis*. The chorus and Laius differ considerably in the degree to which they attribute guilt to Oedipus. But they do agree on one point: violence within the family is nothing new in Thebes. The house of Cadmus should rejoice at another instance at Thebes of murder within the family, says Laius (*Oed.* 626-27): *O Cadmi effera, / cruore semper laeta cognato domus*.²⁶²

Both the necromancy and the subsequent choral ode reveal that Seneca's *Oedipus* is an intensely intertextual play. From the very beginning of the play, Seneca writes about his Oedipus as the successor of Ovid's Theban heroes. Indeed, given the conspicuous absence of Oedipus in Ovid's Theban books, and his absent-presence in the story of Narcissus,²⁶³ we may agree with Seo's words: 'Seneca's *Oedipus* seems to position itself intertextually as the product of the Oedipus-shaped void delineated by the Narcissus tale in *Metamorphoses* 3.'²⁶⁴

The most important Ovidian Theban with whom Seneca establishes an intertextual parallel is Cadmus. In the *Metamorphoses*, Cadmus is a man who **profugus patriamque iramque parentis / uitat** (*Met.* 3.7-8). Oedipus says of the fear caused by Apollo's prophecy that *hic me paternis expulit regnis timor, / hoc ego penates profugus excessi meos* (*Oed.* 22-23) and exclaims (*Oed.* 12):

²⁶² On the interplay between both views, see recently Seo (2013), 107-16 and Trinacty (2014), 225-26, as well as the commentaries of Töchterle and Boyle.

²⁶³ See e.g. Gildenhard/Zissos (2000) and Janan (2009).

²⁶⁴ Seo (2013), 95-96.

Quam bene parentis sceptrā Polybi fugerā! In his first speech, Oedipus already “foresees” his eventual departure from Thebes (*Oed.* 80): *infaustus hospes, profuge iamdudum ocus*. The oracle too calls Laius’ murderer a *profugus* ... *hospes* (*Oed.* 234); in his response to this oracle, Oedipus refers to Thebes as the kingdom *quae* ... *nunc hospes gero* (*Oed.* 264) and he urges himself on with *i profuge uade* (*Oed.* 1051) as he is leaving Thebes, an exile again.²⁶⁵ There are also non-verbal parallels between Cadmus and Oedipus. Both kill a monster before becoming king: Cadmus the snake (*Met.* 3.55-94), Oedipus the Sphinx (*Oed.* 92-102). Both are identified with or compared to the monster that they kill: Cadmus in the mysterious prophecy predicting his transformation into a snake (*Met.* 3.97-98); Laius calls Oedipus an *implicitum malum* / *magisque monstrum Sphinge perplexum sua* (*Oed.* 640-41). Both will leave the city that they have once ruled (*Met.* 4.565-66; *Oed.* 1047-61). In short, Seneca’s Oedipus resembles Ovid’s Cadmus in many respects. It can even be said that through the allusions to Cadmus, Oedipus is presented by Seneca as a second founder of the city, the founder of “Senecan Thebes”, so to speak.

In a tragedy by a Roman poet, the patterns of Cadmus’ and Oedipus’ lives are inevitably open to comparison with Aeneas. In the role of founder and exile, for example, Cadmus and Oedipus both resemble Aeneas, *fato profugus* (*Aen.* 1.2) and founder of the Roman nation (*Aen.* 1.5-7).²⁶⁶ Also like Aeneas, the fates of both Cadmus and Oedipus have been guided by Apollo.²⁶⁷ Ovid had turned the Aeneadic founding narrative on its head in his Theban books, by having the founder leave his own city.²⁶⁸ But Cadmus’ foundation at least has been clearly guided by Apollo’s oracle (*Met.* 3.10-13, *Oed.* 718-21). Oedipus’ kingship has been far more accidental (*Oed.* 14): *in regnum incidi*. The gods too have a much vaguer presence in Seneca’s play than they have in Vergil’s epic or Ovid’s Theban books. Aeneas’ quest, and all its consequences up to and including the reign of Augustus have been predetermined (*Aen.* 1.257-96). And the gods in Ovid’s Theban universe may be malevolent, but at the very least the reader knows their reasons for acting the way they do.

In Seneca’s *Oedipus*, we never get to see the gods’ perspectives on the matter. Phoebus’ will is only presented through his oracles (*Oed.* 15-21, 233-38) and Tiresias’

²⁶⁵ Discussed by Töchterle (1994) *ad Oed.* 234 (with reference to earlier scholarship) and Boyle (2011) *ad Oed.* 22-23, 233-35 and 1047-51. On Oedipus as an exile, also in relation to Cadmus, see Mastronarde (1970), 301-02.

²⁶⁶ On Cadmus and Aeneas in Ovidian Thebes, see Hardie (1990). On Oedipus and Aeneas in the prologue of Seneca’s *Oedipus*, see Seo (2013), 104.

²⁶⁷ See e.g. the prophecies of *Aen.* 3.94-98; 374-462.

²⁶⁸ On Ovid’s inversion of Vergil see again Hardie (1990).

rituals (*Oed.* 293-383). And even in what he tells mortals through his oracles or Tiresias' mantic rituals, the god is unclear.²⁶⁹ Seneca differs from Vergil and Ovid in that he shows nothing but the mortal perspective on the events taking place. For Oedipus and his family and the chorus, the very real presence of divinities as described in the chorus on Bacchus (*Oed.* 403-508) and in the chorus on Theban origins (*Oed.* 709-63) are a thing of the past, and the only gods that are actually witnessed are those of the Underworld (*ipse pallentes deos / uidi inter umbras* (*Oed.* 583-84) Creon says). In fact, Seneca's characters share this limited perspective with Ovid's Cadmus, who receives an anonymous oracle whose sense is unclear (*Met.* 3.97-98) and who in the end 'does not know that the source of his troubles can be traced back to the domestic quarrels of Jupiter and Juno.'²⁷⁰ But the perspective of Seneca's characters is also comparable to the tragically limited perspective of Dido in the *Aeneid*, who is 'doomed throughout to incomprehension of how two gods and two goddesses are making a wreck of her life.'²⁷¹ In his *Oedipus*, Seneca has lifted this tragic perspective from Augustan epic and made it the norm of his tragedy.

Appropriating a tragic perspective for tragedy is of course a very obvious thing for a tragedian to do. But the very fact that this tragic perspective is appropriated *from epic* means that, just as was the case in *Hercules Furens*, the two genres have become inextricably linked in Seneca's *Oedipus*. We should also note that the limited perspective of Oedipus in Seneca's tragedy closely resembles that of the founders of Rome's anti-cities Carthage and Thebes in the *Aeneid* and the *Metamorphoses*.²⁷² In his Theban books, Ovid had already begun to undermine the differences between the three cities, but it would be left to Seneca to collapse them completely, transforming the epic Roman teleological plot into the tragic dead-end Carthaginian, Latin and Theban plot. As it turns out, the figure of Oedipus possesses precisely the right characteristics to bring this transformation about.

²⁶⁹ See Mastronarde (1970), 292-94 for Seneca's constant qualification of Phoebus and his utterings or signs as *dubius*.

²⁷⁰ Wheeler (2000), 97. Of Ovid's Boeotian heroes, Actaeon is aware of his situation (*Met.* 3.203: *mens pristina mansit*) and Narcissus and Pentheus realize their mistake (*Met.* 3.463: *iste ego sum! sensi, nec me mea fallit imago*. and *Met.* 3.718: *iam se damnantem, iam se peccasse fatentem*). Ovid makes no mention of the Minyids' awareness of their transformation, and Agaue, Athamas and Ino do not recover from their insanity. On the tragically limited perspective of Ovid's Theban protagonists see Janan (2009), 72-76 and *passim*.

²⁷¹ Feeney (1991), 181.

²⁷² On this triangle of cities, see the introduction.

The king and the plague

The first extended example of Oedipus' transformative power is Seneca's description of the plague in Thebes (*Oed.* 37-81, 110-201). This description stands in a rich intertextual tradition, but is mostly influenced by Vergil and Ovid.²⁷³ In this section I would like to examine certain aspects of Seneca's constant allusion to Ovid here to demonstrate that the opening of the *Oedipus* is not merely an exercise in plague-writing, *aemulatio* for its own sake. Joe Park Poe has shown that the dissolution of the normal order of things, often a part of plague-narratives,²⁷⁴ is an integral part of the theme of boundary dissolution that is central to the play and of which Oedipus' transgressions are of course the most obvious symbol.²⁷⁵ If this is so, why is a plague-description with a happy ending such an important part of the intertextual background of the opening of a play that is all about disaster? The answer lies in the fact that Ovid casts Aegina as an escape route from Thebes: in turning elements in Ovid's plague description on its head, Seneca cuts off this escape route.

In the second half of the seventh book of his *Metamorphoses*, Ovid tells of the Athenian embassy led by the hero Cephalus to Aegina (*Met.* 7.490-865), asking for help in the war against Minos. The king of Aegina, Aeacus, happily grants this request. Cephalus then goes on to ask why so many of the people he had once seen on Aegina are now absent. Aeacus tells the story of a terrible plague that had ravaged the island, caused by the anger of Juno (*Met.* 7.522-613). Juno was angry with Aegina and its king because Jupiter had made love to the nymph Aegina on the island then still called Oenopia. Aegina had given birth to the future king of the island, Aeacus, who had named the island after his mother. Aeacus first describes how the plague affected the animals of the island (*Met.* 7.522-51) and then how it affected the humans (*Met.* 7.551-613). Aeacus prays to Jupiter in despair to either give him his dying people back, or let him die with his people (*Met.* 7.615-18). Jupiter gives him a sign (*Met.* 7.619), and the king asks his new people to be as numerous as the ants that he can see on a Dodonean oak nearby (*Met.* 7.621-28). In a dream during the following night Aeacus witnesses how the ants are transformed into men (*Met.* 7.634-41), and the very next day the ants have indeed transformed into the city's new inhabitants, the Myrmidons, who will accompany Cephalus back to Athens (*Met.* 7.643-60). Cephalus then tells the king's son Phocus the sad story about his love for Procris (*Met.* 7.690-865).

²⁷³ For a detailed overview of parallels, see Jakobi (1988), 90-98; Töchterle (1994) and Boyle (2011) *ad Oed.* 37-70 and *passim ad Oed.* 37-74, 124-209.

²⁷⁴ On "plague themes", see e.g. Töchterle (1994) *ad Oed.* 37.

²⁷⁵ Poe (1983), esp. 144, 146.

Ovid's plague narrative has received critical attention mostly for its use of various literary sources²⁷⁶ or for the contrast it provides with the story of Cephalus and Procris.²⁷⁷ Parallels with stories of destruction and recreation in the earlier books of the *Metamorphoses* have also been observed.²⁷⁸ It is on another parallel that I will be focusing here: the connection that Ovid establishes between Aegina and Thebes. Stephen Wheeler observes: 'The displacement of Juno's jealousy onto the population of Aegina recalls her transference of hatred from Europa to the Cadmeans. In fact, Aeacus's eyewitness account of the Aeginetan plague repeats and varies the end of the Theban cycle, in which Juno had "plagued" Ino and Athamas with infernal madness. Moreover, he condemns Juno's unfairness with language that recalls the criticisms leveled at the goddess by Ino's companions (7.523-24; cf. 4.547-48):'²⁷⁹ *dira lues ira populis Iunonis iniquae / incidit exosae dictas a paelice terras and utque parum iustae nimiumque in paelice saeuae / inuidiam fecere deae*.

Ovid thus clearly presents Aegina as a double of Thebes. However, he does so too in a more subtle way. Directly following upon the story of the plague on Aegina, Cephalus tells about a hunt in which he was involved that had to rid Thebes of a terrifying fox (*Met.* 7.759-93). Interestingly enough, this story is introduced by mention of Oedipus' solving of the riddle of the Sphinx, resulting in the Sphinx's death (*Met.* 7.759-61). The Sphinx is quickly replaced with another plague (*Met.* 7.763-65): *protinus Aoniis immititur altera Thebis / pestis et exitio multi pecorumque suoque / rurigenae pauere feram*. Ovid is here subtly alluding to both the plague in Thebes under Oedipus and to the plague on Aegina that he has just described. The mention of a *pestis* arriving in Thebes following Oedipus' destruction of the Sphinx will immediately remind the reader of the plague ravaging Thebes at the opening of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Only at the mention of *feram*, the final word of the sentence, does it become clear that the poet has been deceiving the reader. Allusion to the plague at Aegina is also established through the similar division into animal and human casualties (*Met.* 7.764: *exitio ... pecorumque suoque*). Moreover, *immititur altera ... / ... pestis* (*Met.*

²⁷⁶ See Bömer (1976) *ad Met.* 7.523-613 and *passim* at the individual lines for Ovid's (use of) literary sources. See Galinsky (1975), 110-26 for a discussion of Ovid's use of these sources that finds Ovid shockingly lacking in humanity compared to his predecessors. See Otis (1966), 176 and Anderson (1972) *ad Met.* 7.523 for Ovid's focus on the miraculous rather than on the tragic. I have not been able to consult Kenney (2011).

²⁷⁷ For a rather extensive discussion, focusing on matters of genre, see Pechillo (1990). On the intertextual subtleties present in Ovid's description of the Aeginetan plague, see Heerink (2011).

²⁷⁸ Anderson (1972) *ad Met.* 7.558-60. See also Wheeler (2000), 100 n. 97 for parallels between the ant-men in the story of Aeacus and the stone-men in the story of Deucalion and Pyrrha.

²⁷⁹ Wheeler (2000), 100.

7.763-64) can be read as an allusion to *Peruenit ... / pestis ...* (*Met.* 7.552-53), with which Aeacus begins his description of the effects of the plague on humans. Although this obviously cannot be the meaning intended by the character Cephalus, *altera pestis* can be said to mean “a second plague, following the one on Aegina” on an intratextual level. Just as he had done in the tale of Narcissus, Ovid manages to speak of Thebes under Oedipus without actually mentioning it.²⁸⁰

But there are broader thematic concerns involved as well. Ovid’s Aegina is the more fortunate double of his own Thebes. Moreover, as a city first plagued with disaster, but saved from this disaster by a benevolent god, Aegina foreshadows Rome. It has been observed that the *Dira lues* opening the Aeginetan plague narrative foreshadows *Met.* 15.626’s *Dira lues*, which begins the narrative of a plague affecting Rome that can only be undone – and will indeed be undone – by the arrival of Aesculapius in Rome (*Met.* 15.626-744).²⁸¹ This foreshadowing of a blessed Rome by Aegina should be contrasted with Ovid’s use of the city of Thebes as a means to deconstruct the *Aeneid* in the third and fourth book of the *Metamorphoses*.²⁸²

Let us now return to Seneca. The most obvious parallel between the Senecan and the Ovidian plagues is the fact that both are being reported by the kings of the cities that they affect.²⁸³ A very significant resemblance between both kings is their desire to be destroyed by the plague before all of their citizens will be killed by it. Oedipus describes himself thus (*Oed.* 71-74): *Adfusis aris supplices tendo manus / matura poscens fata, praecurram ut prior / patriam ruentem neue post omnis cadam / fiamque regni funus extremum mei*. Aeacus exclaims (*Met.* 7.582-83): *Quid mihi tunc animi fuit aut quid debuit esse, / ni uitam odissem et cuperem pars esse meorum?*²⁸⁴ And some time later he prays (*Met.* 7.615-18): *“Tuppiter o! ... / ... / aut mihi redde meos, aut me quoque conde sepulcro.”* Seneca has collapsed his two Ovidian examples (the king’s private desire and his prayer to Jupiter) into one image.

²⁸⁰ Jakobi (1988), 95, when discussing *illa nunc Thebas lues / perempta perdit* (*Oed.* 107-08), observes that Seneca activates the possibilities offered by Ovid’s *pestis* (*Met.* 7.764), playing on the double meaning of both *pestis* and *lues* (the latter is to be found at *Met.* 7.524: *Dira lues*). See also Trinacty (2014), 144 with n. 68.

²⁸¹ Anderson (1972) and Bömer (1976) *ad Met.* 7.523.

²⁸² Wheeler (2000), 99-100 discusses the Aeginetan plague as part of a pattern in the *Metamorphoses* in which the importance of Juno’s anger decreases, and Jupiter’s tendency to save his descendants from Juno’s anger increases. See Wheeler (2000), 130-37 on the story of Aesculapius as part of the *Metamorphoses*’ closural movement.

²⁸³ *Met.* 7.523-613; *Oed.* 37-70. Although of course, in Seneca’s tragedy, the chorus actually is our most significant informant about the plague (*Oed.* 110-201).

²⁸⁴ A parallel noted by Schetter (1972), 415 n. 27. See also Töchterle (1994) and Boyle (2011) *ad Oed.* 72ff.

The ironic contrast created between both kings is worth examining more closely. Aeacus is portrayed as a one-dimensionally good king, always concerned with the well-being of his own people. He continuously identifies himself with his people: he desires to be a *pars ... meorum* (*Met.* 7.583); he asks for his own to be returned to him (*Met.* 7.618); and when he sacrifices it is for himself, for his family and for his country, all intimately connected (*Met.* 7.596-97): *ipse ego sacra Ioui pro me patriaque tribusque / cum facerem natis*. Aeacus clearly feels responsible for his people, but he does not feel responsible for the plague. Oedipus' situation is quite the opposite. Although both kings feel pity for their citizens (*Met.* 7.552: *miseros*; *Oed.* 65: *miseris*), Seneca's Oedipus is far more obsessed with his own guilt than with being a good king.²⁸⁵ His monologue opens with a brief description of the sun rising over the city devastated by the plague (*Oed.* 1-5), but quickly turns into a description of his own doubts and fears (*Oed.* 6-28). The widespread devastation caused by the plague and the fact that he has not been infected by it, causes Oedipus to think that an even bigger disaster is yet awaiting him (*Oed.* 28-31): *Iam iam aliquid in nos fata moliri parant. / nam quid rear quod ista Cadmeae lues / infesta genti strage tam late edita / mihi parcit uni? cui reseruamur malo?*

Taking this into account, we realize that Oedipus' prayer at *Oed.* 71-74 stems far less from a king's identification with his people than from fear. Even though he speaks of Thebes as his *patriam* (*Oed.* 73; ironically correct, of course), the prayer is already characterized by the longing for escape, Oedipus' desire for death being expressed with the words *praecurram ut prior* (*Oed.* 72). His identification with the city is slippery at best. A few lines after calling himself *uni ... in hoc populo* (*Oed.* 76), he is an *infaustus hospes* again (*Oed.* 80), recalling his earlier self-description as an *exul* (*Oed.* 13) and a *profugus* (*Oed.* 23) who stumbled upon a kingdom (*Oed.* 14). There is another important contrast between Aeacus and Oedipus. Jupiter's paternity of Aeacus is confirmed within one line following the king's prayer (*Met.* 7.619), and Jupiter will repopulate his son's city within a night. Oedipus lives in constant fear of encountering his parents, because meeting them will result in terrible crime (*Oed.* 15-23); and as we all know, he can be far less sure of Polybus being his *parens* than Aeacus can be of Jupiter being his.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁵ This depiction of Oedipus is in contrast with Sophocles', as noted by e.g. Boyle (1997), 92. My interpretation of the prologue as a description of Oedipus' psychological landscape is indebted to Mastronarde (1970), 292.

²⁸⁶ For the forms of *parens* referring to Jupiter and Polybus respectively, see *Met.* 7.617 and *Oed.* 12.

As has been discussed above, the words describing Oedipus as an exile in Seneca's tragedy remind the reader of Cadmus, Ovid's failed Aeneas. Even though Ovid's Aegina is highly reminiscent of his own Thebes, through several important reversals this new "Theban repetition" manages to actually escape from the deadly cycle of repetition that characterized the Theban books. Aeacus is not plagued by ominous (intertextual) memories. Ovid presents Aegina as a positive alternative to Thebes, a city that he used to counter the positive aspects of the *Aeneid*. But for Seneca's Oedipus, there is no Aeginetan escape. In a gesture of intertextual collapse, the Aeginetan plague is firmly returned to where it belongs: to Thebes. The *altera pestis* has turned out to be Oedipus' plague after all, and Seneca has Oedipus walk in the footsteps of Cadmus all over again, ready to repeat and outdo his Theban predecessors in wrongdoing. In the *Metamorphoses*, the disaster of the plague is undone by divine intervention, but Seneca allows it to fester. Seneca recognizes the Theban characteristics of Aegina, but unlike Ovid, he fuses Aegina with Thebes. Seneca stresses that there is no such thing as an escape from Thebes: given the disastrous repetitions in his own *Metamorphoses* 3 and 4, Ovid should have known better.

The entrance of Hell: Oedipus, Aeneas and Hercules

Like Ovid's Theban heroes, Seneca's Oedipus is haunted by a divinity, Phoebus, whose will he cannot fathom and who is apparently indifferent to Oedipus' eventual fate – apart from the fact that he wants it to run its full course.²⁸⁷ But this does not keep Oedipus from trying to fathom Phoebus' purpose with him, and it is precisely his desperate struggle against the will of Phoebus that makes Oedipus' plight so poignant in this play. From the beginning of the tragedy, Oedipus fears the Delphic oracle that he will kill his father and sleep with his mother (*Oed.* 15-21). Phoebus is a threatening god in this prologue (*Oed.* 20-21: *thalamos parentis Phoebus et diros toros / nato minatur impia incestos face.*), one who seems to accuse Oedipus before he has actually done anything (*Oed.* 34: *Phoebeus*). Nevertheless, Oedipus still turns to the very same oracle of Delphi in order to receive advice on how to stop the plague (*Oed.* 108-09): *Vna iam superest salus, / si quam salutis Phoebus ostendat uiam.*²⁸⁸ The word *ostendat* emphasizes Oedipus' confidence that Phoebus will eventually make

²⁸⁷ On the connection between Fate, Phoebus and the gods in this play, see Sklenář (2007-08), who identifies Phoebus' oracles with the malignant Fate governing the tragedy's universe. On Fate in the *Oedipus*, see also Boyle (2011), lxxvii-lxxx.

²⁸⁸ On Oedipus and Phoebus, see also Boyle (2011) *ad Oed.* 34.

things clear and reveal his purpose. This Phoebus will do indeed. In addition, he will reveal to Oedipus a destiny that is quite the opposite of that of his Vergilian counterpart Aeneas. In order to emphasize the difference, Seneca has structured major parts of the revelation of Oedipus' true nature along the lines of the *katabasis* in *Aeneid* 6. In this section, I will discuss in which way Seneca establishes this relationship with the *Aeneid*. We shall see that he develops two intertextual responses in particular: the first, related to a central theme that we have traced in *Hercules Furens*, is the blurring of the lines between Hell and earth. The second is Seneca's Vergilian variation on the intertextual technique that I have discussed in the preceding section: the cutting off of all escape routes and the reduction of the history of Thebes to its essence: Oedipus.

This second theme is announced in the first stanza of the first choral ode, a lurid evocation of the Theban landscape haunted by the plague. The chorus begins by contrasting the languidness caused by the plague with Bacchus' victorious expeditions into the Far East (*Oed.* 110-23). Anthony Boyle remarks that this 'catalogue [...] has a cosmic dimension, proclaiming the immensity of the world (with suggestions of the Roman imperial world – note the reference to the Parthians, 119) already experienced and controlled – and the vanity of that control before the impact of the plague.'²⁸⁹ At the beginning of the choral ode the vastness of the Roman Empire is reduced to Thebes.

The first significant allusions to *Aeneid* 6 appear in *Oedipus'* first choral ode as well. The chorus describes how the boundaries between Hell and earth have dissolved as a result of the plague that has struck Thebes (*Oed.* 160-79):

<i>Rupere Erebi claustra profundi</i>	160
<i>turba sororum face Tartarea</i>	
<i>Phlegethonque sua motam ripa</i>	
<i>miscuit undis Styga Sidoniis.</i>	
<i>Mors atra avidos oris hiatus</i>	
<i>pandit et omnis explicat alas;</i>	165
<i>quique capaci turbida cumba</i>	
<i>flumina seruat</i>	
<i>durus senio nauita crudo,</i>	
<i>uix assiduo bracchia conto</i>	
<i>lassata refert,</i>	
<i>fessus turbam uectare nouam.</i>	170

²⁸⁹ Boyle (2011), lx.

*Quin Taenarii uincula ferri
 rupisse canem fama et nostris
 errare locis, mugisse solum,
 uaga per lucos * * *
 simulacra uirum maiora uiris, 175
 bis Cadmeum niue discussa
 tremuisse nemus,
 bis turbatam sanguine Dircen,
 nocte silenti ***
 Amphionios ululasse canes.*

The passage opens with an allusion to Tisiphone roaming the earth in the plague description in the third book of the *Georgics* (*Geo.* 3.551-53).²⁹⁰ In this way, Seneca inserts his hellish landscape in the Greek and Latin tradition of plague descriptions. But he goes on to develop it in a new direction in his description of Charon (*Oed.* 166-70), which is indebted to Vergil's in the *Aeneid* (*Aen.* 6.302-05):²⁹¹

*ipse ratem conto subigit uelisque ministrat
 et ferruginea subuectat corpora cumba,
 iam senior, sed cruda deo uiridisque senectus.
 huc omnis turba ad ripas effusa ruebat[.] 305*

Seneca has reworked this passage in his *Hercules Furens* as well, in Theseus' description of the Underworld (*HF.* 764-68):²⁹²

*hunc seruat amnem cultu et aspectu horridus
 pauidosque manes squalidus gestat senex. 765
 impexa pendet barba, deformem sinum
 nodus coercet, concauae lucent genae;
 regit ipse longo portitor conto ratem.*

²⁹⁰ Töchterle (1994) *ad Oed.* 160ff. and Boyle (2011) *ad Oed.* 160-65.

²⁹¹ Töchterle (1994) *ad Oed.* 166ff. and Boyle (2011) *ad Oed.* 166-70.

²⁹² The parallels are discussed most recently by Boyle (2011) *ad Oed.* 166-70. See also the discussion of the tragedies' relative dating in the introduction, to which this passage is central.

The fact that Seneca has chosen to rework Vergil's description of Charon twice is not merely evidence of his fascination with Vergil's version of the Underworld. It also suggests a certain relationship between *Hercules Furens* and *Oedipus* in their respective responses to the sixth book of the *Aeneid*. This impression is reinforced by the fact that other parallels with *Hercules Furens* cluster around the picture of Charon in *Oedipus*' first choral ode. The violence that the chorus associates with the breaking of the boundaries between Hell and earth (*Oed.* 160: *Rupere*; *Oed.* 172: *rupisse*) is also associated with Hercules' breaking of these boundaries in *Hercules Furens*, as we have seen in the previous chapter.²⁹³

The connection between both tragedies is significantly strengthened in *Oed.* 171-73, in which the chorus describes Cerberus roaming the earth. We may compare the prologue of *Hercules Furens*, in which Juno first mentions Hercules' breaking of the boundaries between the upper and the lower world and then goes on to describe the disruptive effects of Cerberus' presence on earth (*HF.* 49-63, quoted in the previous chapter, but compare *HF.* 57: *rupto carcere umbrarum* with *Oed.* 160 in particular). Other parallels with *Hercules Furens* can be adduced as well. The words *Taenarii uincula ferri* (*Oed.* 171) will remind the reader of the fact that Hercules had traditionally entered the Underworld through the entrance at mount Taenarus,²⁹⁴ and that this entrance is prominently featured at the beginning of Theseus' description of Hercules' *katabasis* (*HF.* 662-67; 663: *Taenarus*, also used of Hercules' exit in *HF.* 813). Finally, the words *mugisse solum* (*Oed.* 174) are similar to *mugit solum* (*HF.* 521), one of the portents heralding the arrival of Hercules.²⁹⁵

In short, Seneca's opening of Hell in his *Oedipus* is quite similar to his opening of Hell in *Hercules Furens*. This is not just a shared indebtedness to the *katabasis* in the *Aeneid*: Seneca goes out of his way to establish a direct connection between both tragedies through his emphasis on Charon, Taenarus and Cerberus. My position on the relative dating between both plays remains aporetic; but considering that both tragedies take *Aeneid* 6 as the point of departure for their infernal plotlines, they should at least be read as complementary reflections on Vergil's Underworld and on the more general themes that are involved in Aeneas' *katabasis*. In *Hercules Furens*,

²⁹³ See Töchterle (1994) *ad Oed.* 160-61 for an overview of forms of *rumpere* in infernal contexts in Senecan tragedy, including *Hercules Furens*.

²⁹⁴ Cf. Töchterle (1994) *ad Oed.* 171; see also the previous chapter.

²⁹⁵ However, this or similar combinations of words are not uncommon in Senecan tragedy, cf. Töchterle (1994) *ad Oed.* 173ff. and Boyle (2011) *ad Oed.* 171-73 – my sources for this particular parallel.

the figure of Hercules was ideally suited to deconstruct the opposition between Jupiter and Juno, and Seneca used combined allusions to Aeneas' and Juno's *katabaseis* to blur the difference between the two. In *Oedipus*, Seneca turns back the clock on the teleological plot of the *Aeneid*, that featured so prominently in Aeneas' *katabasis* in Vergil's epic.²⁹⁶ In Seneca's tragic response to epic, both the expansive cosmos-shattering energy embodied by Hercules as well as the regressive and inward-directed movement embodied by Oedipus have their place. I will return to this contrast in the epilogue to this chapter.

Following the first choral ode, Creon enters the stage for the first time (*Oed.* 202-05), setting in motion a series of events that will lead to the revelation of Oedipus' identity. Oedipus makes urgent appeals on Creon to report what Phoebus has told him (*Oed.* 210-11, 213, 215-16), and when Creon tells Oedipus that the god will only lift the plague if Laius' murderer is exiled (*Oed.* 217-20) Oedipus wastes no time in demanding the name of the perpetrator (*Oed.* 221-22). Creon responds by describing his visit to Delphi and quoting the priestess' prophecy (*Oed.* 223-38). Creon's response to Oedipus is filled with allusions to the *Aeneid*, the beginning of the sixth book in particular, that form the beginning of an intertextual reworking of Vergil's epic that is carried through until the very end of the play.

Creon begins by mentioning the physical effect that the visit to the oracle has had on him and goes on to describe how all things trembled as he entered the shrine (*Oed.* 223-29):

*Sit, precor, dixisse tutum uisu et auditu horrida;
torpor insedit per artus, frigidus sanguis coit.
ut sacrata templa Phoebi supplici intraui pede* 225
*et pias numen precatus rite summisi manus,
gemina Parnasi niualis arx truce[m] fremitum dedit;
imminens Phoebea laurus tremuit et mouit domum
ac repente sancta fontis lymp[hi]a Castalii stetit.*

Karlheinz Töchterle and Boyle observe that *Oed.* 224 is a reworking of *Aen.* 3.29-30: *mihi frigidus horror / membra quatit gelidusque coit formidine sanguis*,²⁹⁷

²⁹⁶ On Seneca's tragic inversion of Vergil's epic teleology see Schiesaro (2003), 207-08, who rightly emphasizes the generic stakes involved and observes that Seneca moves far beyond Vergil's own tragic questioning of his epic narrative. Vergilian teleology is discussed in depth in e.g. Otis (1964); Hardie (1986); Feeney (1991) and Quint (1993).

²⁹⁷ Töchterle (1994) and Boyle (2011) *ad loc.*

Aeneas' response to the bloody omens at Polydorus' grave. The words *frigidus sanguis coit* are all directly derived from the Vergilian passage, while *artus* echoes *membra*. Both commentators also adduce two Augustan parallels to the shaking of Apollo's temple at Delos and Delphi respectively.²⁹⁸ The first is from Aeneas' visit to the temple of Apollo, describing the trembling of the earth preceding the oracle's response (*Aen.* 3.90-92): *tremere omnia uisa repente, / liminaque laurusque dei, totusque moueri / mons circum et mugire adytis cortina reclusis*. Vergil's *tremere* is echoed in Seneca's *tremuit, laurus ... dei* in *Phoebea laurus*. The second is from Ovid's account of the Roman embassy to Delphi to find a solution for the plague affecting Rome, again preceding the oracle's response (*Met.* 15.634-35): *et locus et laurus et, quas habet ipse, pharetrae / intremuere simul*.

The allusion to Ovid is perhaps the least surprising one and can be explained as part of Seneca's effort to "reappropriate" Ovid's "happy end"-plagues for Thebes. But can the allusions to Vergil be explained in a way that goes further than placing them in a tradition of topoi concerning physical shock and visits to Apollo's oracle? We should remember that both Vergilian passages are from the beginning of the third book of the *Aeneid*, in which Aeneas founds the wrong city several times. The first time he does so is in Thrace (*Aen.* 3.13-18). While sacrificing to his mother Venus, he tries to gather cornel and myrtle from a mound; but as he pulls it out, the cut roots of the shrub start to bleed (*Aen.* 3.19-30). It is at this moment that Aeneas is frozen with fear, and as he tries a second and a third time Polydorus' voice emerges from the mound, urging Aeneas to flee from criminal Thrace (*Aen.* 3.31-46).

The Trojans then sail on to Delos, where Aeneas asks Apollo for directions (*Aen.* 3.84-89). This is followed by the portents quoted above, after which Apollo tells them to return to their ancient mother (*Aen.* 3.94-98):

*'Dardanidae duri, quae uos a stirpe parentum
prima tulit tellus, eadem uos ubere laeto
accipiet reduces. antiquam exquirite matrem.
hic domus Aeneae cunctis dominabitur oris
et nati natorum et qui nascentur ab illis.'*

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Anchises mistakenly concludes that the oracle must be referring to Crete (*Aen.* 3.102-17), and Aeneas sails off to his second erratic founding in a land from which he will be exiled once again – following a plague (*Aen.* 3.121-91).

²⁹⁸ Töchterle (1994) *ad Oed.* 228 and Boyle (2011) *ad Oed.* 227-29.

What are these stories doing in the background of a tragedy about Oedipus? I have already argued that Seneca has fashioned his Oedipus as a second founder of Thebes, following in the footsteps of both Cadmus and Aeneas. The allusions to the beginning of the third book of the *Aeneid* are an integral part of this recasting of Oedipus. Within the context of this founding motif, Seneca's choice for these particular passages is significant. In both cases, Seneca alludes to foundations gone wrong: just as Aeneas has traveled to the wrong place to find a new kingdom in exile, so has Oedipus. To emphasize this, Seneca compares Creon's physical reaction to the oracle demanding the exile of the murderer of Laius to Aeneas' physical reaction to the omen that will eventually banish him from Thrace.

Although Aeneas' visit to the oracle of Delos is alluded to in Creon's account of his own visit to the oracle of Delphi, it becomes a more interpretatively rewarding parallel if we compare it to Oedipus' visit to Delphi. Like Aeneas, Oedipus has misinterpreted an oracle of Apollo, resulting in his journey to a new kingdom that will be plague-stricken as a result of his arrival.²⁹⁹ Ironically, in Oedipus' case the oracle had urged him to flee the *thalamos parentis* (*Oed.* 20), only to drive him right into his mother's bed; Aeneas and the Trojans on the other hand are urged to find their *antiquam ... matrem* (*Aen.* 3.96) who will receive them *ubere laeto* (*Aen.* 3.95). Having received their respective oracles, Oedipus manages to accomplish what Aeneas manages to avoid, and *vice versa*, but both of them end up in the wrong place.

The first allusions to the *Aeneid* in this passage do not bode well for Oedipus in his role as founder, casting him in the role of an Aeneas who travels to the wrong places, accompanied by death and disaster wherever he goes. However, the rest of Creon's report contains allusions to a rather more successful visit of Aeneas to a temple of Apollo: his meeting with the Sibyl of Cumae at the beginning of *Aeneid* 6, when he has just set his first footsteps in the promised land. The allusions begin in Creon's description of the possessed Pythia in *Oed.* 230-32:

incipit Letoa uates spargere horrentes comas 230
et pati commota Phoebum; contigit nondum specum,
emicat uasto fragore maior humano sonus.

²⁹⁹ Interestingly, the general dryness of the earth accompanying the plague in Seneca's Thebes (*Oed.* 41-43) finds its only parallel in earlier Latin plague descriptions in Vergil's Crete (*Aen.* 3.141-42), as observed by Töchterle (1994) *ad Oed.* 41ff. See also Töchterle (1994) *ad Oed.* 49-50 and Boyle (2011) *ad Oed.* 49-51.

which reworks Vergil's portrait of the Sibyl becoming more and more possessed (*Aen.* 6.46-51, 77-80, interrupted by Aeneas' prayer to Phoebus):

cui³⁰⁰ talia fanti
ante fores subito non uultus, non color unus,
non comptae mansere comae; sed pectus anhelum,
et rabie fera corda tument, maiorque uideri
nec mortale sonans, adflata est numine quando 50
iam propiore dei.

At Phoebi nondum patiens immanis in antro
bacchatur uates, magnum si pectore possit
excussisse deum; tanto magis ille fatigat
os rabidum, fera corda domans, fingitque premendo. 80

The first parallel between both passages can be found in the fact that both the Pythia's and the Sibyl's hair is loosened, admittedly a rather traditional element of descriptions of frenzied women in Latin poetry.³⁰¹ More significantly, Seneca's *maior humano sonus* is matched by Vergil's description of the Sibyl as *maiorque uideri / nec mortale sonans* (*Aen.* 6.49-50). *Incipit ... / ... pati commota Phoebum* is matched by Vergil's *Phoebi nondum patiens* (*Aen.* 6.78).³⁰²

The comparison between *Aeneid* and *Oedipus* in this passage can be extended to the speeches of both priestesses. The speech of the Sibyl begins with the promise that the Trojans will indeed arrive in Latium (*Aen.* 6.82-85), but its bulk is taken up by the prediction of future horrors awaiting the Trojans (*Aen.* 6.86-94). The Sibyl portrays the dangers that Aeneas will have to confront as repetitions of the horrors of the Trojan War (*Aen.* 6.88-94):

non Simois tibi nec Xanthus nec Dorica castra
defuerint; alius Latio iam partus Achilles,
natus et ipse dea; nec Teucris addita Iuno 90
usquam aberit, cum tu supplex in rebus egenis

³⁰⁰ The Sibyl.

³⁰¹ Töchterle (1994) *ad Oed.* 230, Boyle (2011) *ad Oed.* 230-32.

³⁰² Parallels noted by Töchterle (1994) *ad Oed.* 231 and 232.

*quas gentis Italum aut quas non oraueris urbes!
 causa mali tanti coniunx iterum hospita Teucris
 externique iterum thalami.*

The repetitive nature of the conflict in Latium is signified most clearly through the Sibyl's use of the word *iterum* in her prophecy (*Aen.* 6.93-94): *causa mali tanti coniunx **iterum** hospita Teucris / externique **iterum** thalami*. The Sibyl's words evoke a very literal repetition of the basic ingredients of the ten years of struggle before the walls of Troy. As is well known, Vergil will actually inverse the Iliadic patterns, turning the Trojans into the victors.³⁰³ However, present within the Sibyl's speech is a regressive view of history, a looking backward instead of the extended forward look that Anchises' speech to his son will provide near the end of the book. In this sense the beginning of the sixth book of the *Aeneid* is quite similar to the false starts of the third book and its "return to origins" prophecy discussed above.

The speech of the Pythia can be divided into the promise of salvation for the city if the murderer leaves the city (*Oed.* 233-35) and the prediction of future civil war (*Oed.* 236-38):

*'mitia Cadmeis remeabunt sidera Thebis,
 si profugus Dircen Ismenida liquerit hospes
 regis caede nocens, Phoebo iam notus et infans. 235
 nec tibi longa manent sceleratae gaudia caedis:
 tecum bella geres, natis quoque bella relinques,
 turpis maternos iterum reuolutus in ortus.*

Seneca lets the Pythia speak these words in hexameters. Of course, hexameters were the traditional meter which the Delphic oracle used to express its prophecies, but one may equally well argue that the use of this meter brings Seneca's language even closer to Vergil's. In addition to this, the Pythia's words echo those spoken by the Sibyl. The word *iterum* (*Oed.* 238) is repeated from *Aen.* 6.93-94, and the repetition of *bella* in line 237 is comparable to the Sibyl's *bella, horrida bella* (*Aen.* 6.86). Just as the war in Italy will be repetition of the Trojan War, so the war between Oedipus' sons

³⁰³ On this technique of inversion, see Quint (1993), 50-96 in particular.

will be a repetition of the war he will fight with and within himself.³⁰⁴ To strengthen the parallelism to the *Aeneid*, Oedipus is called *profugus* by the priestess.

In the *Aeneid*, the Sibyl follows her dreadful prediction with the promise of salvation (*Aen.* 6.95-97). In the Pythia's speech there is salvation for the city, but none for the Aeneas-like exile and his descendants – and the wars between Oedipus' sons will return to haunt Thebes as well. Vergil had been able to undo the Trojans' cycle of suffering through the literary technique of inverted repetition. In *Oedipus*, the Aeneadic pattern of salvation through hardship is broken. Senecan Thebes is a city doomed to repeat previous patterns, without escape from the cycle; similarly Oedipus must forever return to his origins and essence, never able to move forward. In this sense the fates of Thebes and Oedipus are comparable to that of the regressive tendencies of Dido's Carthage in the *Aeneid*.³⁰⁵

This is a fate that Aeneas and the Trojans had only narrowly escaped. As has often been observed, action of the second book of the *Aeneid* is governed by the tension between Aeneas' personal desire to die a heroic death at Troy and the commands of the gods driving him away from the doomed city. Most pointedly, in the book dedicated to Dido's demise, Aeneas tells her that if it were up to him, he would turn back the clock on Trojan history (*Aen.* 4.340-44):³⁰⁶

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*me si fata meis paterentur ducere uitam
auspiciis et sponte mea componere curas,
urbem Troianam primum dulcisque meorum
reliquias colerem, Priami alta tecta manerent,
et recidiua manu posuissem Pergama uictis.*

But Aeneas has to move forward instead of backward, from Troy to Italy, and so he leaves Dido and struggles on. However, even the Trojans' journey to Italy is cast as a return home by Apollo's prophecy discussed above. Conveniently enough, these origins are quite vague, and the Trojans' actual destination and destiny are reinterpreted and

³⁰⁴ Compare Töchterle (1994) *ad Oed.* 237: 'die Prophezeiung wird schon von Farnabius auf die Blendung bezogen (im gleichen Bildbereich dann *victor*, unten 974).' On the significance of *iterum* in Senecan tragedy, see Schiesaro (2003), 27 with n. 2.

³⁰⁵ On Dido and Carthage as manifestations of an idea of time that runs counter to the teleological plot propagated by Jupiter, see Schiesaro (2005), discussed more extensively in the introduction.

³⁰⁶ Schiesaro (2005), 103-04.

refashioned constantly through the course of the poem.³⁰⁷ Oedipus has no such luck: he is forever doomed to return to Thebes, just as Thebes is forever doomed to return to Oedipus.

The next step of Seneca's rewriting of *Aeneid* 6 in his *Oedipus* is Tiresias' necromancy reported by Creon in the middle of the play – a ritual that Tiresias deemed necessary after an extispicium had yielded unsatisfactory and insufficient results (*Oed.* 390-99). The metapoetic overtones of this necromancy and its announcement have become central to interpretations of Seneca's *Oedipus* in recent decades. It has been observed that the words with which Tiresias introduces the need for necromancy (*Oed.* 392: *alia temptanda est uia*) echo Vergil's call for poetic renewal halfway through the *Georgics* (*Geo.* 3.8-9: *temptanda uia est, qua me quoque possim / tollere humo uictorque uirum uolitare per ora*), and that we should read this allusion as an intertextual marker of Seneca's poetic renewal of the Oedipus tale through the addition of a scene of necromancy and the character of Laius.³⁰⁸ Schiesaro has further developed this line of inquiry, and offered a Freudian reading of Tiresias' necromancy as a metapoetic comment on Senecan tragedy, a kind of poetry that unveils irrational truths, hidden in the chthonic and/or subconscious realms unavailable to the rational inquiry of Senecan philosophy.³⁰⁹ It should come as no surprise then, that the necromancy is also one of the most densely allusive passages in Senecan tragedy, and fundamental to our understanding of Seneca's engagement with both the *Aeneid* and the *Metamorphoses*.

The setting and structure of Tiresias' occult ritual is quite similar to Aeneas' descent into the Underworld, but its outcome is radically different.³¹⁰ Seneca begins with a description of the lake-surrounding grove in which the ritual takes place (*Oed.* 530-47). The basic elements of this ecphrasis, "lake" and "grove", are derived

³⁰⁷ See Reed (2007) in general on the elusive nature of Roman identity in the *Aeneid* and 10-13 on the Trojans' supposed "return to origins".

³⁰⁸ Palmieri (1989).

³⁰⁹ Schiesaro (2003), 8-24. Schiesaro's metapoetic approach also informs Boyle's interpretation of the necromancy in his commentary. For a rich interpretation of the metapoetics of this necromancy, see also Wessels (2014), 198-205.

³¹⁰ Lefèvre (1985), 1254-57 emphasizes the importance of *Aeneid* 6 for an interpretation of the necromancy scene in Seneca's *Oedipus*, and has pointed to several structural parallels (Creon/Oedipus = Aeneas; Tiresias = the Sibyl; Laius = Anchises) as well as verbal parallels. See also Boyle (2011) *ad Oed.* 530-658. Lefèvre's observations are part of a more general attempt to interpret *Oedipus* as an opposition tragedy written under the reign of Nero. For another political reading of *Oedipus* as opposition literature, see Bishop (1978). Needless to say, I will be using the parallels between *Aeneid* and *Oedipus* for a different kind of interpretation. Moreover, I am not convinced at all that *Oedipus* is an opposition tragedy in the narrow sense. For a more plausible political reading, see e.g. Bexley (2016).

from Vergil's *spelunca alta fuit uastoque immanis hiatu, / scrupea, tuta lacu nigro nemorumque tenebris ...* (*Aen.* 6.237-38), as Töchterle points out.³¹¹ In addition to this more general Vergilian point of departure, many of Seneca's verse lines in this necromancy have antecedents in Aeneas' *katabasis*. Seneca's *curuosque tendit quercus et putres situ / annosa ramos* (*Oed.* 534-35), of one of the trees surrounding the site of the necromancy, finds its infernal antecedent in Vergil's tree at the entrance to the Underworld: *ramos annosaque brachia pandit / ulmus opaca, ingens* (*Aen.* 6.282-83). And this is only the first tree in Seneca's grove with a counterpart in Aeneas' journey through the Underworld.³¹²

Seneca concludes his "tree catalogue" with a single tree oppressing all the others (*Oed.* 542-44):

*medio stat ingens arbor atque umbra graui
siluas minores urguet et magno ambitu
diffusa ramos una defendit nemus.*

Leaving the forest violated by Ovid's Erysichthon aside,³¹³ there are two major Vergilian intertexts involved here. Framing Seneca's description of the grove, we once again find an allusion to Vergil's *ulmus*, positioned *in medio* at the entrance to the Underworld. But interestingly, the more oppressive characteristics of Seneca's tree are indebted to another passage from the *Aeneid* – one that we have already encountered in the previous chapter. Having sown the seeds of war in Italy, Allecto leaves the earth at Ampsanctus. Vergil describes the forest surrounding the valley of Ampsanctus as follows (*Aen.* 7.565-66): *densis hunc frondibus atrum / urget utrimque latus nemoris*.³¹⁴ We should note that Seneca follows the same procedure here as he uses in *Hercules Furens*: he combines allusions to two different Vergilian entrances to the Underworld in order to create his own. We should view this example of combinatorial allusion as yet another sign that Seneca wants his readers to compare the infernal "digressions" in the middle of both tragedies to each other.

References to the sixth book of the *Aeneid* continue in Seneca's description of Tiresias himself: Seneca portrays the seer as a reincarnation of Vergil's Charon,

³¹¹ Töchterle (1994) *ad Oed.* 530-47.

³¹² The *laurus* (*Oed.* 538) can also be found in Vergil's Elysium (*Aen.* 6.658); the *myrtus* (*Oed.* 539) in the *lugentes campi* (*Aen.* 6.443), as is observed in Töchterle's commentary.

³¹³ Cf. Töchterle (1994) *ad Oed.* 542-44.

³¹⁴ Parallel noted by Töchterle (1994) *ad Oed.* 452-43.

sporting the same dishevelled looks (compare *Aen.* 6.299-304 with *Oed.* 551-54).³¹⁵ Allusions to Vergil also pervade the rituals that Tiresias conducts. First, he offers the dead a sacrifice (*Oed.* 556-58):

*nigro bidentes uellere atque atrae boues
antro trahuntur. flamma praedatur dapes
uiuumque trepidat igne ferali pecus.*

Before Aeneas can enter the Underworld, *nigrantis terga iuuenos* (*Aen.* 6.243) and an *atri uelleris agnam* (*Aen.* 6.249) have to be sacrificed. Both sacrifices are conflated by Seneca in *Oed.* 556.³¹⁶ Next, Tiresias chants violent incantations (*Oed.* 561-63): *carmenque magicum uoluit et rabido minax / decantat ore quidquid aut placat leues / aut cogit umbras*. As Töchterle observes, the combination *rabido ... ore* has several Vergilian antecedents.³¹⁷ Rather unsurprisingly, two of them are derived from the sixth book of the *Aeneid*, describing the ecstasy of the Sibyl (*Aen.* 6.79-80: *tanto magis ille (= Phoebus) fatigat / os rabidum* and *Aen.* 6.102: *ut primum cessit furor et rabida ora quierunt*). However, it is also featured in Allecto's visit to Turnus, as the Fury reveals her true nature and addresses the hero *rabido ... ore* (*Aen.* 7.451).

Allusive conflation continues in Creon's description of Tiresias' libations (*Oed.* 563-67). Tiresias sacrifices blood, wine and milk to the shades below. In his discussion of this sacrifice, Töchterle points out *ad loc.* that, from Homer onwards the sacrifices offered to the dead in literary texts could vary, but that Tiresias shares his preference for these three offerings specifically with Aeneas (*Aen.* 5.77-78) and Medea (*Met.* 7.245-47).³¹⁸ Aeneas' offerings are in pious honor of his father, deceased a year ago; Medea's are part of an occult ritual to rejuvenate Jason's father Aeson. Both allusions look forward to the summoning of Oedipus' father Laius. The one to Aeneas' sacrificial offerings sets up a parallel between Laius and Anchises, while the one to Medea's ritual looks forward to Tiresias' even more disturbing "resurrection of the father".³¹⁹

The narrative pace starts to quicken as the earth and the shades below begin to respond to Tiresias' incantation (*Oed.* 569-81):

³¹⁵ Observed by Trinacty (2014), 220.

³¹⁶ Observed by Lefèvre (1985), 1255 and Töchterle (1994) and Boyle (2011) *ad loc.*

³¹⁷ Töchterle (1994) *ad Oed.* 561-62.

³¹⁸ See also Boyle (2011) *ad loc.*

³¹⁹ It should be emphasized that all this is only true if Seneca's text of Ovid had included *uini* instead of *mellis* in *Met.* 7.246, *contra* Tarrant.

latrauit Hecates turba; ter ualles cauae
sonuere maestum, tota succusso solo 570
pulsata tellus. 'audior' uates ait,
'rata uerba fudi: rumpitur caecum chaos
iterque populis Ditis ad superos datur.'
Subsedit omnis silua et erexit comas,
duxere rimas robora et totum nemus 575
concussit horror, terra se retro dedit
gemuitque penitus: siue temptari abditum
Acheron profundum mente non aequa tulit,
siue ipsa tellus, ut daret functis uiam,
compage rupta sonuit, aut ira furens 580
triceps catenas Cerberus mouit graues.

As Seneca prepares us for the opening of Hell, the language gradually becomes more similar to the vocabulary of cosmic boundary-crossing that we encountered in *Hercules Furens*: we may compare the equally Herculean part of the first choral ode discussed above, in which the dead roamed the earth.

A first connection is offered by Tiresias' exclamation *audior* (*Oed.* 571), which is paralleled by Ampitryon in *Hercules Furens* responding to the portents announcing the arrival of Hercules from the Underworld with *audimur* (*HF.* 523).³²⁰ Creon then adduces several possible causes for the shaking and opening of the earth on Tiresias' call, one of them being the anger of Cerberus (*Oed.* 580-81). Töchterle points out that the *ira* and *furor* of Cerberus as described by Creon is comparable to Theseus' description of the hellhound as he is dragged out of the Underworld by Hercules. The dog *uastas furens* / *quassat catenas* (*HF.* 815-16) as he comes closer to the upper world, and Hercules has to call upon Theseus' strength as well to drag the *canem* / *ira furentem* (*HF.* 819-20) into the light.³²¹ In both tragedies then, we have a messenger describing the dismay of Cerberus at the crossing or breaking of the boundary between earth and Hell, stressing the dog's furious anger.

The opening of the earth is described in Herculean terms as well (*Oed.* 582-83): *Subito dehiscit terra et immenso sinu / laxata patuit*. These lines are remarkably similar to Theseus' description of the entrance to the Underworld at Taenarus (*HF.*

³²⁰ Observed by Boyle (2011) *ad loc.*

³²¹ Töchterle (1994) *ad Oed.* 580-81, Boyle (2011) *ad loc.*

665-66): *immenso specu / ingens uorago faucibus uastis patet*.³²² But these lines are also reminiscent of Vergil's comparison of Hercules' opening of Cacus' cave to the opening of the Underworld (*Aen.* 8.243-45): *non secus ac si qua penitus ui terra dehiscens / infernas reseret sedes et regna recludat / pallida*.³²³ Creon then describes how his blood is turned to ice as he witnesses the shades and infernal gods below (*Oed.* 585-86: *gelidus in uenis stetit / haesitque sanguis*) in language that calls to mind his physical reaction to entering the Pythia's sanctuary (*Oed.* 224: *frigidus sanguis coit*) and echoing comparable passages from the *Aeneid*.³²⁴ In this way, Seneca preserves a numinous Vergilian atmosphere as the moment of revelation approaches.³²⁵

As the Underworld opens, Cadmus' Sown Men are the first to emerge (*Oed.* 586-88). Creon then goes on to mention the various personifications that those present at the ritual had observed: Erinys, Furor, Horror, Luctus, Morbus, Senectus, Metus and the Theban Plague (*Oed.* 590-94, 589). In this passage Seneca's allusions to the *Aeneid* and the parallels between *Hercules Furens* combine again. In addition to this, this passage is also indebted to Juno's *katabasis* in *Metamorphoses* 4. Töchterle notes: 'Vom locus classicus Vergils, *Aen.* 6.274ff. sind vier Personifikationen übernommen: *Luctus* (*Aen.* 6,274), *Senectus* (275), *Metus* (276) und *Erinys* (entspricht den Eumeniden, 280). Mit dem Katalog Ovids, *met.* 4,485f. hat Seneca nur *Luctus* gemein.'³²⁶ We have already seen in the previous chapter how Seneca's Theseus includes similar personifications, indebted to the same passages from Augustan epic, in his description of the Underworld (*HF.* 690-96: *Sopor, Fames, Pudor, Metus, Pauor, Funus, Dolor, Luctus, Morbus, Bella, Senectus*), and how Juno had summoned several personifications from the Underworld in her assault on Hercules (*HF.* 95-99: *Scelus, Impietas, Error, Furor*).³²⁷ To strengthen the connection with the *Aeneid* once more, just before we arrive at the *telos* of the necromancy, Seneca has Creon describe the countless shades in terms highly reminiscent of Vergil's description of the shades

³²² Töchterle (1994) *ad Oed.* 582-83 and Boyle (2011) *ad loc.*

³²³ Töchterle (1994) *ad Oed.* 582-83 and Boyle (2011) *ad loc.*

³²⁴ I have already discussed *Oed.* 224's echoes of *Aen.* 3.29-30 and 3.90-92 above. *Oed.* 585-86 echoes both *Aen.* 3.29-30 and *Aen.* 3.259-60: *at sociis subita gelidus formidine sanguis / deriguit* (following Celaeno's prophecy). See Boyle (2011) *ad loc.*

³²⁵ For more on the Vergilian intertextuality present in the preliminary moments of the necromancy, see Trinacty (2014), 216-19.

³²⁶ Töchterle (1994) *ad loc.* The parallel between Seneca and Vergil is also noticed by Lefèvre (1985), 1255.

³²⁷ See also Töchterle's comments on the individual personifications in relation to the *Aeneid*, *Hercules Furens* and other texts, and Boyle (2011) *ad loc.* on the various catalogues of personifications in the *Aeneid*, *Oedipus* and *Hercules Furens*.

(*Oed.* 598-607).³²⁸ Significantly, this passage also alludes to Vergil's description of the swarm of future Roman souls (*Aen.* 6.706-09, a first sign that Seneca's Underworld will confront the teleological drive of Vergil's).³²⁹

Before we move on to the heart of the play (the appearance of the shade of Laius and the third choral ode, both revealing something crucial about Oedipus and Thebes), we should take a moment to consider the patterns that we have traced so far. In the first choral ode and at the beginning of the second act, Seneca establishes two important themes that he will develop in response to the sixth book of the *Aeneid*. The first, that of the breaking and blurring of the boundaries between Hell and earth, responds to the more descriptive passages found in the sixth book of Vergil's epic, those in which the hellish landscape that Aeneas enters is evoked. Seneca's interest in this first theme in his *Oedipus* is paralleled by his even more obsessive treatment of the same theme in *Hercules Furens*. Seneca stresses this parallelism between both tragedies through the use of similar language in both plays in his reworking of several key figures positioned at the entrance of Vergil's Underworld (Charon, Cerberus and the "personifications"). We will see later that Seneca's treatment of this particular theme serves quite a different purpose in *Oedipus* than it does in *Hercules Furens*, where its main purpose was to blur the boundaries between Jupiter and Juno.

The second major intertextual pattern that we have seen Seneca establish, both in response to Ovid and in response to Vergil, is that of cutting off escape routes and returning things to their Theban essence. In Creon's confrontation with the Sibyl, which reworks several scenes of prophecy from the first half of the *Aeneid*, as well as in the play's first act, we have already observed how Seneca has fashioned his Oedipus as a Theban Aeneas, disastrously returning to his origins. In the following section we will see how Seneca exploits the full potential of this idea in the speech of Laius and the third choral ode.

Oedipus as the essence of Thebes

At the heart of Seneca's *Oedipus* are two passages that reflect upon the relationship between Oedipus and his Theban ancestors. The first is the appearance of several Theban shades, Laius in particular, at the end of the necromancy conducted

³²⁸ Discussed by Lefèvre (1985), 1255. See also Töchterle (1994) *ad Oed.* 598b-609a; Boyle (2011) *ad Oed.* 598-607; Trinacty (2014), 221-23.

³²⁹ Parallel observed by Boyle (2011) *ad Oed.* 601-02; my interpretation further develops Trinacty (2014), 223-24.

by Tiresias. The second is the third choral ode, in which the chorus tries to connect Oedipus' fate to that of Cadmus and Actaeon. The first passage is the culmination of Seneca's reworking of Aeneas' *katabasis* in this tragedy, the second that of his rewriting of Ovidian Thebes. In both cases, Seneca appropriates his predecessors in Oedipal fashion, turning Vergil's teleological plot back on itself and revealing that all of Ovid's Theban detours actually lead back to Oedipus.

The inversion of the epic teleological plot has been one of Seneca's concerns from the very beginning of the play. In his opening monologue, Oedipus casts himself as an exile from his old kingdom, now ruling a new one. Of course, the reader knows very well that Oedipus has only returned home to rule the city in which was born. We have also seen how Seneca has rewritten the words of the Sibyl in the speech of the Pythia to match the fate of Oedipus and Thebes. Both the idea that Aeneas' foundational mission is really a return to origins as well as the repetitive nature of the war in Latium is appropriated in Oedipal fashion: after all, the story of Thebes in general and Oedipus in particular has always been one of repetition and return to origins.

After some ninety lines of preparatory business, in which he extensively alludes to the "liminal" passages from the sixth book of the *Aeneid*, Seneca finally reaches the heart of the necromancy with the appearance of the shades of the Theban ancestors (*Oed.* 608-18). Rather than the forward glance into the Roman future offered by the *Aeneid*, Tiresias' necromancy presents us with a backward glance at the Theban past, which is presented as a crescendo in violence within the family. All Theban characters are frozen in their defining acts or with their defining character traits. Zethus and Amphion emerge from the Underworld punishing Dirce and building the city's walls (*Oed.* 609-12): *primus emergit solo, dextra ferocem cornibus taurum premens, / Zethus, manuque sustinet laeua chelyn / qui saxa dulci traxit Amphion sono*. The image of Zethus continues the theme of foundational violence that was established when the Sown Men rose from the ground a few lines earlier (*Oed.* 586-88).

The image of Amphion is not very violent, but we are reminded of his unhappy destiny through his wife Niobe, who preserves her defining characteristic of pride (*Oed.* 613-15): *interque natos Tantalus tandem suos / tuto superba fert caput fastu graue / et numerat umbras*. Niobe's pride is a defining characteristic too in the *Metamorphoses*: Ovid says that she *oculos circumtulit ... superbos* (*Met.* 6.169) when witnessing the honors paid to Latona; a few lines later she speaks of *nostra superbia* (*Met.* 6.184). In life she was obsessed with the number of her children compared to Latona's (*Met.* 6.191-200); in death she continues to be so (*Oed.* 615: *numerat umbras*), but without

penalty in death (*Oed.* 614: *tuto*).³³⁰ This “frozen” nature of the ancestors³³¹ suggests that identity can be fixed and permanent at Thebes; which in turn suggests that, just as the Theban ancestors have not been able to escape who they are, neither will Oedipus.³³² There appears to be an increase of evilness throughout the catalogue: *peior hac genetrix adest / furibunda Agaue* (*Oed.* 615-16). After Agaue the maenads emerge (*Oed.* 616-17), and finally Pentheus, forever *lacer* (*Oed.* 617) and forever the angry king (*Oed.* 618: *tenetque saeuus etiamnunc minas*).

The last shade that Creon witnesses, is Laius: ‘Finally, Laius is seen, the climax and the *telos* of the necromancy’, Boyle remarks, pointing to ‘Virgil’s similar positioning of a rather different father figure (Anchises) in *Aeneid* 6.’³³³ Laius’ words contrast sharply with those of Anchises. Anchises’ main purpose is to encourage Aeneas to continue with his mission by showing him his glorious descendants, as he emphasizes to his son at several key moments.³³⁴ Laius, on the other hand, condemns his son as the worst criminal in Theban history, outdoing the other Theban ancestors that have just emerged from the Underworld.

Laius stands apart from the other shades and is described in grisly terms (*Oed.* 619-26):

Tandem uocatus saepe pudibundum extulit
caput atque ab omni dissidet turba procul 620
celatque semet (instat et Stygias preces
geminat sacerdos, donec in apertum efferat
uultus opertos) Laius – fari horreo:
stetit per artus sanguine effuso horridus,
paedore foedo squalidam obtentus comam, 625
et ore rabido fatur:

³³⁰ On Seneca’s use of the literary tradition on Niobe, see Boyle (2011) *ad Oed.* 613-15. This Niobe’s Ovidian pedigree is well observed by Seo (2013), 108-09, who notes that Tiresias, Manto and Amphiion are all present in Ovid’s story of Niobe, providing a bridge to the Theban books of the *Metamorphoses* that Seneca here exploits.

³³¹ Also observed by Seo (2013), 108.

³³² Compare Boyle (2011) *ad Oed.* 626-30.

³³³ Boyle (2011) *ad Oed.* 619-23. See also Lefèvre (1985), 1254 and 1256.

³³⁴ *Aen.* 5.737 (when telling his son that he should come and visit him in the Underworld): *tum genus omne tuum et quae dentur moenia disces. Aen.* 6.756-59 (at the beginning of the *Heldenschau*): *Nunc age, Dardaniam prolem quae deinde sequatur / gloria, qui maneant Itala de gente nepotes, / inlustris animas nostrumque in nomen ituras, / expediam dictis, et te tua fata docebo. Aen.* 6.806-07 (following Anchises’ prophecy concerning Augustus): *et dubitamus adhuc uirtutem extendere factis, / aut metus Ausonia prohibet consistere terra?*

Laius' isolation from the crowd of shades (*Oed.* 620) echoes the isolation of Homer's Ajax (*Hom. Od.* 11.544-46).³³⁵ Interestingly, this allusion is combined with one to the appearance of the shade of Hector in the second book of the *Aeneid*. Seneca's two verses describing the appearance of Laius (*Oed.* 624-25) echo Vergil's verses describing Hector, who appears to Aeneas *ater ... cruento / puluere* (*Aen.* 2.272-73) and *squalentem barbam et concretos sanguine crinis / uulneraque illa gerens ...* (*Aen.* 2.277-78).³³⁶ The first allusion carries ominous overtones, implicitly comparing the self-destructiveness of the Theban royal house to that of Ajax. The second continues Seneca's response to the teleological plot of the *Aeneid*. Both Hector and Laius urge Aeneas and Oedipus respectively to leave their ancestral city and go into exile. Laius promises the Thebans that the plague will leave the city with Oedipus if they banish the king (*Oed.* 647-58), but his true vindictiveness against his own house and the entire city is evident right before this promise of salvation (*Oed.* 645-46): *incestam domum / uertam et penates impio Marte obteram*. The contrast with Hector, who tells Aeneas that Troy wants him to carry the city's *Penates* to a new homeland (*Aen.* 2.293-95), could not be more marked.

To reinforce this contrast, Laius speaks *ore rabido* (*Oed.* 626), just as Tiresias had (*Oed.* 561-62).³³⁷ I have already mentioned in my discussion of the Tiresias scene how this combination of words has its parallel both in Vergil's Sibyl as well as in Vergil's Allecto. In response to Vergil, Seneca too has chosen to use the expression to describe the speech of two different figures, one opening Hell in order to reveal essential knowledge, the other emerging from Hell in order to spread destruction and (proto-)civil war. In both the *Aeneid* and *Oedipus* these figures make their appearance in the middle of the poem. The main difference is of course that Seneca has chosen to conflate the two openings of Hell in Vergil, which in this case results in a ghastly Theban fusion of Anchises and Allecto, father and Fury. At this thematic mid-point of the tragedy, Seneca marks his Theban transformation of the teleological Roman plot into its opposite: the tragic destruction of the cities and heroes of Rome's anti-cities.

When the shade of Laius begins to speak, the old king casts the final verdict on Theban history, presenting Oedipus as its climax and essence (*Oed.* 626-30):

³³⁵ Töchterle (1994) *ad Oed.* 620 and Boyle (2011) *ad Oed.* 619-23.

³³⁶ Töchterle (1994) *ad Oed.* 620.

³³⁷ Töchterle (1994) *ad Oed.* 626. On the similarity, see also Trinacty (2014), 225 with n. 114 and Bexley (2016), 362.

‘O Cadmi effera,
 cruore semper laeta cognato domus,
 uibrate thyrsos, enthea gnatos manu
 lacerate potius – maximum Thebis scelus
 maternus amor est.

630

Oedipus continues a Theban cycle of crime, and his own crime is characterized by return and the undoing of personal history (*Oed.* 638-39): *egit ... in ortus semet et matri impios / fetus regessit*.³³⁸ Vergil’s Anchises could point Aeneas and the Romans to Augustus as the culmination of history, Seneca’s Laius can only point to Oedipus as the ultimate case of Theban self-destruction. The deceased monarch even turns against his own son, house and city (*Oed.* 642-46):

*Te, te cruenta sceptrum qui dextra geris,
 te pater inultus urbe cum tota petam
 et mecum Erinyn pronubam thalami traham,
 traham sonantis uerbera, incestam domum
 uertam et penates impio Marte obteram.*

645

The language that Laius uses is characteristic of the tragic destruction of royal houses in Augustan poetry, particularly destruction engineered by Furies or Fury-like figures. Laius’ *Erinyn pronubam* (*Oed.* 644) is reminiscent of the Furies that had presided over the wedding of Phyllis and Demophoon (*Epist.* 2.117-20), Hypsipyle and Jason (*Epist.* 6.45-46), Dido and Aeneas (*Epist.* 7.95-96) and Tereus and Procne (*Met.* 6.428-32) in Ovid’s poetry.³³⁹ Laius’ *sonantis uerbera* (*Oed.* 645) are derived from Vergil’s description of Allecto threatening Turnus as she kindles his lust for war (*Aen.* 7.451): *uerbera ... insonuit*.³⁴⁰ The words *incestam domum / uertam* (*Oed.* 645-46) too are reminiscent of Allecto’s attack on the Latin cities. Vergil marks the transition between Allecto’s attack on Amata and that on Turnus with the words *Postquam uisa satis primos acuisse furores / consiliumque omnemque domum uertisse Latini* (*Aen.* 7.406-07).³⁴¹ Finally, Laius’ promise that he will haunt Oedipus like a tragic Fury is

³³⁸ On the language of incest and its cultural implications in Seneca’s *Oedipus*, see Bettini (1983) and (1984). See also Gunderson (2017), 129 on the repetitious nature of Laius’ speech.

³³⁹ Töchterle (1994) *ad Oed.* 644, Boyle (2011) *ad Oed.* 642-46.

³⁴⁰ Töchterle (1994) *ad Oed.* 645, Boyle (2011) *ad Oed.* 642-46.

³⁴¹ Töchterle (1994) *ad Oed.* 646.

reminiscent of Dido's promise that she will haunt Aeneas with a Fury's torches (*Aen.* 4.384): *sequar atris ignibus absens*.³⁴²

In short, Seneca's Laius possesses the characteristics of both Anchises and Allecto and other Furies or Fury-like figures from Augustan literature. Instead of predicting to his son the glory of their descendants, Laius promises his son everlasting hate and his city's destruction through impious warfare. At the end of his indignant monologue, Laius urges the Thebans to banish their king, promising that the horrors characteristic of both the plague and the Underworld will leave the city together with Oedipus (*Oed.* 652-53): *Letum Luesque, Mors Labor Tabes Dolor, / comitatus illo dignus, excedent simul*. Although Seneca had already closely connected Oedipus' tormented soul to the horrors of the plague in the prologue, he takes this connection a step further here by suggesting that the plague will continue to accompany Oedipus in his exile. Laius uses a list of abstractions to describe the plague that connects it to the entrance of Hell that Creon has just described – just as the first choral ode had identified the outbreak of the plague with the opening of Hell. The centripetal force of Seneca's Oedipus manages to include the hellish plague as well, just as everything in this tragedy seeks the play's core: Oedipus himself.

Seneca hammers this message home in the third choral ode. After Oedipus has rejected Laius' charges and has had Creon locked up because he suspects he is plotting against him (*Oed.* 659-708), the chorus responds with an ode that shifts the blame for the plague from Oedipus to the anger of the gods (*Oed.* 709-12): *Non tu tantis causa periclis, / non haec Labdacidas petunt / fata, sed ueteres deum / irae secuntur*. In consoling Oedipus, the chorus tries to counter Laius' claim *patria, non ira deum, / sed scelere raperis* (*Oed.* 630-31).³⁴³ Of course, both Laius and the chorus are right: Oedipus' crime is the source of the plague, but Oedipus' suffering can also be attributed to a malignant Phoebus governing his Fate. An intertextual reading of the choral ode in fact reveals that both the anger of the gods and "Oedipus" have always afflicted Thebes and will continue to do so eternally.³⁴⁴ In its search for remoter origins, the chorus always finds Oedipus already there.

The choral ode begins with the story of Cadmus' arrival in Greece, his visit to the oracle of Delphi and his founding of the city of Thebes (*Oed.* 709-23). This

³⁴² For further discussion of the intertextuality of Laius' speech, see Trinacty (2014), 225-29, especially on Ovidian intertextuality.

³⁴³ See Töchterle (1994) and Boyle (2011) *ad loc.*; Boyle (2011), 275-76; Seo (2013), 112.

³⁴⁴ Compare Seo (2013), 115 on the ineffectiveness of the chorus' consolation.

section of the ode is heavily indebted to the arrival of Cadmus as described in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.³⁴⁵ However, just as at the beginning of the play Oedipus was intertextually compared to Cadmus, so Cadmus here is intratextually compared to Oedipus. The first hint is contained in the chorus' words *Castalium nemus / umbram Sidonio praebuit hospiti* (*Oed.* 712-13), which is reminiscent not only of Ovid's *Sidonius hospes* (*Met.* 3.129, of Cadmus), but also of Oedipus' self-description as an *infaustus hospes* (*Oed.* 80).³⁴⁶ In addition to this, Cadmus arrives at the site of Thebes *monitu ... Phoebi* (*Oed.* 718), just as Oedipus had fled his native city out of fear that he would kill his father: *hoc me Delphicae laurus monent* (*Oed.* 16).³⁴⁷

The two locations that Cadmus visits, Delphi and the site of Thebes, are described in terms similar to the grove that Creon had just described in the previous act. In Delphi, *Castalium nemus / umbram Sidonio praebuit hospiti* (*Oed.* 712-13). At the site of Thebes, *lauit ... Dirce Tyrios colonos* (*Oed.* 714) and Cadmus *sub nostra pauidus constitit arbore* (*Oed.* 717). All of these elements are reminiscent of the necromancy scene. Creon gives the location of the forest as follows (*Oed.* 530-31): *Est procul ab urbe lucus ilicibus niger / Dircaea circa uallis inriguae loca*. This forest is referred to as *nemus* thrice (*Oed.* 533, 544, 575). After the naming of the location, there follows a description of all trees (*Oed.* 532-44), which closes with an *ingens arbor* that *umbra graui / siluas minores urguet* (*Oed.* 542-43). When the chorus goes on to describe Cadmus' snake (*Oed.* 726-30) – again in terms highly reminiscent of Ovid³⁴⁸ – there are other reminiscences of Creon's *lucus*. The snake's forest is filled with *annosa ... robora* (*Oed.* 726), *pinus* (*Oed.* 727) and *Chaonias ... arbores* (*Oed.* 728), which may remind the reader of the *quercus ... / annosa* (*Oed.* 534-35), *pinus* (*Oed.* 541) and *robora* (*Oed.* 575) in that other forest.³⁴⁹

The description of the forest and the snake is followed by that of the Sown Men, locked in civil war (*Oed.* 731-50). Jakobi notes that the final lines of this description are reminiscent of Ovid's description of the battle between the Sown Men.³⁵⁰ Seneca mostly borrows the civil war terminology, taking the words denoting "war" and "people" from

³⁴⁵ Jakobi (1988), 112-14; Töchterle (1994) and Boyle (2011) *ad loc.*; Seo (2013), 112-13.

³⁴⁶ Jakobi (1988), 112 with n. 213 for Oedipus (tentatively); Töchterle (1994) *ad loc.* and Boyle (2011) *ad loc.*

³⁴⁷ Boyle (2011) *ad loc.*

³⁴⁸ See Jakobi (1988), 115-17 and Töchterle (1994) and Boyle (2011) *ad loc.*

³⁴⁹ Noticed by Jakobi (1988), 115. See also Mastronarde (1970), 311 and Töchterle (1994) *ad Oed.* 727.

³⁵⁰ Jakobi (1988), 119-21, from whose discussion all following parallels have been derived. See also Töchterle (1994) and Boyle (2011) *ad Oed.* 743-44 and 745-47.

Ovid's version: *territus hoste nouo Cadmus capere arma parabat; / 'ne cape' de populo quem terra creauerat unus / exclamat, 'nec te ciuilibus insere bellis.'* (*Met.* 3.115-17) becomes *horret tantis aduena monstis / populi que timet bella recentis* (*Oed.* 743-44). The chorus' wish *hac transierit ciuile nefas! / illa Herculeae norint Thebae / proelia fratrum* (*Oed.* 749-50) is inspired by Ovid's *ciuilibus ... bellis* (*Met.* 3.117) and *suo ... / Marte cadunt subiti per mutua uulnera fratres* (*Met.* 3.122-23). However, here too the figure of Oedipus exerts its power over the Ovidian intertext. The war between Polynices and Eteocles was only a distant association for the reader of the *Metamorphoses*: for the reader of the *Oedipus* it is located in the very near future, given the prophecy of *Oed.* 237, discussed above, and the omens of *Oed.* 321-23 and *Oed.* 359-65.³⁵¹ The chorus' wish that *hac transierit ciuile nefas! / illa Herculeae norint Thebae / proelia fratrum* (*Oed.* 748-50) is in vain. Even Oedipus himself is present in this part of the ode: both *feta tellus impio partu / effudit arma* (*Oed.* 731-32)³⁵² and *genetrixque suo reddi gremio / modo productos uidit alumnos* (*Oed.* 746-47)³⁵³ are reminiscent of Oedipus' criminal "return to the mother".³⁵⁴

The chorus' final example of the gods plaguing Thebes is that of Actaeon (*Oed.* 751-63).

*Quid? Cadmei fata nepotis,
cum uiuacis cornua cerui
frontem ramis texere nouis
dominumque canes egere suum?
praeceps siluas montesque fugit* 755
*citus Actaeon agili que magis
pede per saltus ac saxa uagus
metuit motas zephyris plumas
et quae posuit retia uitat —
donec placidi fontis in unda* 760
*cornua uidit uultusque feros,
ubi uirgineos fouerat artus
nimium saeui diua pudoris.*

³⁵¹ Mastronarde (1970), 309. See also Töchterle (1994) and Boyle (2011) *ad loc.*.

³⁵² Jakobi (1988), 117 and Boyle (2011) *ad loc.*

³⁵³ Mastronarde (1970), 311 and Töchterle (1994) and Boyle (2011) *ad loc.*

³⁵⁴ For further discussion: Seo (2013), 113.

The chorus starts with a general introduction (*Oed.* 751-54), then describes Actaeon's flight (*Oed.* 755-59) and concludes with his self-recognition as a stag (*Oed.* 760-61) in the pool where he first saw Diana (*Oed.* 762-63). Through detailed analysis of many parallels with the Ovidian account of Actaeon's fate,³⁵⁵ Jakobi has demonstrated how Seneca refashions Ovid's story of Actaeon to turn it into a mirror image of the story of Oedipus. Jakobi's introductory discussion of *Oed.* 751-54 is worth quoting in full:

‘Die Struktur des Eingangs der ovidischen Actaeon-Erzählung ist von Seneca übernommen worden: Durch die drei Substantive (*Cadmei*) *nepos*, *cornua* und *canes* wird jeweils die gesamte Actaeon-Sage kurz umrissen [...] Inhaltlich stellt er die Verfolgung anstelle des Todes durch die eigenen Hunde in den Vordergrund. Wie in den Versen 712b – 14 wird der Ausgang der Sage in der Exposition vorweggenommen. In der Actaeon-Partie ist der Tod explizit nicht einmal mehr erwähnt. Bei Ovid wird das Ende auch in den Anfangsversen vorweggenommen, danach jedoch wird das Geschehen in seiner logischen Folge erzählt. Seneca kehrt den inhaltlichen Ablauf völlig um: Am Anfang der Erzählung deren inhaltliches Ende (Tod bzw. Verfolgung des Actaeon), am Schluß der Erzählung (760ff.) deren logischer Anfang (Actaeon sieht Diana). Der Erzählweise im Kleinen entspricht im Gesamtzusammenhang des Oedipus-Dramas die Aufschlüsselung der Vorgeschichte, des Mordes an Laius: Actaeon steht für Oedipus.’³⁵⁶

Moreover, when discussing *Oed.* 760-63, Jakobi notes that Actaeon's return to the pool where he first saw Diana mirrors Oedipus' own search for and arrival at his beginnings and his discovery of his true identity: *donec placidi fontis in unda / cornua uidit uultusque feros, / ubi uirgineos fouerat artus / **nimium saeui** diua pudoris*, the final line echoing Oedipus' exclamation *o saeua **nimium** numina, o fatum graue!* (*Oed.* 75).³⁵⁷ Hinds has argued that *Oed.* 760-61 is not only modelled on Ovid's *uultus et cornua uidit in unda* (*Met.* 3.200),³⁵⁸ but that there also is a more subtle allusion to Narcissus in Seneca's text:

³⁵⁵ Jakobi (1988), 121-25, but see also Töchterle (1994) and Boyle (2011) *ad loc.* Some significant parallels are: *uiuacis cornua cerui* (*Oed.* 752) from *dat sparso capiti uiuacis cornua cerui* (*Met.* 3.194); *cornua ... / frontem* (*Oed.* 752-53) from *alienaque cornua fronti / addita* (*Met.* 3.139-40); *in unda / cornua uidit uultusque feros* (*Oed.* 760-61), from *uultus et cornua uidit in unda* (*Met.* 3.200); *ubi uirgineos fouerat artus* (*Oed.* 762) from *hic dea siluarum uenatu fessa solebat / uirgineos artus liquido perfundere rore* (*Met.* 3.163-64).

³⁵⁶ Jakobi (1988), 121.

³⁵⁷ Jakobi (1988), 124.

³⁵⁸ The line is deleted by Tarrant (2004), but I agree with Hinds (2011), 12 n. 14 that this allusion ‘offers good evidence that Seneca's text of the *Met.* contained 3.200’.

‘*Oed.*760-1 maps on to *Met.*3.200 almost word for word. However, the moment has been moved from the middle of the story to its end (*donec...*); and where Ovid writes, simply, *cornua vidit in unda*, Seneca writes *placidi fontis in unda / cornua vidit*. What the Senecan adjustment does, I think (though the hint may already be implicit in the Ovidian text), is to cast Actaeon – fleetingly – as an analogue to *Narcissus*, an adjacent character from an adjacent (and emblematically placid and untouched) pool in Ovid’s Theban cycle; a character in whose story the aquatic self-recognition more obviously forms the moment of climax. Such syncretism (if felt) harmonizes with the spirit of the Senecan ode as a whole, draws a series of Theban myths closer to one another, and allows *both* Actaeon *and* Narcissus to prefigure the plot, most forcefully realised in Oedipus, of delayed self-knowledge.’³⁵⁹

A careful reading of the third choral ode reveals that Oedipus was part of Theban history from the beginning. Although this was already implied in Ovid’s Thebes, with its focus on themes such as the loss of identity, and with the Oedipus-like Narcissus at its heart, it is Seneca who really brings the Oedipal element of Roman Thebes to the fore. In the process, the idea of “Thebes” as the location for an “anti-*Aeneid*” changes as well. In Ovid, Thebes is a city where narratives of founding eventually lead to nowhere and the opposition between the fates of Rome and Carthage is deconstructed. Seneca’s choral ode continues the Ovidian alignment of Thebes with the doomed Aeneadic cities of Carthage and Troy. The Thebans are denoted as *Tyrios colonos* (*Oed.* 714), which calls to mind the *Tyrii ... coloni* inhabiting Carthage at the beginning of Vergil’s *Aeneid* (*Aen.* 1.12).³⁶⁰ The Cadmean snake inhabiting the grove in Seneca’s choral ode (*Oed.* 726-30) is not just indebted to Ovid’s snake, but also to the snakes bringing death to Laocoon in the second book of the *Aeneid*.³⁶¹ As is evidenced by this choral ode in particular, Senecan Thebes is first and foremost about a return to origins, to Oedipus.

The gravitational pull of Seneca’s Oedipus persists in the final moments of the play. As both Oedipus and Jocasta seek out a proper form of punishment for their crimes, they try to compete with the Theban past and intertextually appropriate doomed figures from other myths as well. After he has discovered the precise nature of his crime, Oedipus turns to the past for punishment (*Oed.* 930-33): *ipse tu scelerum capax, / sacer Cithaeron, uel feras in me tuis / emitte siluis, mitte uel rabidos canes – / nunc redde Agauen*. This combination of the death of Actaeon and Pentheus is a

³⁵⁹ Hinds (2011), 13. For further discussion, see Seo (2013), 113-15.

³⁶⁰ As observed by Jakobi (1988), 112 n. 214. See also Töchterle (1994) *ad loc.*

³⁶¹ See Jakobi (1988), 115-17 (including footnotes) and Töchterle (1994) and Boyle (2011) *ad loc.* for the parallels and references to earlier secondary literature.

response to Ovid's description of the death of Pentheus, that featured Pentheus asking Autonoe to remember the fate of Actaeon (*Met.* 3.720).³⁶² Oedipus remembers the similarity between Actaeon and Pentheus, and views himself as similar as well.

However, Oedipus himself is also just as *furens* as Agaue was (*Oed.* 957: *ira furit*; *Oed.* 960: *uiolentus ... iratus ferox*; *Oed.* 961: *fremens*; *Oed.* 970: *saeuitque frustra plusque quam satis est furit*, the last line describing Oedipus tearing into his empty sockets), and he does turn out to combine the roles of both Pentheus and Agaue. He is simultaneously the one who tears apart (*Oed.* 967-69: *haeret in uacuo manus / et fixa penitus unguibus lacerat cauos / alte recessus luminum*) and the one who has a *lacerum* caput (*Oed.* 978). Forms of *lacerare* are otherwise only used in *Oedipus* in reference to the slaying of Pentheus, in imitation of Ovid, as we have seen above (*Oed.* 442, 617, 629). Indeed, line 629 is from Laius' speech requesting Thebes' mothers to tear their sons apart (*Oed.* 628-29: *entheia gnatos manu / lacerate potius*). Rather, Oedipus punishes himself – another manifestation of the “inward” movement and intertextual conflation characteristic of this play. In addition to this, Oedipus' lionesque frenzy (*Oed.* 919-20) is reminiscent of the madness possessing Turnus at the beginning of the twelfth book of the *Aeneid* (*Aen.* 12.4-8), aligning Oedipus with the doomed heroes of Vergil's epic.³⁶³ Finally, just as Oedipus had called upon Cithaeron to punish him, so Jocasta enters like Agaue (*Oed.* 1004-07):

En ecce, rapido saeua prosiluit gradu

Jocasta uaecors, qualis attonita et furens

1005

Cadmea mater abstulit gnato caput

*sensitue raptum.*³⁶⁴

The Bacchic frenzy possessing Oedipus and Jocasta call to mind another suicidal victim of Bacchic frenzy: Dido. A first intertextual sign that Seneca's Thebes is similar to Dido's Carthage may be found in one of the omens witnessed during the rituals conducted by Manto and Tiresias. The turning of wine into blood in this scene (*Oed.*

³⁶² Hinds (2011), 13-14.

³⁶³ Töchterle (1994) *ad loc.*

³⁶⁴ These scenes of self-blinding and suicide are also replete with allusions to Ovidian Troy, including Ajax' suicide and Hecuba's blinding of Polymestor, as has been observed by Jakobi and the commentators. The allusions to Ajax' suicide add an Ovidian layer to the allusions to Vergil's Dido (discussed below) who was herself portrayed as an Ajax-figure by Vergil (as discussed in the introduction). For the sake of focus, I have refrained from discussing these allusions to Ovidian Troy in detail.

324) finds its parallel in one of the omens announcing Dido's tragic demise (*Aen.* 4.455).³⁶⁵ In the third choral ode, as I have discussed above, Seneca's mention of *Tyrios colonos* (*Oed.* 714) continues the parallelism between Thebes and Carthage. But Dido is most fully appropriated in the scene of Jocasta's suicide. The chorus' description of Jocasta's entrance in Bacchic frenzy, quoted above (*Oed.* 1004-07), can be compared to Dido's Bacchic madness as described by Vergil (*Aen.* 4.300-03).³⁶⁶ In addition to this, Jocasta's death by the sword is comparable to Dido's death by Aeneas' sword: 'It is Oedipus' sword, as with Phaedra it was Hippolytus' sword and with Dido Aeneas' sword.'³⁶⁷ The reversal of the teleological plot announced in Seneca's Pythia scene, that had reached its climax in the necromancy, reaches its conclusion here. Not only has Oedipus returned to his ancestral land and to his mother, in this tragic reworking of epic the hero even returns to Carthage. After a prophecy and a necromancy that reversed the Roman plot of the *Aeneid*, Oedipus and Jocasta end up looking like the victims left in its wake: Turnus and Dido.

Closure and punishment

In conclusion, Seneca's *Oedipus* should be read as an attempt to impose a final Oedipal interpretation upon Ovid's ever elusive Thebes. In the process, the *Aeneid*'s teleological plot is appropriated in typically regressive Theban fashion. But just as putting an end to the boundless energy of Hercules proved impossible in *Hercules Furens*, similarly Senecan tragedy has difficulty with setting a limit to the endless inward drive possessing Oedipus. As in *Hercules Furens*, this closural paradox is shared by poet and protagonist. Moreover, a strong parallel between both tragedies invites us to compare the obsession with closural punishment of Oedipus and Hercules. In *Hercules Furens*, as discussed in the previous chapter, Juno had announced Hercules' inner turmoil with *bella iam secum gerat* (*HF.* 85); in *Oedipus*, as we have seen above, the Pythia announced in similar terms *tecum bella geres* (*Oed.* 237). Finally, in both plays the boundlessness of the protagonists is associated with the boundlessness of Hell, a marked parallelism that we have traced above.

As in *Hercules Furens*, the theme of the protagonist's boundlessness is connected to the Augustan vocabulary of generic ascent. Although Oedipus' nature is defined by

³⁶⁵ Discussed by Töchterle (1994) and Boyle (2011) *ad loc.* and already noticed by Farnabius.

³⁶⁶ Discussed by Töchterle (1994) and Boyle (2011) *ad loc.*

³⁶⁷ Boyle (2011), lxxxi. See also Töchterle (1994) *ad Oed.* 1038-39 and 1038 specifically.

an endless regressive and inward movement, the fact that his crime forms the climax of a series of Theban crimes within the family allows Seneca to apply Augustan generic vocabulary to Oedipus as well. We may note that the reverse procedure is applied to Hercules in *Hercules Furens*: Hercules is inherently suited to generic vocabulary, but in addition to this his boundless epic energy is directed inwards, in a way more characteristic of Oedipus.

Let us trace this vocabulary of ascent throughout Seneca's *Oedipus*. Right from the start of the play Oedipus fears a *maius ... scelus* and *maius ... nefas* (*Oed.* 17-18). When he is summoned from the underworld by Tiresias, Laius says that Oedipus surpasses all previous Theban criminality (*Oed.* 626-30):

‘O Cadmi effera
*cruore semper laeta cognato domus,
 uibrate thyrsos, enthea gnatos manu
 lacerate potius – maximum Thebis scelus
 maternus amor est.*

630

After these first two occasions, the generically loaded language accumulates near the end of the tragedy. Having discovered the true nature of his crime, Oedipus – again like Hercules – desires to punish himself. Describing the king's state of mind as he enters the palace, the messenger remarks (*Oed.* 925-26): *secum ipse saeuus grande nescioquid parat / suisque fatis simile*.³⁶⁸ As he reemerges from the palace, Oedipus first calls for the more obvious means of punishment, inflicted by someone else (*Oed.* 927-28): *hoc scelestum pectus aut ferro petat / aut feruido aliquis igne uel saxo domet*.³⁶⁹ Then, as discussed above, he calls upon mount Cithaeron and the previous Theban terrors that it contains, including the dogs of Actaeon and Pentheus' mother Agaue (*Oed.* 930-34). Oedipus then decides to draw his sword to kill himself, but he considers this insufficient punishment (*Oed.* 935-41):

Haec fatus aptat impiam capulo manum
*ensemque ducit. ‘itane? tam magnis breues
 poenas sceleribus soluis atque uno omnia*

935

³⁶⁸ On the ‘metatextual’ nature of these lines, compare Seo (2013), 116.

³⁶⁹ These means of punishment are roughly the same as those that he calls for directly after he has learnt the truth (*Oed.* 870-75).

*pensabis ictu? moreris: hoc patri sat est;
quid deinde matri, quid male in lucem editis
gnatis, quid ipsi, quae tuum magna luit* 940
scelus ruina, flebili patriae dabis?

Oedipus realizes that the nature of his crime calls not for annihilation, but for the eternal return of annihilation (*Oed.* 942-51):³⁷⁰

*soluendo non es: illa quae leges ratas
Natura in uno uertit Oedipoda, nouos
commenta partus, supplicis eadem meis
nouetur. iterum uiuere atque iterum mori* 945
*liceat, renasci semper ut totiens noua
supplicia pendas—utere ingenio, miser:
quod saepe fieri non potest fiat diu;
mors eligatur longa. quaeratur uia
qua nec sepultis mixtus et uiuis tamen* 950
exemptus erres: morere, sed citra patrem.

As Oedipus blinds himself, his fingers and eyes storm at each other, almost as if in a duel: recalling the battle between the Sown Men, prefiguring the war between his sons Eteocles and Polynices, and fulfilling the Pythia's prophecy that he will wage war against himself (*Oed.* 958-64):³⁷¹

*ardent minaces igne truculento genae
oculique uix se sedibus retinent suis;
uiolentus audax uultus, iratus ferox* 960
*iamiam eruentis; gemuit et dirum fremens
manus in ora torsit. at contra truces
oculi steterunt et suam intenti manum
ultro insecuntur, uulneri occurrunt suo.*

³⁷⁰ On the fittingness of Oedipus' punishment, see Mader (1995) and Boyle (2011) *ad loc.* On repetition and innovation in Oedipus' punishment, see Seo (2013), 117 and Gunderson (2017), 130-31. Poe (1983) is still fundamental in countering all too comfortably Stoic interpretations of Oedipus' self-blinding. On the language of return and reversal in *Oedipus*, see Schiesaro (2003), 204-06.

³⁷¹ Compare Seo (2013), 118.

Oedipus' return to his deepest origins also recurs in the vocabulary of this scene, full of words emphasizing a reaching for the depths (*Oed.* 965-70):

scrutatur avidus manibus uncis lumina, 965
radice ab ima funditus uulsos simul
euoluit orbes; haeret in uacuo manus
et fixa penitus unguibus lacerat cauos
alte recessus luminum et inanes sinus
saeuitque frustra plusque quam satis est furit. 970

In this everlasting annihilation, Oedipus has finally achieved victory, and discovered a sufficiently fitting and final form of punishment (*Oed.* 974-77):

uictor deos
conclamat omnis: 'parcite en patriae, precor: 975
iam iusta feci, debitas poenas tuli;
inuenta thalamis digna nox tandem meis.'

This sense of closure is cruelly frustrated in the final scene of the play. When Oedipus emerges from the palace with his empty sockets, he triumphantly declares (*Oed.* 998-99, 1001-03): *Bene habet, peractum est: iusta persolui patri. / iuuant tenebrae. ... / nil, parricida, dexterae debes tuae: / lux te refugit. uultus Oedipodam hic decet.* But no sooner has Oedipus spoken these words than Jocasta rushes onstage, and we witness the second self-annihilation in the play as she kills herself with Oedipus' sword. Even in her reasoning she is similar to her son.³⁷² She criticizes her own reluctance to punish herself (*Oed.* 1024-25: *Quid, anime, torpes? socia cur scelerum dare / poenas recusas?*; cf. *Oed.* 952: *cunctaris, anime?*); considers herself the source of all evil (*Oed.* 1025-26: *omne confusum perit, / incesta, per te iuris humani decus*); calls for punishment by the sword (*Oed.* 1027) and considers punishment by divine fire only to dismiss it as not severe enough (*Oed.* 1028-31). Finally, she urges herself to devise a fitting type of death for herself, just as her son had done (cf. *Oed.* 1031-32: ***mors*** placet: ***mortis uia / quaeratur.*** with *Oed.* 948-51: *quod saepe fieri non potest fiat diu; / mors eligatur longa. quaeratur uia / qua nec sepultis mixtus et uiuis tamen / exemptus erres: morere, sed citra patrem.*).

³⁷² As noted by Töchterle (1994) *ad Oed.* 1024, with reference to earlier literature.

Oedipus realizes that the punishment he has imposed upon himself is not really capable of providing the closure that he so desperately craves. Oedipus perceives the presence of his mother as destroying the fruits of his efforts (*Oed.* 1012-14): *Quis frui tenebris uetat? / quis reddit oculos? matris, en matris sonus! / perdidimus operam.* He desires to remain as far removed from his mother as possible (*Oed.* 1015-18), and as she keeps on talking, Oedipus asks her politely to shut up (*Oed.* 1020-23):

Iam parce uerbis, mater, et parce auribus: 1020
per has reliquias corporis trunci precor,
per inauspicatum sanguinis pignus mei,
per omne nostri nominis fas ac nefas.

Jocasta does indeed silence herself, but her suicide once again frustrates Oedipus' desire for closure, as he himself realizes (*Oed.* 1042-46):

Fatidice te, te praesidem ueri deum
compello: solum debui fatis patrem;
bis parricida plusque quam timui nocens
matrem peremi: scelere confecta est meo. 1045
o Phoebe mendax, fata superaui impia.

As the words *plus ... quam timui* (*Oed.* 1044) and *fata superaui impia* (*Oed.* 1046) emphasize, apparently even after Oedipus has found the ultimate punishment to fit the ultimate crime he is still able to emulate his own criminal example.³⁷³

In light of the frustration of Oedipus' desire for closure, his words to the Theban citizens announcing that the plague will depart with him (*Oed.* 1052-61, and *Oed.* 1057-58 in particular: *ite, ferte depositis opem: / mortifera mecum uitia terrarum extraho.*) ring hollow. The plague may leave with Oedipus, but the attentive reader has already noted the references to the repetition of Theban fratricide to come, and neither do Oedipus' final words bode well for the future. Oedipus chooses the dreadful personifications summoned from the Underworld by Tiresias and Laius as his guides (*Oed.* 1059-61): *Violenta Fata et horridus Morbi tremor, / Maciesque et atra Pestis*

³⁷³ On the frustration of closure and, following in its wake, the excessiveness of this final act, see also Seo (2013), 119-20.

*et rabidus Dolor, / mecum ite, mecum. ducibus his uti libet.*³⁷⁴ In the final lines of the tragedy that bears his name, Oedipus fully identifies himself with the forces of Hell that had roamed the earth during the course of the play. Oedipus may keep these forces in check for now, but considering both the repetitive nature of Theban history and the open-endedness of Hell, there is no knowing when they will be unleashed again. In both *Hercules Furens* and *Oedipus*, opposed in their intertextual response to epic though they may be, the opening of Hell is permanent and civil war is just around the corner.

³⁷⁴ On the similarities and differences between these personifications and those mentioned at *Oed.* 590-94, 589 and 652 see Töchterle (1994) *ad Oed.* 1059-61 and Boyle (2011) *ad Oed.* 1059-60.

CHAPTER 3

THYESTES AND PHOENISSAE: THE ASSAULT ON EPIC³⁷⁵

³⁷⁵ Some of the ideas in this chapter have been published in a slightly different form as part of Van der Schuur (2013 – including some ideas on Ovid and (Senecan) tragedy that can also be found in the introduction) and (2018).

Both *Hercules Furens* and *Oedipus* are powerful examples of tragedy's ability to radically transform some of Vergilian epic's most fundamental structures. In both plays an intertextual plot can be discerned: the distinction between Jupiter and Juno (*Hercules*) and the teleological plot (*Oedipus*) are gradually dismantled and reversed, using allusive techniques that further develop those employed by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*. In both plays the climax of this intertextual plot is the implosion of the psyche of Seneca's protagonist, who seeks and seems to find closural punishment, only to linger on in a state of limbo. The plays are open-ended in a different sense as well: in both tragedies the forces of Hell are unleashed and do not leave the earth – confined though they may temporarily be to the soul of the protagonist. In addition to this, the threat of civil war looms large in both plays.

Thyestes and *Phoenissae* present equally serious tragic challenges to Latin epic. But there is a major difference between these two plays and the two tragedies discussed in the preceding chapters: *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae* take the outcomes of the other two tragedies as their point of departure and aim to go beyond them. The shattering of the boundaries between earth and Hell that caused so much consternation in *Hercules Furens* is a given for the Fury that governs the action in *Thyestes*. She can summon shades from the Underworld and invade earth and Heaven as she pleases, without the help or permission of a Juno or a Hercules. In *Phoenissae*, the tormented mind of Oedipus and – intertextually – Hercules form the soil from which a new Theban civil war will rise. Different too from *Hercules Furens* and *Oedipus* is the nature of both plays' response to Augustan epic. Both *Hercules Furens* and *Oedipus* are careful deconstructions of the *Aeneid* in the Ovidian manner: *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae* present themselves as frontal assaults on the genre of epic.

In this chapter I will argue that, intertextually speaking, *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae* occupy a special place in Seneca's tragic oeuvre. *Thyestes* shows Seneca at the top of his game as a challenger of epic, presenting the rival genre with a tragic *non plus ultra*. What we possess of *Phoenissae* suggests a comparable single-mindedness. It is attractive to suppose that *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae* are Seneca's last tragedies, and thereby his last word on the subject – as both the unfinished nature of *Phoenissae* as well as Fitch' "late" dating of both plays seem to suggest.³⁷⁶ But even if this is not the

³⁷⁶ For matters of dating, see my discussion of Seneca's tragic oeuvre as a whole. On the unfinished nature of *Phoenissae*, see especially Frank (1995), 1-16. Hirschberg (1989), 7-8 correctly argues, with reference to earlier scholarship, that the complete absence of choral odes speaks against the hypothesis that *Phoenissae* has been damaged during the course of its textual transmission. Tarrant (1978), 229-31 makes the case for the completeness of *Phoenissae*. See also the discussion at the end of this chapter.

case, I hope that the discussion of both plays below will reveal that, within the Senecan tragic corpus, *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae* can indeed be most fruitfully read as “late”, climactic plays. Finally, we will also see that even these two climactic tragedies cannot escape Seneca’s now familiar closural anxieties.

Beyond Procne: the triumph of Allecto and the Iron Age

Thyestes begins with the Fury’s summoning of Tantalus, to infect the upper world with his infernal touch. After a monologue from the puzzled Tantalus, who has inexplicably been dragged back to the Upper World (*Thy.* 1-23), the Fury urges him on with a speech of shocking criminal ambition (*Thy.* 23-67). Characteristic of the Fury’s opening lines is her emphasis on the boundlessness of the violence and criminality to be unleashed through the house of Tantalus, aptly summarized by the word *crescat*, placed in enjambment (*Thy.* 25-32):

<i>certetur omni scelere et alterna uice</i>	25
<i>stringatur ensis; nec sit irarum modus</i>	
<i>pudorue, mentes caecus instiget furor,</i>	
<i>rabies parentum duret et longum nefas</i>	
<i>eat in nepotes; nec uacet cuiquam uetus</i>	
<i>odisse crimen: semper oriatur nouum,</i>	30
<i>nec unum in uno, dumque punitur scelus,</i>	
<i>crescat.</i>	

The Fury’s desire for criminal expansion becomes more specific and more all-encompassing as her monologue progresses, and she desires that Tantalus’ descendants *bella trans pontum uehant, / effusus omnis irriget terras cruor* (*Thy.* 43-44). Finally, the sky should be infected as well (*Thy.* 48-51):

<i>non sit a uestris malis</i>	
<i>immune caelum – cur micant stellae polo</i>	
<i>flammaeque seruant debitum mundo decus?</i>	50
<i>nox alta fiat, excidat caelo dies.</i>	

Tantalus desperately tries to escape from the task that the Fury has appointed to him, by fleeing back to the Underworld (*Thy.* 68-95). But the Fury tortures him by rousing the all too familiar hunger, and Tantalus follows (*Thy.* 96-100). Tantalus' presence infects both his direct surroundings, the Argive and more general countryside, as well as, finally, the sun god himself, who doubts whether he must let "a day doomed to perish" even commence (*Thy.* 101-21).

As Schiesaro has shown in great detail, the prologue of *Thyestes* tells the story of a struggle between a desire to let unbridled *nefas* have its course and the futile attempt to stop it.³⁷⁷ Remarkable about *Thyestes* is the fact that this desire for criminality *sine fine* is clearly and forcefully formulated right from the start, without doubt, tortured reasoning or the suggestion that the Fury's thoughts and plans gradually take shape. The plan is there from the beginning, and all the Fury has to do is force Tantalus to carry it out. This is something quite different from Juno's gradual realization of her means of punishment in the prologue of *Hercules Furens*.³⁷⁸ This difference is particularly interesting because of the shared Vergilian background of both prologues. Like that of *Hercules Furens*, the prologue of *Thyestes* is heavily indebted to the tragic madness spread in the seventh book of the *Aeneid*.³⁷⁹

In both *Hercules Furens* and the seventh book of the *Aeneid*, Juno summons infernal forces to at the very least delay her opponent's fulfillment of a Jovian goal, be it settlement in Italy (Aeneas) or deification (Hercules).³⁸⁰ In *Thyestes* it is the other way around: the Fury, obviously in control of the plot of the play and the sequence of events stretching beyond the boundaries of the play,³⁸¹ sets a sequence of crime for its own sake in motion. Unlike Juno, the Fury feels no need for revenge. The Fury's purely "aesthetic" – for lack of a better term – appreciation of *furor* and *nefas* has its roots in Vergil's *Aeneid*. Vergil had compared the gradual increase of Amata's madness to a spinning top, set in motion by a group of intently watching children (*Aen.* 7.378-84: *intenti ludo* (*Aen.* 7.380), *stupet inscia supra / impubesque manus mirata uolubile buxum* (*Aen.* 7.381-82)). And when Allecto has successfully pitted Trojans and Latins

³⁷⁷ Schiesaro (2003), 36-45.

³⁷⁸ See Fitch (1987) *ad HF.* 1-124 on the gradual development of Juno's thoughts on how to keep Hercules' boundless aspirations in check.

³⁷⁹ See e.g. Tarrant (1985) *ad Thy.* 23, 52, 84-85, 85-86, 96-100, 105 for parallels, as well as Schiesaro (2003), 32-36 for a detailed discussion of some of these parallels.

³⁸⁰ See the chapter on *Hercules Furens* above.

³⁸¹ Schiesaro (2003), 65-69 convincingly argues that the sequence of Argive criminality, set in motion by the Fury in the prologue, does not end with Atreus' complete triumph over Thyestes by the end of the play. The Fury's ambition exceeds the tragedy of Atreus and Thyestes, which is, so to speak, only the first act.

against each other, she enthusiastically tells Juno that, should the goddess wish so, she can set all of Italy ablaze with war (*Aen.* 7.547-51).

In response to this, Juno sends Allecto back to Hell, claiming that Jupiter would not approve of Allecto roaming the earth freely (*Aen.* 7.552-60). A reader of *Hercules Furens* will remember that that play's Juno had not commanded her Furies to return after the deed was done, and indeed we have seen that an open-ended infernal atmosphere persists until the very end of the play. In *Thyestes* this unleashing of the Furies is taken another step further. It is not Jupiter or Juno but rather the Fury herself who determines when enough is enough. Tantalus is sent back to Hell when the effects of his touch have become irreversible (*Thy.* 105-07) and the entire cosmos has been infected.³⁸²

In his reworking of *Aeneid* 7 in this prologue Seneca exploits the generic tension between epic and tragedy characteristic of Vergil's narrative,³⁸³ particularly in the following command given by the Fury (*Thy.* 83-86):

*Ante perturba domum
inferque tecum proelia et ferri malum
regibus amorem, concute insano ferum
pectus tumultu.* 85

These lines echo Juno's orders to Allecto (*Aen.* 7.335-40):³⁸⁴

*tu potes unanimos armare in proelia fratres
atque odiis uersare domos ...
...
... fecundum concute pectus.
disice compositam pacem, sere crimina belli;
arma uelit poscatque simul rapiatque iuuentus.* 335
340

³⁸² The parallel with the *Aeneid* is observed by Tarrant (1985) *ad Thy.* 105, Schiesaro (2003), 33. See Gilder (1997), 70-79 on the gradual increase in the Furies' power from *Aeneid* 7 through *Hercules Furens* to *Thyestes*.

³⁸³ Discussed in my chapter on *Hercules Furens*.

³⁸⁴ The allusion to *Aen.* 7.338 is observed by Tarrant (1985) *ad Thy.* 85-86. Schiesaro (2003), 32 compares *Thy.* 83-86 and *Aen.* 7.335-40.

In both commands we find the combination between tragic element of chaos within the house and the epic element of war. In addition to this, the Fury's *ferri malum / regibus amorem* (*Thy.* 84-85) may be compared with the *amor ferri* taking possession of Turnus upon Allecto's visit (*Aen.* 7.461),³⁸⁵ which follows her invasion of Latinus' *domus*.

But the increased criminal ambition of Seneca's Fury does not only derive from the fact that she has usurped a position generally occupied by Juno. Seneca has also infused her with the violent energy of Ovid's Iron Age.³⁸⁶ At the heart of her first speech, the Fury calls for unending strife within the family of Tantalus (*Thy.* 40-46):

fratrem expauescat frater et gnatum parens 40
gnatusque patrem, liberi pereant male,
peius tamen nascantur; immineat uiro
infesta coniunx, bella trans pontum uehant,
effusus omnis irriget terras cruor,
supraque magnos gentium exultet duces 45
Libido uictrix[.]

Richard Tarrant points out that Seneca here refers to Ovid's description of the Iron Age (*Met.* 1.144-50):³⁸⁷

uiuatur ex rapto. non hospes ab hospite tutus,
non socer a genero; fratrum quoque gratia rara est. 145
imminet exitio uir coniugis, illa mariti;
lurida terribiles miscent aconita nouercae;
filius ante diem patrios inquirat in annos;
uicta iacet pietas, et uirgo caede madentis
ultima caelestem terras Astraea reliquit. 150

Through the allusion to Ovid's Iron Age Seneca creates the possibility for evil to spread all over the world and reach for the heavens. If we are aware of the more general reference to Ovid's Iron Age in this passage, it also becomes possible to associate the

³⁸⁵ Tarrant (1985) *ad Thy.* 84-85.

³⁸⁶ See also Tarrant (2002a) on Seneca's reception of the Ovidian Iron Age in *Thyestes*. For a rather different reading of *Thyestes* as dominated by the Ovidian Iron Age, see Littlewood (2004), 127-48. I will return to Seneca's Iron Age below.

³⁸⁷ Tarrant (1985), *ad Thy.* 40-46.

phrase *bella trans pontum uehant* (*Thy.* 43) with one of the prime characteristics of the Iron Age of the *Metamorphoses*: disturbance of boundaries through seafaring (*Met.* 1.94-96, 132-34).

After quoting *Met.* 1.144-50, Tarrant rightly remarks that, just as Ovid moves on from a description of the Iron Age to the Giants' assault on Heaven next (*Met.* 1.151-62), so does Seneca's Fury mention her desire to upset the cosmos shortly after her description of strife within the family (*Thy.* 48-51). The similarity between the world of Seneca's *Thyestes* and that of Ovid's Iron Age becomes even more marked if one considers that Ovid's Jupiter concludes his speech about Lycaon's Iron Age ferocity with the words *qua terra patet, fera regnat Erinys* (*Ov. Met.* 1.241) and taking the defeat of *pietas* and Astraea in *Met.* 1.149-50 into account, the situation in *Thyestes* is remarkably similar to that in the Iron Age: a Fury has taken control of the world and the gods have fled. In the following act, Atreus will express this Ovidian vision of the Iron Age in even more compressed form (*Thy.* 249-51): *Excede, Pietas, si modo in nostra domo / umquam fuisti. dira Furiarum cohors / discorsque Erinys ueniat et geminas faces / Megaera quatiens*. But this time, Jupiter will not intervene.

The Fury's desire for unlimited criminality is the first, programmatic manifestation of the *maius*-motif that runs through Seneca's *Thyestes*:³⁸⁸ a desire – on the part of both poet and characters³⁸⁹ – to go beyond all established norms and all predecessors. Although this desire is most clearly articulated and fulfilled in *Thyestes*, it is a defining generic characteristic of Latin Imperial tragedy in general. Vergil had famously defined the Iliadic half of his epic as his *maius opus* (*Aen.* 7.45), and Propertius had announced the *Aeneid* with the words *nescioquid maius nascitur Iliade* (*Prop.* 2.34.66). Likewise, in the *Amores* personified Tragedy had urged Ovid to move on from elegy to a *maius opus* (*Am.* 3.1.24), and in the *Heroides* Medea's tragic crime is anticipated in her closing words *nescioquid certe mens mea maius agit* (*Epist.* 12.212).³⁹⁰ In other passages in the *Amores* and *Tristia*, Ovid had characterized tragedy as *grauis*,³⁹¹ and anticipated the arrival of a *grandius ... opus* (*Am.* 3.1.70) after the completion of the *Amores*.

³⁸⁸ On the *maius*-motif in Senecan tragedy, *Thyestes* in particular, see Seidensticker (1985) (mentioned before).

³⁸⁹ Cf. Tarrant (1985) *ad Thy.* 272-77.

³⁹⁰ As observed by Hinds (1993), 40-43; Barchiesi (1993) 343-45 and Spoth (1992), 202-05. See Bessone (1997), 32-41 and *ad loc.* for further parallels in Seneca – including the ones discussed below – and other writers. Hinds (2011), 22-28 argues that *Epist.* 12.205-12 lies behind *Med.* 45-50, 393-95, 674-75, 916-19; *Phaed.* 696-97; *Oed.* 925-27; *Thy.* 266-70 (through Procne: *Met.* 6.618-19), all expressions of the *maius*-motif pervading Seneca's tragedies.

³⁹¹ *Am.* 3.1.23, 35, 36; *Am.* 3.15.17; *Tristia* 2.381, 554. On *grauitas* and (Ovidian) tragedy see Kelly (1993), 8 and Curley (2013), 45-46.

From Vergil onwards, the subject matter of this “higher poetry” often included the unspeakable horrors of *bella*, *scelus* and *nefas*. Indeed, only a few hundred lines after Vergil has begun his *maius opus* Allecto has inspired Amata to commit a *maius nefas* (*Aen.* 7.386),³⁹² and Ovid had written a tragedy about the crimes of Medea. Seneca further develops this vocabulary of generic ascent and criminality in his tragedies, as is evidenced in *Oedipus* and *Thyestes* among other plays – two tragedies that, as we shall see, can be compared and contrasted in other ways as well.³⁹³

But for now, let us have a look at Oedipus’ and Atreus’ attitude towards *maius nefas*. Seneca’s Oedipus fears a *maius ... scelus* and *maius ... nefas* (*Oed.* 17-18), while his Atreus welcomes the onset of the most sublime crime yet (*Thy.* 267-70):

*Nescioquid animus maius et solito amplius
supraque fines moris humani tumet
instatque pigris manibus – haud quid sit scio,
sed grande quiddam est.*³⁹⁴ 270

Becoming aware that this crime has already been committed by Procne and Philomela, he calls upon them to inspire him to something even greater (*Thy.* 272-77):

*uidit infandas domus
Odrysia mensas – fateor, immane est scelus,
sed occupatum; maius hoc aliquid dolor
inueniat. animum Daulis inspira parens 275
sororque; causa est similis; assiste et manum
impelle nostram.*

And although Oedipus does not desire a crime that surpasses all previous criminality, he is guilty of one as well. We have already noted the presence of *maius* in his vocabulary, and when he is summoned from the underworld by Tiresias, Laius says that Oedipus surpasses all previous Theban criminality (*Oed.* 626-30):

³⁹² On this connection between greater poetry and greater crime, including Amata’s *maius nefas*, see Barchiesi (1993), 344 n. 17 and Schiesaro (2003), 34-35.

³⁹³ Important too in this context is of course *Medea*, briefly discussed below.

³⁹⁴ It should be noted that *maius* has been part of Atreus’ vocabulary at least since Accius: cf. Guastella (2001), 77.

‘O Cadmi effera,
 cruore semper laeta cognato domus,
 uibrate thyrsos, enthea gnatos manu
 lacerate potius – **maximum** Thebis scelus
 maternus amor est.

630

3

But only when Oedipus has discovered the true nature of his criminality does he desire punishment. Because only he is guilty of the crime that has caused the plague in Thebes, he directs his creative punishment at himself. The messenger remarks (*Oed.* 925-26): *secum ipse saeuus **grande nescioquid** parat / suisque fatis simile*.

The fact that Ovid’s and Seneca’s metapoetic language exploits generic vocabulary generally associated with ascent to a greater form of epic further illustrates a central point of this book: the interwovenness of epic and tragedy in Latin poetry of the first century. Vergil’s implicit alignment of *maius opus* and *maius nefas* – a *nefas* of strong tragic coloring, as we have seen in the introduction – was a self-conscious poetic gamble. What are the consequences if an epicist introduces tragic frenzy into his poem? Will the epic framework survive? We have already seen how Seneca, in his *Hercules* and *Oedipus*, gradually dismantles the epic structures in which Vergil had tried to contain these dangerous tragic forces.³⁹⁵ In doing so, Seneca competes with Ovid, going beyond his predecessor’s more elusive deconstructions of the *Aeneid*.

In terms of the nature of Seneca’s engagement with the poetic tradition, his *Medea* merits inclusion in a discussion of *Oedipus*, *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae*. Seneca’s *Medea* is the tragedy in which the heroine famously realizes her literary potential, truly becoming Medea (*Med.* 171; 910). The Medeas against which Seneca measures his Medea are not just the Euripidean or Apollonian ones, but most importantly the Ovidian ones from both the *Heroides* and the *Metamorphoses*. Seneca’s Medea realizes the tragic potential present in Ovid’s fragmented picture of Medea in the *Heroides* and *Metamorphoses*, and presumably tries to out-Medea the version of the heroine of Ovid’s lost tragedy as well.³⁹⁶ Seneca fully realizes the Medean potential present in Ovid’s poetry,³⁹⁷ just as he had fully realized the Oedipus implicit in Ovid’s poetry.

³⁹⁵ On Vergil trying to keep virtually uncontrollable forces in check, compare Hardie (2009), 110 (a way of looking at the epic tradition indebted to Helen Lovatt (n. 131)): ‘It is this sovereign (in both aesthetic and political senses) ability of the *Aeneid* to impose order on the disorderly to contain chaos within cosmos, that will be subjected to increasing pressure by the epic successors of Vergil, reaching breaking point in the epics of Lucan and Statius.’

³⁹⁶ See my introduction for references to secondary literature on the Ovidian intertextuality of Seneca’s *Medea*.

³⁹⁷ And in Vergil’s Dido, as has been argued by Schiesaro (2008). Dido features prominently in Hardie’s discussion of Tereus and Procne (Hardie (2002b), 259-72).

In many ways, *Thyestes* and *Medea* are very similar plays. The desire for revenge drives the plot of both tragedies, and in both tragedies this revenge is achieved through the killing of children, a form of revenge upon which the protagonists reflect in comparable language.³⁹⁸ But there is a notable difference between both tragedies as well. *Medea* is about the road that leads us and the protagonist from *Medea fiam* to *Nunc Medea sum*, about Medea becoming Medea, fully realizing her intertextual potential, gradually discovering and finally executing her ultimate crime after an excruciating mental struggle. Atreus is quite different from Medea in this respect. The dissolution of all moral order is a given for him, and he is Atreus right from the start.³⁹⁹

Seneca articulates this defining characteristic of Atreus most clearly in his engagement with a story closely related to Medea's child-murder, that of Procne, the Athenian princess married to the Thracian Tereus. Tereus rapes Procne's sister Philomela, and Procne avenges herself by killing her son Itys and serving him to his father Tereus. Ovid, who had incorporated allusions to Medea's child murder and Thyestes' banquet in his version of the story of Procne (*Met.* 6.424-674),⁴⁰⁰ as well as other Roman poets had connected the three stories, and Seneca continues this tradition.⁴⁰¹ Both the Fury and Atreus choose Procne as their criminal model.⁴⁰² The Fury wishes that *Thracium fiat nefas / maiore numero* (*Thy.* 56-57), and Atreus, aware that his crime has already been committed by Procne, calls to her for inspiration (*Thy.* 270-78):

hoc, anime, occupa

270

(dignum est Thyeste facinus et dignum Atreo,

³⁹⁸ See .e.g. Littlewood (1997), 79, who discusses some interesting parallels; Guastella (2001), 56, 69, 75-83, 105, 154 and 232-33 for parallels between Atreus' and Medea's revenge and *passim* on revenge in Seneca's *Thyestes* and *Medea* and related texts; Littlewood (2004), 180-205 for a comparison between Atreus' and Medea's revenge. Borgo (1993), 52-62 discusses adultery as a motive for revenge in *Thyestes* and *Medea*. Winter (2014) offers a comparative study of both plays as tragedies of revenge.

³⁹⁹ Compare Henry/Henry (1985), 66 on this fundamental difference between Atreus and Medea in their attitude towards their own criminality.

⁴⁰⁰ On Ovid's play with complementary myths and stories see Larmour (1990), 132-37 with further references for this technique in relation to his Procne story; also Newlands (1997) on Ovid's fragmented reflection on Medea in the *Metamorphoses*, not only in his retelling of the story of Medea (*Met.* 7.1-424), but also in the surrounding stories of Procne, Scylla etc.; and now the lengthy discussion in Curley (2013), 177-216 of Ovid's tragic intratextuality in his *Metamorphoses* and *Heroides*.

⁴⁰¹ On this tradition see the overview in Guastella (2001), 75-83 with further references.

⁴⁰² For an overview of the parallels between Seneca's *Thyestes* and Ovid's Procne see Jakobi (1988), 152-67, from which the parallels discussed below are derived; for other discussions of the importance of the story of Procne to *Thyestes*, see especially Picone (1984), 105-06 with further references and Schiesaro (2003), 70-138.

quod uterque faciat): uidit infandas domus
Odrysia mensas — fateor, immane est scelus,
sed occupatum: maius hoc aliquid dolor
inueniat. animum Daulis inspira parens 275
sororque; causa est similis: assiste et manum
impelle nostram. liberos audius pater
gaudensque laceret et suos artus edat.

The fact that Procne had fed her husband their child is not the only reason for Seneca to select precisely this Ovidian tale for emulation. The tale of Procne happens to be an important return to the disorder of the Iron Age.⁴⁰³ Not only is Tereus' rape of Philomela and Procne's murder and cooking of her own son an obvious example of the violation of moral order within the family characteristic of the Iron Age, the moral chaos of this story is inaugurated and perpetuated by travel by ship (*Met.* 6.422-24; 444-46; 511-12). Incidentally, these are the first mentions of sea-faring in the poem since the Iron Age, even before, at the end of the book, Calais and Zetes *uelleram cum Minyis nitido radiantia uillo / per mare non notum prima petiere carina*. (*Met.* 6.720-21).⁴⁰⁴ Finally, Philomela's and Procne's slaughtering and cooking of Itys is a repetition of the supreme crime of the Iron Age, Lycaon's slaughtering and cooking of a poor Molossian *hospes*. Compare the following passages (*Met.* 1.226-30 and (*Met.* 6.641-47):

missi de gente Molossa
obsidis unius iugulum mucrone resoluit
atque ita semineces partim feruentibus artus
mollit aquis, partim subiecto torruit igni.
quod simul imposuit mensis ... 130

⁴⁰³ See also Tarrant (2002a), a piece to which I am much indebted here, on Ovid's reworking of cosmic chaos-motifs from the first book of his epic in moral terms in later books, particularly in the story of Procne, and the relevance of this for Neronian poetry.

⁴⁰⁴ Cf. for a similar sense of novelty – significantly lacking in the Tereus passages to disguise the chronological disjunction – *Met.* 1.132-34: *uela dabat uentis (nec adhuc bene nouerat illos) / nauita, quaeque diu steterant in montibus altis / fluctibus ignotis exsultauere carinae*. On these and other chronological inconsistencies in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, see O'Hara (2007), 121-23 with reference.

*ense ferit Procne, lateri qua pectus adhaeret,
 nec uultum uertit. satis illi ad fata uel unum
 uulnus erat; iugulum ferro Philomela resoluit,
 uiuaque adhuc animaeque aliquid retinentia membra
 dilaniant. pars inde cauis exsultat aenis, 645
 pars ueribus stridunt; manant penetralia tabo.
 his adhibet coniunx ignarum Terea mensis[.]*

Both the similarities and the differences between these two passages are interesting. The slitting of the throat (*Met.* 1.227; 6.643) is described in almost identical terms in both passages.⁴⁰⁵ However, in the case of Itys this is an unnecessary act, as one blow was sufficient to kill the boy (*Met.* 6.642-43). In both cases the body parts are described as still retaining some life (*Met.* 1.228: *semineces ... artus*; 6.644: *uiuaque adhuc animaeque aliquid retinentia membra*), and the method of preparing the meat is similar as well (*Met.* 1.228-29; 6.645-46).⁴⁰⁶ But unlike Lycaon, Procne and Philomela themselves tear the dead boy apart (*Met.* 6.645: *dilaniant*). And most importantly, Procne kills her own son, whereas Lycaon “only” sacrifices a hostage (*Met.* 1.227: *obsidis*). Interestingly enough, this hostage is an Ovidian innovation: ‘In other versions, the victim was one of Lycaon’s sons; Ovid absolves the ruler of such a crime, but ascribes to him one more thematically relevant, namely, the murder of a hostage, which violates sacred customs of hospitality.’⁴⁰⁷ By slightly altering the tale of Lycaon, Ovid has allowed Procne to surpass him in evil; but there is no god to punish her, although there was a god to punish Lycaon.

The absence of the gods in this story is significant. Jupiter effectively ends the Iron Age with the Great Flood in the first book, but apparently in this tale the Iron Age can re-emerge without being stopped by divine intervention. After she had been raped, Philomela had already wondered if the gods had actually perished with her (*Met.* 6.546), and the rest of the story in Ovid’s version comes close to a confirmation of this suspicion. As Charles Segal has noted, the only god truly present in this story is the sun god, who loyally marks the time but is indifferent to the things that happen below.⁴⁰⁸ It should be observed that Procne and Philomela only come to their deed after Tereus’

⁴⁰⁵ Bömer (1969) *ad Met.* 1.227.

⁴⁰⁶ Bömer (1976) *ad Met.* 6.645-46.

⁴⁰⁷ Anderson (1997) *ad Met.* 1.226-27. See also Bömer (1969) *ad Met.* 1.226-27.

⁴⁰⁸ Segal (1994), 269-70. The only other divinities mentioned are, as Segal observes, Bacchus and the Eumenides.

crime has provoked no response from above. Philomela's first impulse is to cry to the gods for justice (*Met.* 6.542-48). Ovid continuously associates Athens, where Procne and Philomela are from, and its king Pandion (the girls' father) with piety, and Thrace and its king Tereus with impiety.⁴⁰⁹ What is tragic about this story is the way in which civilized girls are gradually transformed into barbaric Furies.⁴¹⁰

The confusion of what seemed to be clearly established categories reaches a climax in Procne's deliberations concerning the punishment of her husband. Ovid says that Procne, having heard of Tereus' crime, *fasque nefasque / confusura ruit* (*Met.* 6.585-86). The distinctions between father and son are blurred as well. When her son Itys runs in as she and her sister are deliberating about Tereus' fate, Procne exclaims (*Met.* 6.622-23): *'a! quam / es similis patri'*. The confusion continues during Procne's dilemma. She momentarily halts the impulse to kill Itys *ex nimia ... pietate* (*Met.* 6.629). The idea that there can be such a thing as "too much piety" preventing a just act of revenge is in itself a paradoxical and startling thought.⁴¹¹ But soon the distinctions between father and son disappear again as Procne turns from Itys, who shows her his childlike affection (*Met.* 6.624-28), to Philomela (*Met.* 6.630-35):

<i>ab hoc iterum est ad uultus uersa sororis</i>	630
<i>inque uicem spectans ambos 'cur admouet' inquit</i>	
<i>'alter blanditias, rapta silet altera lingua?</i>	
<i>quam uocat hic matrem, cur non uocat illa sororem?</i>	
<i>cui sis nupta uide, Pandione nata, marito:</i>	
<i>degeneras; scelus est pietas in coniuge Terei.'</i>	635

By contrasting Itys with Philomela, Procne seems to blame Itys for Philomela's inability to speak – thus identifying him with Tereus again (*Met.* 6.631-33). In a final paradox (*Met.* 6.634-35), Procne shows awareness of her Athenian heritage: she, a daughter of the pious king Pandion, is married to a barbarian – this contrast collapses as soon as Procne establishes it, because it continues the permanent confusion of *scelus* and *pietas*, a process that had begun in *Met.* 6.585-86.

⁴⁰⁹ Segal (1994), 263, 267-269, 271, 276.

⁴¹⁰ See Pavlock (1991) on Ovid's collapsing of boundaries in this story, and see also Larmour (1990), 134 and Gildenhard/Zissos (2007) on the collapsing of cultural boundaries.

⁴¹¹ Cf. Anderson (1972) *ad loc.*

This total confusion of the moral order, of *fas* and *nefas*, is merely the starting point for Seneca's Atreus.⁴¹² Atreus describes how Thyestes' theft of the golden ram that bestows royal power over Argos on its owner – with the aid of Atreus' wife (*Thy.* 225-35) – is the source of all moral disorder (*Thy.* 220-24, 236-41):

Fas est in illo quidquid in fratre est nefas. 220
quid enim reliquit crimine intactum aut ubi
sceleri pepercit? coniugem stupro abstulit
regnumque furto: specimen antiquum imperi
fraude est adeptus, fraude turbavit domum.
 ...
Hinc omne cladis mutuae fluxit malum:
per regna trepidus exul erravi mea,
pars nulla nostri tuta ab insidiis uacat,
corrupta coniunx, imperi quassa est fides,
domus aegra, dubius sanguis et certi nihil 240
nisi frater hostis.

In other words: Thyestes has already fulfilled his role as Tereus. This means that the *process* of transformation into a criminal that was central to Ovid's tragedy is absent from Seneca's play. This is particularly evident if we compare Procne's deliberations to those of Atreus. Phrases that were painful steps in Procne's tortured transformation in Ovid's tale are turned into Atreus' clever *sententiae* that are merely employed to make his *satelles* shut his mouth. Consider the following moment from Seneca's play. Atreus' *satelles* tries to stop his king from harming his brother (*Thy.* 219) *Nefas nocere uel malo fratri puta*. This argument is instantly dismissed by Atreus (*Thy.* 220): *fas est in illo quidquid in fratre est nefas* (*Thy.* 220). 'So räsoniert auch Procne met.6,635 *scelus est pietas in coniuge Tereo*.' , Jakobi observes.⁴¹³ Indeed she does – but to force herself to her deed, not to merely silence a powerless servant.

Seneca has also changed Procne's directionless anger into Atreus' carefully crafted revenge. Atreus is engaged in a criminal competition with his brother (*Thy.* 194-96): *tale [nefas] quod frater meus / suum esse mallet – scelera non ulcisceris /*

⁴¹² With Hinds, we may call Ovid's Procne a 'reluctant precursor' to Seneca's Atreus. This Hindsian angle could have been more explicit in Van der Schuur (2013).

⁴¹³ Jakobi (1988), 159.

nisi uincis and *in medio est scelus / positum occupanti* (*Thy.* 203-04). Atreus hopes to commit a crime that will guarantee his immortality (*Thy.* 190-91): *Age, anime, fac quod nulla posteritas probet, / sed nulla taceat*. In Seneca's Ovidian example for Atreus' plotting scene, *Met.* 6.601-35, this element of competition and creativity is almost absent. We do find the desire to commit a crime unparalleled in its horror (cf. *sed si quid habes, quod vincere ferrum / possit. in omne nefas ego me, germana, parui* (*Met.* 6.612-13) and *magnum quodcumque parui; / quid sit, adhuc dubito* (*Met.* 6.618-19)). But unlike Atreus (*scelera non ulcisceris / nisi uincis* (*Thy.* 195-96)) Procne does not theorize about her crime and is not striving for immortality either.

The fact that Atreus is a more "rational" and deliberative criminal than Procne is also emphasized by Seneca's reception of the following passage (*Met.* 6.611-19):

*'non est lacrimis hoc ... agendum
sed ferro, sed si quid habes, quod uincere ferrum
possit. in omne nefas ego me, germana, parui:
aut ego, cum facibus regalia tecta cremabo,
artificem mediis immittam Terea flammis, 615
aut linguam atque oculos et quae tibi membra pudorem
abstulerunt ferro rapiam, aut per uulnera mille
sontem animam expellam. magnum quodcumque parui;
quid sit, adhuc dubito.'*

In her frenzy Procne considers several possibilities: *ferrum* and *quod uincere ferrum possit* are more specifically defined as burning down the palace and Tereus together, terrible mutilation of Tereus or bloody slaughter of Tereus. Seneca's reception of this passage is most interesting, as Procne's horrible options are turned into easily dismissible suggestions from the *satelles*. Firstly, *per uulnera mille / sontem animam expellam* (*Met.* 6.617-18) together with *ferro* (*Met.* 6.612) return in *Thy.* 245: *Ferro peremptus spiritum inimicum expuat*, the *satelles* answers. The suggestion is instantly dismissed by Atreus (*Thy.* 246-48): *De fine poenae loqueris; ego poenam uolo. / perimat tyrannus lenis: in regno meo / mors impetratur*. When the *satelles* dares mentioning *pietas* again (*Nulla te pietas mouet?* (*Thy.* 248)) Atreus banishes *pietas* from his house and calls upon the Furies to inspire him (*Thy.* 249-54, discussed above). After this, Procne's *ferrum* and *ignis* can be succinctly dismissed (*Thy.* 258): SAT. *Ferrum?* AT. *Parum est*. SAT. *Quid ignis?* AT. *Etiamnunc parum est*.

In a supreme case of intertextual irony, the reason that Seneca's Atreus can so easily dismiss Procne's terrifying alternatives is that Ovid's Procne is the one who ultimately came up with the supreme crime, one that the Fury and Atreus will only slightly surpass because they make it take place *maiore numero* (*Thy.* 56) and manipulate a father who devours his sons *avidus* (*Thy.* 277) and *gaudens* (*Thy.* 278).⁴¹⁴ Therefore Atreus can call upon Procne as a noble example in criminality rather than as the poor tortured woman that she also was in Ovid (*Thy.* 275-77): *animum Daulis inspira parens / sororque; causa est similis: assiste et manum / impelle nostram*. Tellingly, it is the most gruesome moment from Ovid's tale that next appears before Atreus' eyes as if in an intertextual vision (*Thy.* 281-83): *tota iam ante oculos meos / imago caedis errat, ingesta orbitas / in ora patris*, with which one should compare *Met.* 6.657-59: *sicut erat sparsis furiali caede capillis, / prosiluit Ityosque caput Philomela cruentum / misit in ora patris*.

Indeed, the only scene in which Procne directly preceeds Atreus is in her malevolent pleasure and wicked ingenuity during the dinner scene. In a manipulation of tradition worthy of Atreus, she invents an Athenian tradition to make sure her husband dines alone (*Met.* 6.648-49): *et patrii moris sacrum mentita, quod uni / fas sit adire uiro, comites famulosque remouit*. When Tereus asks where his son is (*Met.* 6.653-55), *dissimulare nequit crudelia gaudia Procne / iamque suae cupiens exsistere nuntia cladis / 'intus habes, quem poscis' ait*. In the parallel scene in *Thyestes*, this is emulated by Atreus with five double-edged lines (*Thy.* 976-80), but the fact remains that only at the end is Procne similar to Atreus. Procne ends where Atreus begins.

As I have discussed above, Seneca embeds his reception of the story of Procne within a larger thematic framework, mirroring Ovid's own linking of Tereus' and Procne's criminality to that of the Iron Age. We should also note that Ovid himself had allusively linked the outbreak of tragic madness and violence in the story of Procne to that in *Aeneid* 7,⁴¹⁵ thereby inviting Seneca to do the same.⁴¹⁶ Atreus' revenge forms part of the cycle of criminality set in motion by the Fury. In the prologue, Seneca had combined the infernal power of Vergil's Allecto with the unending moral chaos of Ovid's Iron Age. These combined forces fuel Atreus' revenge, helping him to bring about a crime that exceeds all bounds with a virtuosity and commitment that far surpasses

⁴¹⁴ Compare Winter (2014), 56 and 238.

⁴¹⁵ Discussed in detail by Gildenhard/Zissos (2007).

⁴¹⁶ Cf. Schiesaro (2003), 76.

Procne's or Medea's. But the goal of this fusion is not just to spawn a poem of *nefas* to surpass all others, but to actually bring down the epic framework in which it had been contained up to this point.

With his *Thyestes*, Seneca finally realizes a possibility that had been inherent in Augustan epic all along. Vergil had unleashed the “energy of Hell”,⁴¹⁷ Ovid the “Iron Age”, as a challenge to an increasingly problematic and morally ambiguous Jupiter. Although these forces challenging Jovian order could take over, and indeed fuel, large parts of the epic narrative, in the end they were always contained – be it through sheer Jovian force (the Dira and the compromise with Juno in the *Aeneid*, the Flood in the *Metamorphoses*⁴¹⁸) or through a form of narrative damage control (Ovid's Procne – whose tale is followed by the divine “comic relief”-story of Boreas and Orithyia (*Met.* 6.675-721)).⁴¹⁹ However, the very fact that Vergil and Ovid had to take these “containment measures” betrays their awareness of the power of the forces that they had unleashed upon their epics. Seneca is acutely aware of this, and shows that, when Allecto and the Iron Age are combined, these forces of chaos are too much for the forces of order to control.

In order to show this as clearly as possible, Seneca does away with both the ambiguous or downright problematic relationship between Heaven and Hell in the *Aeneid*, the *Metamorphoses* and his own *Hercules Furens* as well as with the splendid indifference of Ovid's gods in the story of Procne. In *Thyestes* the gods do care and would love to uphold moral order, but they are powerless and are actively expelled by the forces of chaos. As Atreus is seized with inspiration for his terrible crime, the palace begins to shake and Atreus rejoices at the apparent revulsion of the gods at the onset of his crime (*Thy.* 263-67):

*imo mugit e fundo solum,
tonat dies serenus ac totis domus
ut fracta tectis crepuit et moti lares
uertere uultum: fiat hoc, fiat nefas
quod, di, timetis.*

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⁴¹⁷ On the importance of the “Energy of Hell” in Latin epic, see Hardie (1993), 60-65.

⁴¹⁸ On the complexities of creation and destruction involved in this part of the *Metamorphoses*, see Wheeler (2000), 23-32. For more on the problem of Jupiter in Latin epic, see the following chapter.

⁴¹⁹ As observed by Segal (1994), 278-79. See again Newlands (1997) on Ovid's careful avoidance of providing a clear-cut picture of Medea and similar women.

And when he carries out the actual sacrifice, the Sun reverses its course in horror (*Thy.* 776-88). In their absence, it is Atreus who assumes the role of the gods in this play. He sacrifices his brother's children to his own *impiæ ... iræ* (*Thy.* 712-13), and when he has achieved his revenge he confidently claims divine status (*Thy.* 885-88):

Aequalis astris gradior et cunctos super 885
altum superbo uertice attingens polum.
nunc decora regni teneo, nunc solium patris.
*dimitto superos: summa uotorum attigi.*⁴²⁰

Following the flight of the Sun, Thyestes' cries for divine retribution remain unanswered. He first calls upon the Earth to swallow him and his brother (*Thy.* 1006-29), but as the Earth remains motionless, he concludes that the gods have fled (*Thy.* 1030-31): *immota, tellus, pondus ignauum iaces? / fugere superi*. In a later speech he calls upon Jupiter to avenge this crime with all his celestial might (*Thy.* 1077-87). But as the sky remains silent, he is forced to modify his request twice (*Thy.* 1087-89: *causa, ne dubites diu, / utriusque mala sit; si minus, mala sit mea: / me pete*, with *ne dubites diu* revealing the ongoing silence above). Finally, realizing that no god will answer his call, he asks Titan to at least persevere in his flight (*Thy.* 1092-96). Thyestes' powerless curses and calls for divine retribution⁴²¹ drive home Seneca's metagenetic point: his tragedy of *nefas* has caused the epic cosmos as his reader had known it to cease to function permanently.

Atreus and Oedipus

Of Seneca's reception of Ovid's Iron Age in *Thy.* 40-46 Tarrant has acutely observed: 'Seneca re-interprets Ovid's vision of moral collapse to fit a new context; instead of a common degeneracy, an infection spreading outward from a single source.'⁴²² And indeed, it is precisely this ever-expanding, all-conquering nature of the

⁴²⁰ On the double meaning of *dimitto superos* (*Thy.* 885) see Tarrant (1985) *ad loc.* See also *Thy.* 911-12: *o me caelitum excelsissimum, / regumque regem!* On Atreus' assumption of divine status see e.g. Hine (1981), 264-71 (who also argues that Tantalus too usurps the place of the gods); Tarrant (1985) *ad locc.*; Davis (1989), 433-34; Schiesaro (2003), 97; Mader (2003) and Volk (2006), 194-95.

⁴²¹ To which he clings until the very end, his last words in the play being (*Thy.* 1110-11): *Vindices aderunt dei; / his puniendum uota te tradunt mea*. On Thyestes' rhetorical and literal powerlessness in these final speeches and dialogues see Tarrant (1985) *ad locc.*, an important source for this paragraph. See also Hine (1981), 265 and Davis (1989), 434.

⁴²² Tarrant (1985) *ad loc.*

Fury's and Atreus' *maius nefas* that we have traced in the preceding section. Tarrant's observation is particularly helpful if one wants to define Seneca's positioning of his *Thyestes* in relation to his *Oedipus* – something I will briefly discuss here as a build-up to my discussion of *Phoenissae*. The brief section on civil war in *Thyestes*, following this section on Atreus and Oedipus, serves a similar connecting purpose.

That we should read *Thyestes* and *Oedipus* in relation to each other is evidenced by the fact that both plays have at their heart a hellish grove, a *locus horridus*,⁴²³ in which a climactic ritual takes place. In the case of *Oedipus*, as was discussed in the previous chapter, it was in this grove that the Theban ancestors, Laius in particular, were summoned by Tiresias. In *Thyestes*, Atreus sacrifices his brother's children in the sacred grove that is hidden in the Argive royal palace (*Thy.* 641-775). Seneca's description of the grove in Atreus' palace (*Thy.* 651-56) is remarkably similar to that of the grove outside Thebes (*Oed.* 530-47).⁴²⁴ In addition to this there is a stream with Styx-like water (*Thy.* 665-67, compare *Oed.* 545-47).⁴²⁵ The boundary between earth and Hell is permeable as spirits roam the earth (*Thy.* 668-79) in a way reminiscent of the blurring of the boundaries between these two realms as described by the chorus in *Oedipus* (*Oed.* 160-79).⁴²⁶

But the similarities with *Oedipus* in this passage do not stop there. Both Tarrant in his commentary and Hans Smolenaars in an article on Senecan intertextuality have drawn attention to Seneca's extensive use of Vergilian intertexts in his description of the palace, both Aeneas' *katabasis* and Vergil's description of Latinus' palace (*Aen.* 7.170-91).⁴²⁷ Both scholars have shown how Latinus' noble proto-Roman palace is transformed into a showcase of the typically perverted Tantalid pride in ancestral *nefas*, while Smolenaars has additionally argued that, through an interpretation of the allusions to *Aeneid* 6, Seneca's palace-description can be read as a *katabasis* with a criminal Tartarus as its final destination.⁴²⁸ What we have here then, just as in *Hercules Furens* and *Oedipus*, is yet another Senecan fusion of *Aeneid* 6 and 7, with yet a different purpose. This time the result of the fusion is not the deconstruction of the difference between Jupiter and Juno or the reversal of the teleological plot, but rather a

⁴²³ On the literary history of the *locus horridus* in Greek and Latin poetry see Smolenaars (1996), 58-60.

⁴²⁴ See Tarrant (1985) *ad locc.*; Töchterle (1994) *ad loc.*

⁴²⁵ Tarrant (1985) *ad loc.*; Töchterle (1994) *ad loc.*; Boyle (2011) *ad loc.*

⁴²⁶ Tarrant (1985) *ad loc.*; Töchterle (1994) *ad Oed.* 171-79; and Boyle (2011) *ad loc.*

⁴²⁷ Tarrant (1985) *ad locc.*; Smolenaars (1996). Smolenaars also draws attention to the cave of Cacus in *Aeneid* 8.

⁴²⁸ Smolenaars (1996), 60-62.

view of history – echoing the desires of the Fury uttered in the prologue – as an endless sequence of criminal competition.

Of course, as has been argued in the previous chapter, Seneca conceives of Theban history too as an endless sequence of ever greater criminality, and we have seen how his *Oedipus* too is a tragedy obsessed with the idea of *maius nefas*. But unlike Atreus, Oedipus does not relish the prospect of this *maius nefas*, but rather he fears it and tries to run from it, as is evidenced by his prologue in particular.⁴²⁹ Like Tantalus, he is doomed to infect the universe with the criminality from which he tries to escape.⁴³⁰ Another, related, difference between Atreus and Oedipus is the contrast that Seneca establishes between the “direction” of their criminality. Atreus’ language is ‘globalizing’ from the start,⁴³¹ and his crime results in an expulsion of the gods that is perceived by the chorus as a sign of the end of the cosmos (*Thy.* 789-884). This expansive, outwardbound nature of Tantalid criminality is absent in *Oedipus*, which is about a return to origins in all possible senses.

However, Oedipus does have something of Atreus’ “reasoning mania” in him at the end of the play, as he creatively devises a punishment befitting his crime.⁴³² And just as Atreus wishes that he could draw the fleeing gods back so that they would be witness to his triumph (*Thy.* 893-95), so Oedipus *uictor deos / conclamat omnis* (*Oed.* 974-75) after he has devised a punishment fitting his crime. *Vice versa*, some aspects of *Thyestes* can be compared to the “inward turn” of Hercules’ madness and Oedipus’ crime. Just as Juno had turned Hercules against himself in order to achieve her revenge, so Atreus uses *Ipsio Thyeste* (*Thy.* 259) to bring about his.⁴³³ And Oedipus’ incestuous return to the mother finds its counterpart in Thyestes’ children’s gruesome return to the father.⁴³⁴ Indeed, Schiesaro argues that a “regressive” view of history, endlessly returning to and surpassing ancient *nefas*, pervades all Senecan tragedy, including *Thyestes*.⁴³⁵

⁴²⁹ See the discussion on “The king and the plague” in the previous chapter.

⁴³⁰ As Boyle (2011) observes *ad Oed.* 80-81 both Tantalus (*Thy.* 68-83) and Oedipus are overwhelmed by a desire to return where they – think they – came from at the beginning of the play (Hell and Corinth respectively).

⁴³¹ Cf. Tarrant (1985) *ad Thy.* 180-81 *totus ... orbis*.

⁴³² On Oedipus’ “reasoning mania” in connection to that of Atreus and other Senecan protagonists, see Poe (1983), 153-54. On the fittingness of Oedipus’ self-punishment see especially Mader (1995).

⁴³³ Zwielerlein (1986b), 239-41.

⁴³⁴ On child-eating and the body of the father in *Thyestes* and related texts see Guastella (2001), 75-107.

⁴³⁵ Schiesaro (1997) and (2003), 177-220.

Seneca summarizes the similarities and differences between *Oedipus* and *Thyestes* with a paradoxical cross-reference. Whereas Phoebus punishes Oedipus for his criminal return to origins in the former play (*Oed.* 638 (Laius speaking): *egit ... in ortus semet*, and compare Phoebus' own oracular words in 238), in the latter play the Sun-god is himself driven back to his origins by Atreus' crime (*Thy.* 1035-36 (Thyestes speaking)): *Hoc est deos quod pudit, hoc egit diem / auersum in ortus*.

*Civil war on the horizon – Part I*⁴³⁶

In spite of his summoning of *Aeneid* 7 from the very outset of his *Thyestes*, there is one thing that Seneca manages to steer clear from in this tragedy of fraternal strife: civil war. To the characters of the play, this is by no means certain from the beginning. Atreus' first impulse is to summon all of his armies in his hunt for Thyestes (*Thy.* 180-89), and even after he has decided to avenge himself on his brother through deception he continues to speak of his plans as *bella* (*Thy.* 328). Following the apparent reconciliation between both brothers in the third act, the chorus breathes a sigh of relief, happy that Mycenae has managed to narrowly avoid civil war (*Thy.* 552-76):

*Ira cum magnis agitata causis
gratiam rupit cecinitque bellum,
cum leues frenis sonuere turmae,
fulsit hinc illinc agitatus ensis,* 555
*quem mouet crebro furibundus ictu
sanguinem Mauors cupiens recentem –
opprimit ferrum manibusque iunctis
ducit ad pacem Pietas negantes.
Otium tanto subitum e tumultu* 560
*quis deus fecit? modo per Mycenae
arma ciuilis crepuere belli:
pallidae natos tenuere matres;
uxor armato timuit marito,
cum manum inuitus sequeretur ensis,* 565
sordidus pacis uitio quietae;

⁴³⁶ The ideas in this section are further developed in Van der Schuur (2018), which devotes more attention to the theme of civil war. On the theme of civil war in this choral ode see Lowrie (2016).

ille labentes renouare muros,
hic situ quassas stabilire turres,
ferreis portas cohibere claustris
ille certabat, pauidusque pinnis 570
anxiae noctis uigil incubabat:
peior est bello timor ipse belli.
Iam minae saeui cecidere ferri,
iam silet murmur graue classicorum,
iam tacet stridor litui strepentis: 575
alta pax urbi reuocata laetae est.

Tarrant rightly observes: ‘The signs of imminent conflict correspond closely to the measures ordered by Atreus in his opening speech (180-90). From the Chorus’s perspective, however, they sound much more real than they did earlier: in fact the ode seems to presuppose that Mycenae was poised to repel an armed attack by Thyestes and his supporters.’⁴³⁷ The chorus’ description of these preparations for civil war is the closest that we will get to actual civil war in this play. It is also the closest we will get to a Senecan reworking of the pseudo-civil warfare of the second half of the *Aeneid* – a reworking that was announced in the prologue. After all, the Fury’s orders to Tantalus to unleash fraternal strife in the royal house (*Thy.* 83-86) had echoed the very attack on Turnus by Allecto that had helped set in motion the war in Latium in Vergil’s epic.⁴³⁸

A first possible allusion to the war in Latium may be found in lines 555-57, in which the chorus describes Mars’ insatiable desire for blood. Tarrant remarks that this is ‘a conventional picture of Mars’, and adduces the following parallel from the *Aeneid* (*Aen.* 12.332-33): *sanguineus Mauors clipeo increpat ... / bella mouens*.⁴³⁹ Conventional though this picture may be, the context from which it is derived is quite disturbing. Vergil’s description of Mars is part of a comparison between Turnus and the war god, trampling victims in the frenzy of battle (*Aen.* 12.331-40). This comparison forms part of the last great outbreak of unnecessary violence in the poem, after the sacred pact that was to inaugurate the duel between Aeneas and Turnus has been violated and Aeneas has been forced to retreat because of an arrow wound.

⁴³⁷ Tarrant (1985) *ad Thy.* 549-59. See also *passim* on this passage for parallels with Atreus’ first speech.

⁴³⁸ See my discussion in the first section of this chapter.

⁴³⁹ Tarrant (1985) *ad Thy.* 556-57.

A clearer allusion to Vergilian poetry can be found shortly afterwards, when the chorus asks *Otium tanto subitum e tumultu / quis deus fecit?* (Thy. 560-61). Several scholars have observed that this is an allusion to Tityrus' *deus nobis haec otia fecit* (Ecl. 1.6).⁴⁴⁰ Tarrant comments that Seneca, through his reference to the *arma civilis ... belli* (Thy. 562) directly afterwards, 'makes explicit a connection that remains below the surface of Vergil's poem.' Finally, Seneca returns to the *Aeneid* in the following line (Thy. 563): *pallidae natos tenuere matres*, which echoes Vergil's *trepidae matres pressere ad pectora natos* (Aen. 7.518), a line that follows Allecto's sounding of the pastoral war horn.⁴⁴¹

The two references to the *Aeneid*, of which the last one is particularly strong, both point to a moment at which the pact between two factions claiming rule over Latium is shattered. In the case of the allusion to *Aeneid* 7, the reference is more specifically to the breaking of a power-sharing deal. Although part of a passage describing the situation *before* the deal between Atreus and Thyestes, these allusions to broken pacts, following closely upon the sealing of a power-sharing deal on stage, cast an intertextual doubt upon the durability of this pact.⁴⁴² In addition to this, they help Seneca to emphasize once again how dangerously close the action in this tragedy of fraternal strife comes to actual civil war. However, at this stage of Tantalid history crime will still be contained within the *domus*, leaving actual *bella* to the next generation – or, perhaps, to another play.

A Theban "Energy of Hell"

If Seneca's *Phoenissae* does not ultimately reach its *telos* of civil war in the end, it is not for lack of trying. In the middle of the play as we have it, a messenger arrives at Mount Cithaeron to urge Oedipus to stop his sons from waging war against each other (*Phoen.* 320-27, 347-49). Oedipus responds by urging his sons to go on with the war

⁴⁴⁰ Picone (1984), 87; Tarrant (1985) *ad loc.* See Trinacty (2014), 55-57 and Lowrie (2016), 342-43 for further discussion.

⁴⁴¹ Parallel observed by Picone (1984), 87; Tarrant (1985) *ad loc.* Tarrant also adduces *impositos duris crepitare incudibus enses* (Geo. 2.540) and ... *bellum ... / crepitantia concutit arma* (Met. 1.143) as parallels for Seneca's phrase *arma civilis crepuere belli* (Thy. 562). The former parallel is from a passage describing the Saturnian Golden Age in Latium, where the sound of swords was not yet to be heard (Geo. 2.536-40), the latter from Ovid's description of the Iron Age. Although I am not too certain about the civil war connotations that Tarrant ascribes to these specific lines, the web of associations that Seneca creates through the reference to the *Eclogues* as well as these (admittedly somewhat tenuous) allusions is very intriguing. If all three of these Vergilian and Ovidian echoes are indeed heard, Seneca's Mycenae is walking a fine line between the Golden and the Iron Age, between peace and the very Roman threat of civil war.

⁴⁴² Compare Trinacty (2014), 55.

and commit the greatest Theban crimes yet (*Phoen.* 328-47, 350-62). He encourages them to tear the city down (*Phoen.* 340-47) and to go even beyond civil war (*Phoen.* 354-55): *non satis est adhuc / ciuile bellum: frater in fratrem ruat*.

How did Oedipus reach this point? The play opens with Oedipus and Antigone wandering over Mount Cithaeron. Oedipus is driven by an unrelenting desire for self-annihilation, while his guide Antigone, on the other hand, tries to keep him alive. This Oedipus seems to be the very character that had left Thebes at the end of the Senecan tragedy that carried his name. Gone, however, is the pride with which he had carried his self-inflicted punishment.⁴⁴³ Many lines spoken by Oedipus in the first half of the play refer back to the moment at which he had thought out his punishment in *Oedipus*, and suggest that what had seemed a perfect punishment at the time is not so perfect a punishment in hindsight. Oedipus laments that his hand has achieved too little (*Phoen.* 8: *quantulum hac egi manu!*) and desires a less open-ended punishment than the one he had originally imposed upon himself (*Phoen.* 46-48): *omitte poenas languidas longae morae / mortemque totam recipe; quid segnis traho / quod uiuo?*⁴⁴⁴

The opening of *Phoenissae* fully exploits the lack of closure that had characterized the final scenes of *Oedipus*: the protagonist's open-ended punishment had provided Seneca with the possibility to continue Oedipus' story. Atreus had continued where Procne and Medea had stopped. In the case of Oedipus this "picking up where we have left off" results in an obsessive return to his self-punishment, which does not seem like a very productive way forward. And indeed, most of the first half of *Phoenissae* is characterized by this typically Theban desire for a return to origins. Oedipus has returned to Cithaeron, *ut expirem senex / ubi debui infans* (*Phoen.* 32-33). At a certain point he expresses the desire to take the place of the Sphinx (*Phoen.* 118-39), a return to the origins of his identity of Oedipus the solver of riddles.⁴⁴⁵

Oedipus has also returned to the world of Ovidian Thebes, as he recounts the deaths of Actaeon, Pentheus, Ino and Palaemon (*Phoen.* 12-26).⁴⁴⁶ Featured too in this

⁴⁴³ On Seneca's treatment of Oedipus' pride in *Oedipus* and *Phoenissae* see Paul (1953), 18-19.

⁴⁴⁴ Hirschberg (1989) *ad Phoen.* 46-47 comments on the contrast between *Oed.* 949 *mors eligatur longa* and this passage: in *Oedipus* death is insufficient punishment and the long death of blinding the preferred option; in *Phoenissae* Oedipus has apparently changed his mind on the matter. See also Barchiesi (1988), 10 and 26-27. For further expressions of a desire to complete the work begun at the end of *Oedipus* see *Phoen.* 91-93, 154-65, 173-81. *Phoen.* 166-81 has long been considered a reworking of *Oed.* 935-70 and evidence that *Phoenissae* is the later play. See now Dingel (2009), 62-64 for discussion and references.

⁴⁴⁵ Cf. *Oed.* 92-109 and 216 on the solving of the Sphinx' riddle as a defining moment in Oedipus' career.

⁴⁴⁶ On the Ovidian coloring here see especially Jakobi (1988), 42 and Hinds (2011), 16-21 – the latter also on Seneca's more general indebtedness to Ovid in his treatment of landscape and myth in the first half of *Phoenissae*.

catalogue is the death of Dirce, dragged by the bull of Zethus (*Phoen.* 19-21). Zethus and his bull had been among the Theban shades summoned from the Underworld by Tiresias (*Oed.* 609-11),⁴⁴⁷ and only a few lines later Oedipus thinks that the shade of his father is attacking him (*Phoen.* 40-43): *sanguineum gerens / insigne regni Laius rapti furit; / en ecce, inanes manibus infestis petit / foditque uultus*. These lines refer to Laius' promise in the necromancy (*Oed.* 642-44): *Te, te cruenta sceptrum qui dextra geris, / te pater inultus urbe cum tota petam / et tecum Erinyn pronubam thalami traham*.⁴⁴⁸ Laius is a figment of Oedipus' imagination,⁴⁴⁹ but his appearance here is very relevant all the same. After all, Laius had also promised that he would not only haunt his son, as he does here, but also that he would become Thebes' very own Allecto – overturning the house and destroying the city with war (*Oed.* 645-46): *incestam domum / uertam et penates impio Marte obteram*. Laius' appearance is the first suggestion of the dramatic way forward instead of backward that Seneca will take in this tragedy.

Another sign that *Phoenissae* will not just be an incessant return to Oedipus' traumas, but that this cycle might actually be broken, is the presence of a Senecan intertext in the first half of the play, evoked from the very first lines. *Caeci parentis regimen et fessi unicum / patris leuamen, nata* (*Phoen.* 1-2), Oedipus addressing Antigone, does not only refer to the opening of Sophocles' *Oedipus Coloneus*.⁴⁵⁰ These lines are also the manifestation of a topos in Senecan tragedy, in which a character addresses another character as his/her/the royal house's last hope.⁴⁵¹ Of the other manifestations of this topos in Seneca's tragedies, the one found in his *Hercules Furens* is perhaps the closest and certainly the most relevant to *Phoenissae* (*HF.* 1250-52): *unicum lapsae domus / firmamen, unum lumen afflictis malis / temet reserua*. Not only the wording, but also the context from which the passage is derived is extremely relevant to the beginning of *Phoenissae*. The speaker in *Hercules Furens* is Amphitryon, urging his son not to take his own life but to keep on living. In both passages, the child is the only support of the father, and in both cases the father addresses the child.

⁴⁴⁷ See Hirschberg (1989) *ad Phoen.* 18-21 on Seneca's separation of Zethus from Amphion, following Propertius 3.15.41-42.

⁴⁴⁸ Hirschberg (1989) *ad loc.*

⁴⁴⁹ Hirschberg (1989) *ad Phoen.* 38-39; Frank (1995) *ad Phoen.* 43-44.

⁴⁵⁰ Barchiesi (1988), 26; Hirschberg (1989) *ad Phoen.* 1-3; Frank (1995) *ad loc.* On the interaction between Oedipus and Antigone see now also Ginsberg (2015), who discovers disturbing incestuous undercurrents through allusions to Latin elegy.

⁴⁵¹ Hirschberg (1989) *ad Phoen.* 1-3 and Frank (1995) *ad loc.* in particular for parallels within the tragic oeuvre.

However, Seneca also establishes a contrast between both plays: in *Phoenissae* the father, wanting to die, urges his daughter, who would want him to live on, to let him go (*Phoen.* 3): *desere infaustum patrem*. In *Hercules Furens* it is the son who wants to die, while the father wants him to stay alive (*HF.* 1252: *temet reserua*).

The first half of *Phoenissae* is basically the story of the struggle between Oedipus' desire to die and Antigone's desire that he lives on. It has been observed that this plot mirrors that of the final act of *Hercules Furens*, in which Amphitryon and Theseus try to stop Hercules from taking his own life.⁴⁵² In the end, the struggle between Antigone and Oedipus results in Oedipus' acceptance of life (*Phoen.* 319): *iubente te uel uiuet*, which echoes *HF.* 1316-17: *eat ad labores hic quoque Herculeos labor: / uiuamus*.⁴⁵³ But the reader will remember that this thwarted desire for death is not the only thing that Oedipus and Hercules have in common. The minds of both protagonists have also absorbed the hellish forces that had been unleashed against them. Saving Oedipus from self-destruction is not necessarily free from danger. And indeed, when the messenger arrives, right after Oedipus' submission to Antigone, to ask the former king to put a stop to the imminent war between Eteocles and Polynices, it becomes clear that Oedipus really has not changed at all.⁴⁵⁴ Rather, his self-destructive energy is no longer limited to himself, but now also includes his family and all of Thebes. Taking on the role of Laius,⁴⁵⁵ who had promised that he would do exactly that, Oedipus encourages his sons to destroy *domus* and *urbs* alike (*Phoen.* 345-46).

Several scholars have noted that, at this point of the play, the semi-dead Oedipus takes on the role of the ghost of Thyestes in *Agamemnon* and that of the ghost of Tantalus in *Thyestes*: Oedipus personifies and encourages the continuation of the sins of the fathers by the sons.⁴⁵⁶ Indeed, both Oedipus and Tantalus express the expectation that their offspring will surpass their ancestors. Tantalus expects the arrival of a *turba quae suum uincat genus* (*Thy.* 19), with which we may compare the following words uttered by Oedipus (*Phoen.* 334-37):⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵² Hirschberg (1989), 10 and *passim* with references. See also Wessels (2014), 106 and 110.

⁴⁵³ Opelt (1972), 277; Hirschberg (1989) and Frank (1995) *ad loc.*; Mader (2010), 304 n. 34 with further references.

⁴⁵⁴ A point exhaustively and convincingly argued by Mader (2010), 303-09. See also Li Causi (2009), 278-82 on Oedipus truly becoming himself and his sons' father as a consequence of Antigone's successful supplication.

⁴⁵⁵ Barchiesi (1988), 25.

⁴⁵⁶ Opelt (1972), 276; Barchiesi (1988), 24-25; Mader (2010), 308.

⁴⁵⁷ Observed by Hirschberg (1989) *ad loc.*

agite, o propago clara, generosam indolem
 probate factis, gloriam ac laudes meas 335
 superate et aliquid facite propter quod patrem
 adhuc iuuat uixisse.

One might argue that Seneca has even gone beyond the prologue of his *Thyestes* in the first half of his *Phoenissae*. In the former play, the sequence of crime was set in motion by Tantalus only after the Fury had forced him to do so. Tantalus' desire for flight, for a return to the Underworld, was conquered by the Fury's desire for the expansion of *nefas*. In *Phoenissae* both of these poles – flight from *nefas* and actively desiring its triumph – are contained within the psyche of Oedipus.⁴⁵⁸ We may doubt whether Oedipus actually curses his sons.⁴⁵⁹ Consequently we may argue that Oedipus' frenzied language does not actually poison his son's actions, but that they are genetically predetermined to commit intrafamilial crimes. This is what Oedipus himself believes (*Phoen.* 337-38): *facietis, scio: / sic estis orti*.⁴⁶⁰

In either case *Phoenissae* shows Seneca at his most radical in his handling of the epic "Energy of Hell" motif. In *Hercules Furens* Juno could act without Jovian intervention, in *Thyestes* the Fury could act without Juno. In *Phoenissae* even the Furies have become redundant. Oedipus himself becomes the infernal source of the *maius nefas* that is at hand, appropriately taking over prologue duties from Juno and the Fury as the civil war that had always eluded Senecan tragedy finally approaches.⁴⁶¹ In this respect too, *Phoenissae* forms the final frontier of Seneca's tragic oeuvre.⁴⁶²

Polynices returns home

The approaching conflict between Eteocles and Polynices gradually emerges as a theme from Oedipus' and Antigone's conversation.⁴⁶³ After several brief references to

⁴⁵⁸ Petrone (1997), 8 states that Oedipus succeeds Laius as the Fury haunting the Theban royal house.

⁴⁵⁹ Frank (1995) *ad Phoen.* 355.

⁴⁶⁰ See also *Phoen.* 272-74.

⁴⁶¹ On Oedipus as a Fury figure, see Gilder (1997), 97-98.

⁴⁶² In a different way this side of *Phoenissae*'s *non plus ultra*-character was already perceived by Paul (1953), 20-21, who comments on Oedipus' exclamation *Me fugio* (*Phoen.* 216): 'Ja, der tragische Raum scheint gesprengt zu sein, Götter, Schicksal, Fluch, Schuld und Sühne werden hinfällig. Der Mensch steht an einer äußersten Grenze, an der er nur sich sieht und gegenüber steht und sich flieht.'

⁴⁶³ On Seneca's gradual development of this theme, see Frank (1995), 6-7.

the brothers and their power struggle (*Phoen.* 53-58 (Antigone); 105-08 (Oedipus)), Oedipus provides a detailed description of the conflict, linking it to his own crimes (*Phoen.* 273-87). In the passage preceding this description Oedipus looks back on his criminal record, acknowledging how he has indeed committed the crimes that the oracle of Delphi had predicted (*Phoen.* 259-73). This passage also looks back on the prologue of *Oedipus*, strengthening the link between both plays and inserting Oedipus' sons in the rich tradition of Theban criminality. Having established Oedipus as the ultimate manifestation of Theban criminality in *Oedipus*, Seneca casts Polynices and Eteocles as his successors, who will outdo even their father in *nefas*. Unsurprisingly, *maius* is a word that comes easily to Oedipus in this part of the play.

Oedipus had opened with the protagonist's declaration that he had fled the kingdom of Corinth out of fear of Apollo's oracle (*Oed.* 15-23):

<i>infanda timeo: ne mea genitor manu</i>	15
<i>perimatur; hoc me Delphicae laurus monent,</i>	
<i>aliudque nobis maius indicunt scelus.</i>	
<i>est maius aliquod patre mactato nefas?</i>	
<i>pro misera pietas (eloqui fatum pudet),</i>	
<i>thalamus parentis Phoebus et diros toros</i>	20
<i>gnato minatur impia incestos face.</i>	
<i>hic me paternis expulit regnis timor,</i>	
<i>hoc ego penates profugus excessi meos[.]</i>	

In *Phoenissae* Oedipus is cynically aware of the fact that the oracle has been fulfilled (*Phoen.* 259-73):⁴⁶⁴

<i>praestiti Delphis fidem:</i>	
<i>genitorem adortus impia strauī nece.</i>	260
<i>hoc alia pietas redimet: occidi patrem,</i>	
<i>sed matrem amaui. proloqui hymenaeum pudet</i>	
<i>taedasque nostras? has quoque inuitum pati</i>	
<i>te coge poenas: ...</i>	
...	

⁴⁶⁴ On Oedipus' cynical tone see Hirschberg (1989) *ad locc.* and Frank (1995) *ad Phoen.* 243-62 and *ad locc.*

... in patrios toros
 tuli paterno sanguine aspersas manus
 scelerisque pretium maius accepi scelus.
 leue est paternum facinus: in thalamos meos
 deducta mater, ne parum sceleris foret,
 fecunda: nullum crimen hoc maius potest
 natura ferre.

270

After dutifully fulfilling the first part of the oracle's prophecy, Oedipus compensated for the killing of his father by loving his mother. The following question, *proloqui hymenaeum pudet / taedasque nostras?* (*Phoen.* 262-63) picks up on *eloqui fatum pudet* (*Oed.* 19).⁴⁶⁵ Oedipus has no shame of speaking his fate now, announcing his next crime as one that will guarantee his immortal fame (*Phoen.* 264-67). The *maius scelus* he had once feared now becomes the prize he receives for killing his father (*Phoen.* 269), and to make sure it would not be too small (*Phoen.* 271) Oedipus made his mother pregnant – surely *that* crime must be insurpassable (*Phoen.* 272-73).

But if it can be surpassed, Oedipus' sons will be the ones to do so, he predicts (*Phoen.* 274-75). After they have torn the pact between them asunder, Polynices marches against his brother Eteocles (*Phoen.* 279-84) and together they will bring destruction to Thebes worthy of Oedipus (*Phoen.* 285-87): *tela flammae uulnera / instant et istis si quod est maius malum, / ut esse genitos nemo non ex me sciat*. Oedipus rejects Antigone's request to intervene in this conflict, arguing that there is no curing his sons from their desire for power (*Phoen.* 298-302):

*certant in omne facinus et pensi nihil
 ducunt, ubi illos ira praecipites agit,
 nefasque nullum per nefas nati putant.*
*non patris illos tangit afflictus pudor,
 non patria: regno pectus attonitum furi.*

300

Seneca establishes a strong parallel with his *Thyestes* here: *certant in omne facinus* echoes *certetur omni scelere* (*Thy.* 25), the first words of the Fury's ecstatic description of the endless struggle for power within the house of Pelops.⁴⁶⁶ In his

⁴⁶⁵ Parallel observed by Hirschberg (1989) *ad loc.*

⁴⁶⁶ For a comparison between Oedipus in this passage and the prologue to *Thyestes*, see also Gilder (1997), 97-98.

second response to the messenger, Oedipus becomes positively Atrean in his desire for ever-increasing *nefas* (*Phoen.* 352-58)⁴⁶⁷ and the Pythia's prophecy *natis quoque bella relinques* (*Oed.* 237) is fulfilled:

*tumet animus ira, feruet immensum dolor,
maiusque quam quod casus et iuuenum furor
conatur aliquid cupio. non satis est adhuc
ciuile bellum: frater in fratrem ruat. 355
nec hoc sat est: quod debet, ut fiat nefas
de more nostro, quod meos deceat toros:
date arma matri*⁴⁶⁸ [.]

The actual power struggle between Eteocles and Polynices too is similar to that between Atreus and Thyestes.⁴⁶⁹ This is most obviously so in the final lines of the play as we have it. Jocasta is trying to negotiate between her two sons, and is particularly focused on convincing Polynices to abandon his attack on Thebes. One of her final arguments is that Eteocles will suffer the same terrible fate that all Theban kings have suffered and that Polynices should count him among Thebes' unfortunate kings (*Phoen.* 645-51). Eteocles responds quite confidently to this (*Phoen.* 651-53): *Numeret, est tanti mihi / cum regibus iacere. te turbae exulum / ascribo*. He then justifies tyrannical rule in general, saying (*Phoen.* 654-59):

*Regnare non uult, esse qui inuisus timet:
simul ista mundi conditor posuit deus, 655
odium atque regnum: regis hoc magni reor,
odia ipsa premere. multa dominantem uetat
amor suorum; plus in iratos licet.
qui uult amari, languida regnat manu.*

⁴⁶⁷ Compare *Thy.* 267-68: *Nescioquid animus maius et solito amplius / supraque fines moris humani tumet* with *Phoen.* 352-53, and compare Oedipus' *non satis est* and *nec hoc sat est* with *Thy.* 252-54; 256; 889-90 with Hirschberg (1989) *ad loc.*

⁴⁶⁸ For various interpretations of this line, ranging from murder to incest, see Frank (1995) *ad loc.* The manuscript reading *patri* is vigorously defended by Aricò (1997).

⁴⁶⁹ For a general overview in relation to Statius' *Thebaid* see Frings (1992).

The final words of the play go to Eteocles as well (*Phoen.* 664): *Imperia pretio quolibet constant bene*. These aphorisms on kingship are very similar to those uttered by Atreus in discussion with his *satelles*: compare *Laus uera et humili saepe contigit uiro, / non nisi potenti falsa. quod nolunt uelint* (*Thy.* 211-12) and *Vbicumque tantum honesta dominanti licent, / precario regnatur.* (*Thy.* 214-15) with *Phoen.* 654-58 and 657-58 respectively.⁴⁷⁰

In both *Phoenissae* and *Thyestes* rulers and would-be rulers speak of their exile. Before his return to power, Atreus had been an exile, as he himself states (*Thy.* 237): *per regna trepidus exul errauit mea*. These words refer to Oedipus' self-description as *a curis solutus exul, intrepidus uagans* (*Oed.* 13).⁴⁷¹ In fact, Oedipus' exile is distributed over both Argive brothers. Atreus calls Thyestes an *exul ... uagus* (*Thy.* 297)⁴⁷² and Thyestes mentions his *trepidi ... exilii* (*Thy.* 923).

Exile is a defining characteristic of Polynices as well, and his condition as an exile is referred to by both his parents before he himself appears (Oedipus: *Phoen.* 283; Jocasta: *Phoen.* 372-73). Standing on the walls of Thebes, Jocasta provides a full description of her exiled son's cause (*Phoen.* 372-79):

*ut exul errat natus et patria caret
profugusque regum auxilia Graiorum rogat.
gener est Adrasti, cuius imperio mare
quod scindit Isthmos; hic gentes suas* 375
*septemque secum regna ad auxilium trahit
generi – quid optem quidue decernam haut scio.
regnum reposcit: causa repetentis bona est,
mala sic petentis.*

As a Theban exile Polynices follows in the footsteps of his father Oedipus and his more remote ancestor Cadmus. In addition to this, just as was the case with Oedipus and Cadmus, his exile is cast in Aeneadic terms. The first hints of this can be discerned

⁴⁷⁰ The parallels are adduced by Frank (1995) *ad loc.* See also Mader (2010), 301-02 on similarities between Eteocles and Atreus in this scene, and Barchiesi's and Hirschberg's comments on the final lines of *Phoenissae* for parallels with other Senecan tragedies, including *Oedipus* and *Hercules Furens*.

⁴⁷¹ Note the difference in attitude between both men: Oedipus was *intrepidus* in exile, Atreus *trepidus*. Oedipus had fled his father's throne and accidentally stumbled upon another one (*Oed.* 14); Atreus' only desire was return to the throne of his father.

⁴⁷² Parallel mentioned by Zwierlein (1986b) *ad Oed.* 13. Töchterle (1994) *ad loc.* observes the references to *Thy.* 237 and 297.

in lines 373-74 – not just through the programmatic word *profugus*, but also through the use of the word *gener* (*Phoen.* 374, 377). The motif of Aeneas coming from overseas to become Latinus' *gener* is a prominent motif in the seventh book of the *Aeneid*.⁴⁷³ However, Thebes once again turns the *Aeneid* on its head. Aeneas comes to Latium to find a *socer* and settle there. Latium is his final destination. To Polynices, Argos and his *socer* Adrastus are merely a stop on the way back to Thebes – the place where he came from is also his home and final destination. Seneca has again tendentiously transformed the journey of Aeneas, a homecoming ultimately looking towards the future, into Thebes' endless return to the past.⁴⁷⁴ Polynices' journey appropriates Aeneas' in a characteristically Theban way.⁴⁷⁵

This Aeneadic portrayal of Polynices becomes more fully fleshed out in the discussion between Jocasta, Polynices and Eteocles (*Phoen.* 443-664). When they first meet, Jocasta calls Polynices *qui tot labores totque perpessus mala / longo parentem fessus exilio uides* (*Phoen.* 465-66).⁴⁷⁶ This calls to mind the opening lines of the *Aeneid*, Vergil laments that Juno forced Aeneas *tot uoluere casus / ... tot adire labores* (*Aen.* 1.9-10). Allusion to the *Aeneid* continues when Jocasta again describes her son (*Phoen.* 502-05):

⁴⁷³ Forms of the word *gener* referring to Aeneas and the Trojans occur in *Aen.* 7.97 (Faunus' prediction to Latinus); 256 (Latinus considering this prophecy); 270 (Latinus telling the Trojans of the omens predicting their arrival); 317 (Juno predicting the terrible price at which the marriage between Aeneas and Lavinia will come, shortly after having called the Trojans *profugis* (*Aen.* 7.300)); 367 (Amata speaking to Latinus).

⁴⁷⁴ On the problematic nature of Polynices' return to his mother see now Ginsberg (2018). Petrone (1988-89, *non uidi*) has connected Seneca's use of the terms *socer* and *gener* in his *Phoenissae* to Caesar and Pompey. Li Causi (2009), 270-73 finds this approach intriguing but is also cautious. I will limit myself to Seneca's engagement with the *Aeneid* (where these terms of course are also applied to Caesar and Pompey in *Aen.* 6.830-31), but see Braund (2006) on speaking of Thebes as a way of thinking about Rome in Latin literature. See also La Penna (1994) on the connections between descriptions and depictions of Jocasta's intervention and Roman legends about women preventing civil strife or something comparable (the interventions of the Sabine women and Veturia in particular).

⁴⁷⁵ Interesting too in this context is a parallel observed by Pyplacz (2009), 56-58 between *Aen.* 4.632-47, 645-47 in particular, and *Phoen.* 103-14 (Dido's and Oedipus' suicide plans respectively), partially observed by Hirschberg (1989) *ad Phoen.* 111, adducing *Aen.* 4.645-46 as a parallel for *altos ... rogos*. If we combine this with the parallel observed by Hirschberg (1989) and Frank (1995) *ad loc.* between *Phoen.* 142-43 and *Aen.* 4.695, it becomes likely that in *Phoenissae* Seneca continues an intertextual strategy that he had employed in *Oedipus*: casting Thebes as Vergil's anti-city Carthage, while simultaneously comparing the fate of Thebes' kings in exile with that of Aeneas. Perhaps it is not too fanciful to read Oedipus' last words (*Phoen.* 358-62: *nemo me ex his eruat / siluis: latebo rupis exesae cauo / aut saepe densa corpus abstrusum tegam. / hinc aucupabor uerba rumoris uagi / et saepe fratrum bella, quod possum, audiam.*) as an echo of the last words that Dido speaks directly to Aeneas (*Aen.* 4.387: *audiam et haec Manis ueniet mihi fama sub imos.*)

⁴⁷⁶ Frank (1995) *ad loc.* adduces *Aen.* 2.283-85, Aeneas addressing the shade of Hector, as a parallel.

te profugum solo
patrio penates regis externi tegunt,
te maria tot diuersa, tot casus uagum
egere.

505

The use of *profugum* (*Phoen.* 502) gains allusive weight through *maria tot diuersa, tot casus* (*Phoen.* 504), calling to mind *tot uoluere casus* / ... *tot adire labores* again (*Aen.* 1.9-10).⁴⁷⁷ The mere fact that Polynices has suffered at sea at all, when there is no need for it geographically speaking, betrays Vergilian influence (cf. e.g. *Aen.* 1.3: *multum ille et terris iactatus et alto*).⁴⁷⁸ Finally, *externi* (*Phoen.* 503) is relevant because of the endless labeling of Aeneas as *externus* and the Trojans as *externi* in the seventh book of the *Aeneid*.⁴⁷⁹ The use of Aeneadic terminology such as *socer*, *gener* and *externus* is continued in *Phoen.* 508-14, also spoken by Jocasta.

Being a tragedy about fraternal strife that will inevitably culminate in a *maius nefas*, *Phoenissae* is very similar to *Thyestes*. However, Seneca devotes as much effort to establishing the similarity as to establishing the essential difference between both plays. I have already discussed the fundamental contrast between Seneca's *Thyestes* and his *Oedipus*: the former is a tragedy of expansive, the latter one of regressive and inward-looking criminality. *Phoenissae* can be compared to *Oedipus* in the fundamentally Theban nature of its crime.

Two strong parallels between *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae* further emphasize the difference between both plays. At the beginning of the latter tragedy, Oedipus commands his *animus* (*Phoen.* 44): *Tandem spiritum inimicum expue*. The commentaries note the similar wording of Atreus' *satelles*, who proposes that Thyestes *ferro peremptus spiritum inimicum expuat* (*Thy.* 245).⁴⁸⁰ Significantly, Atreus' *satelles* is co-plotting the murder of a rival, whereas Oedipus is longing for self-destruction. Another interesting parallel can be found in the middle of both plays. As he arrives upon the stage, the messenger in *Thyestes* expresses the desire to escape from Argos (*Thy.* 623-25): *Quis*

⁴⁷⁷ See Zwierlein (1986b), Hirschberg (1989) and Frank (1995) *ad loc.* for further parallels.

⁴⁷⁸ Zwierlein (1986b) and Barchiesi (1988) *ad loc.* observe this parallel (as well as other parallels with the *Aeneid*). *Phoen.* 254 has been the victim of emendation for precisely the geographical reason – for discussion and overviews of the debate, see the references in the previous note.

⁴⁷⁹ Forms of *externus* occur in *Aen.* 7.68; 97; 255; 270; 267; 367; 370; 424; almost all of these appearances of the word refer to Aeneas, the Trojans, or their homeland. The Sibyl had prepared Vergil's readers for this pattern with *causa mali tanti coniunx iterum hospita Teucris / externique iterum thalami* (*Aen.* 6.93-94). These lines are adduced by Frank (1995) *ad loc.* as a parallel to *Phoen.* 503.

⁴⁸⁰ Tarrant (1985) *ad Thy.* 245; Hirschberg (1989) and Frank (1995) *ad loc.*

me per auras turbo praecipitem uehet / atraque nube inuoluet, ut tantum nefas / eripiat oculis? Jocasta on the other hand, watching her sons' armies approaching, desires to be flung right between them (*Phoen.* 420-21): *Quis me procellae turbine insanae uehens / uolucer per auras uentus aetherias aget?*⁴⁸¹ Whereas evil gradually spreads from one point to conquer the entire cosmos in *Thyestes*, everything in *Phoenissae* is governed by a centripetal force. In the case of Oedipus and Polynices this takes the shape of a return to origins and self-destruction, and all Jocasta can do to prevent Polynices' and Eteocles' mutual self-destruction is to jump between them, risking her own annihilation – as she herself points out in her first speech to her sons (*Phoen.* 443-58).

*Civil war on the horizon – Part II*⁴⁸²

Although the reader is aware of the mythologically predetermined outcome of the conflict between Eteocles and Polynices, in Seneca's tragedy as it has come down to us this outcome is never realized. Rather, the fear of *bellum civile* that the chorus of *Thyestes* had expressed is raised to fever pitch in *Phoenissae*. I have already mentioned Oedipus' use of the term (*Phoen.* 355), and discussed his desire for the *maius nefas* that it should bring about. Antigone, the messenger and a *satelles* all urge Oedipus and Jocasta to prevent the disaster. Antigone asks her father to avert the *impii belli minas* (*Phoen.* 290), the messenger tells Oedipus that Thebes, *pauentes arma fraterna* (*Phoen.* 321), calls on him to intervene (*Phoen.* 327): *succurre, prohibe pariter et bellum et scelus*. And with good reason too (*Phoen.* 323): *non sunt minae, iam propius accessit malum*. But Oedipus wants the war to go on (*Phoen.* 328-47; 350-62).

ferte arma (*Phoen.* 340), Oedipus encourages his sons. Perhaps we should translate these words as "Bring on the epic!" Never has Senecan tragedy been this close to a return to epic, the genre to which it continuously responds and which is now deconstructed, now assaulted. Or more precisely, never has Senecan tragedy been this close to returning *maius nefas* to its rival genre. When the scene shifts to the city walls and the *satelles* addresses Jocasta, war is imminent (*Phoen.* 388-93):

⁴⁸¹ Also echoing *Thy.* 636-37: *ferte me insanae procul, / illo, procellae ...* Parallel and contrast observed by Hirschberg (1989) *ad loc.* See also Tarrant (1985) *ad Thy.* 623; Zwierlein (1986b) *ad Phoen.* 420 and Frank (1995) *ad locc.* Both parallels are part of Dingel's argument that *Thyestes* precedes *Phoenissae* (Dingel (2009), 115-21).

⁴⁸² The ideas in this section are further developed in Van der Schuur (2018), which devotes more attention to the theme of civil war.

saeua nudatis stetit

acies in armis; aera iam bellum cient
aquilaque pugnam signifer mota uocat. 390
septena reges bella dispositi parant,
animo pari Cadmea progenies subit,
cursu citato miles hinc atque hinc ruit.

Only Jocasta's intervention can stop or at least delay the war, the *satelles* and Antigone point out. *impia arma matris oppositu impedi* (*Phoen.* 402) the *satelles* says; *aut solue bellum ... aut prima excipe* (*Phoen.* 406) Antigone advises her mother. Jocasta decides to intervene (*Phoen.* 407-08): *Ibo, ibo et armis obuium opponam caput, / stabo inter arma.*

The word *arma* is omnipresent in the short scene featuring Jocasta, the *satelles* and Antigone, and it also opens the final scene of the play (*Phoen.* 443): *In me arma et ignes uertite*, Jocasta begins addressing her sons. Seneca's emphasis on *arma* at this point is no accident. I have already discussed some parallels with the *Aeneid* in the portrayal of Polynices in *Phoenissae*, and Vergilian coloring has been discerned in the language used by the *satelles* (*Phoen.* 387-402).⁴⁸³ But the most intriguing allusions to Vergil appear in the *satelles*' description of Jocasta's flight from the city walls down to the battlefield.

After Jocasta herself has wondered what storm, Sphinx, Stymphalian bird or harpy will carry her down (*Phoen.* 420-26), the messenger observes (*Phoen.* 427-34):

Vadit furenti similis aut etiam furit.
sagitta qualis Parthica uelox manu
excussa fertur, qualis insano ratis
premente uento rapitur aut qualis cadit 430
delapsa caelo stella, cum stringens polum
rectam citatis ignibus rumpit uiam,
attonita cursu fugit et binas statim
diduxit acies.

⁴⁸³ Barchiesi (1988) *ad loc.* and Hirschberg (1989) *ad locc.*

This frenzied intervention of a woman in the masculine public sphere is very similar to that of Amata in the *Aeneid*.⁴⁸⁴ Paradoxically, Jocasta's attempt at preventing war and *maius nefas* is reminiscent of the madness of Amata, a queen herself responsible for a *maius nefas* and one that had been instrumental in bringing about Vergil's *horrida bella*.

But Seneca goes even further than this. The *satelles* compares Jocasta to a Parthian arrow. Several commentators compare the *satelles*' words to Vergil's description of the flight of the Dira (*Aen.* 12.856-60):

*non secus ac neruo per nubem impulsa sagitta,
armatam saeui Parthus quam felle ueneni,
Parthus siue Cydon, telum immedicabile, torsit,
stridens et celeris incognita transilit umbras:
talis se sata Nocte tulit terrasque petiuit.*

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This is a most disturbing allusion. The intervention that should put an end to the Theban civil war is compared to the intervention that had removed Juturna, the last instrument that Juno had used to delay Turnus' doom, and finally brought about the duel between Aeneas and Turnus. Jocasta, who calls herself *belli moram* (*Phoen.* 458), is compared to the Dira that put an end to all *belli mora*.⁴⁸⁵ More importantly we should note that for Seneca apparently not just *Aeneid* 7, but also *Aeneid* 12 is at stake: we can only guess how he would have reworked the final duel between Aeneas and Turnus in his own treatment of the final duel between Polynices and Eteocles.

Several scholars have pointed out that Seneca presents Jocasta's intervention as doomed by its very nature, an interpretation that was already hinted at in the two preceding paragraphs. Ominous creatures are associated with Jocasta's flight,⁴⁸⁶ and it has also been argued that, because of the confused family relationships in the house of Oedipus, Jocasta cannot assume a position of parental authority.⁴⁸⁷ However, a few scholars have argued that Polynices does in fact give up his claim to the throne and

⁴⁸⁴ Barchiesi (1988) *ad Phoen.* 427.

⁴⁸⁵ On Seneca's use of *belli mora* here see Barchiesi (1988) *ad loc.*

⁴⁸⁶ Barchiesi (1988) *ad Phoen.* 427.

⁴⁸⁷ Li Causi (2009), 285-88, who also points to Jocasta's awareness of her "complicitness" in Theban criminality by giving birth to Eteocles and Polynices (*Phoen.* 367-69) and her realization (*Phoen.* 380-82): *nil possum pie / pietate salua facere: quodcumque alteri / optabo nato fiet alterius malo*. See now also Ginsberg (2018).

that *Phoenissae* actually ends the way it has come down to us. This ending is achieved by assigning, with Grotius, the words *Regna, dummodo inuisus tuis* (*Phoen.* 653) to Polynices rather than Jocasta.⁴⁸⁸ According to Umberto Moricca this supposed radical transformation of the myth was inspired by Livy's story of Coriolanus, in which Coriolanus' mother Veturia convinced her son not to attack Rome (*AUC.* 2.39-40).⁴⁸⁹ There are good reasons to assign *Phoen.* 653 to Jocasta, especially the improbability of so radical a divergence from the legend on Seneca's part⁴⁹⁰ and the fact that the line fits Jocasta's line of argument very well.⁴⁹¹ Even so, the idea that *Phoenissae* is a finished tragedy has remained attractive. Gottfried Mader keeps the possibility of completeness open and offers the intriguing suggestion that Eteocles' unqualified acceptance of absolute power in Thebes and the self-destruction that it brings with it is in itself a fitting fulfillment of Oedipus' wishes.⁴⁹²

The reader will have noticed that during the course of this chapter I have assumed that the play is unfinished, and it is true that the constant references to the approaching battle between Eteocles and Polynices are so dominant that this battle would form the only logical dramatic climax of the play.⁴⁹³ However, the fact remains that the play stops, finished or not, before we have reached this point. Theoretically, it is still possible that Jocasta will succeed and that Polynices will indeed turn around and go home.

This open-endedness is fitting of a play that may very well be the last one that Seneca has written. But it is also fitting of Senecan tragedy in general. Tarrant has argued that the fact that the conflict remains unresolved is characteristic of Senecan tragedy, and that this need not imply that the play is unfinished. He adduces the endings of *Medea*, *Agamemnon* and *Thyestes* as parallels.⁴⁹⁴ Although Marica Frank rightly argues that there is a difference between fundamental unresolvedness and the

⁴⁸⁸ Moricca (1917), 481-93. Paul (1953), 68 also assigns this line to Polynices but does not consider the play complete (69-75).

⁴⁸⁹ Moricca (1917), 491-93 – challenged by Frank (1995), 11 and Li Causi (2009), 285-88. See however La Penna (1994) on the connections between Jocasta's and Veturia's intervention, which is probably more relevant to the Senecan passage than Frank would allow it to be.

⁴⁹⁰ Frank (1995), 11-12 and *ad loc.*

⁴⁹¹ Barchiesi (1988) *ad Phoen.* 651-64.

⁴⁹² Mader (2010), 310. Mazzoli (2002), 158-59 too considers the play virtually complete. See also Petrone (1997), 8 and 18-19. For further discussion, especially on the problematic textual tradition of the final line, see Van der Schuur (2018), 132 n. 51.

⁴⁹³ Frank (1995), 12, with reference to Pratt (1939), 66. See Opelt (1972), 284 and Frank (1995), 12 for possible endings.

⁴⁹⁴ Tarrant (1978), 229-30 with n. 88.

threat of a continuation of violence uttered at the end of the play,⁴⁹⁵ Tarrant's point merits further thought. In the two preceding chapters I have already discussed the closural problems pervading the final scenes of *Hercules Furens* and *Oedipus*. My line of thinking there was indebted to Schiesaro's work on *Thyestes*, the other tragedy discussed in this chapter. *Thyestes* too is fundamentally open-ended. At the end of the play Atreus' revenge plot has succeeded, and his victory is complete. However, it is only Atreus' revenge plot that has achieved complete closure, not the strife between the two brothers, nor the cycle of revenge set in motion by the Fury.⁴⁹⁶

In the end then, Seneca's tragic corpus leaves the reader with an intriguing paradox. *Hercules* and *Oedipus* are sophisticated and radical deconstructions of some of the fundamental structures of Augustan epic. *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae* go beyond even these plays: either by letting tragic crime within the house overturn the entire epic cosmos, or by transforming the second half of the *Aeneid* into Theban civil war and – prospectively – mutual fratricide. In *Thyestes* the gods are driven out, in *Phoenissae* they are dispensed with altogether. All four of these tragedies pose a radical challenge to the genre of epic, so radical indeed that there seems to be no going beyond them. And yet, all of these tragedies remain curiously open-ended. And although they all manage to bring about the dominion of Hell on earth, the civil war at which they so often hint in the end always eludes them: even in *Phoenissae*, which presents itself as the tragedy about civil war par excellence, the actual poetic treatment of civil war remains outside Seneca's grasp, even though he had never been closer to incorporating it in his plays. The very open-endedness of the Senecan tragic corpus implied that the road back to epic was still open for those wanting to take up Seneca's challenge, even though this tragedian had done all he could to make it as narrow as possible.

⁴⁹⁵ Frank (1995), 11.

⁴⁹⁶ Schiesaro (2003), 65-69. On the tension between Atreus' triumph and the threat of further violence (with an emphasis on the former) in the final scene see also Picone (1984), 121-29.

PART II

STATIUS

CHAPTER 4

BEGINNING FROM SENECA

The impact on epic

The first epic poet to have absorbed the influence of Senecan tragedy – that we know of, at least – is Seneca’s nephew Lucan in his poem on the civil war between Caesar and Pompey, the *Bellum Ciuile*. Lucan wrote his epic during the first half of the 60s and – like his uncle – was forced to take his own life following the collapse of the Pisonian conspiracy against Nero in 65.⁴⁹⁷ If we assume that *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae* were indeed written in the final years of Seneca’s life, and the other six tragedies at an earlier, maybe even far earlier date, we may imagine Lucan as composing his epic when the major themes and structures of his uncle’s tragic project were already quite clear and familiar, but were now taking on their most radical shape.⁴⁹⁸

It has long been established that Lucan fashioned his epic as a response to Vergil’s epic, or – more specifically – an anti-*Aeneid*.⁴⁹⁹ Lucan discredits Vergil’s teleological narrative, and turns it on its head: the goal of history is not peace and Augustus, but civil war and Caesar.⁵⁰⁰ Following the turn of the century, scholarship on Lucan has put more emphasis on Lucan’s intertextual auxiliary forces – most notably Ovid.⁵⁰¹ But there are other intertexts involved as well: like Vergil and Ovid, Lucan made his reception of Greek and Latin tragedy an integral part of his epic, as has been extensively argued by Ambühl.⁵⁰²

One of the intertextual strategies that Lucan employs time and again throughout his epic, and especially in the seventh book, is the use – through similes and allusions – of Thebes as a tragic prefiguration of and parallel to Rome’s fate of self-destruction through internal strife.⁵⁰³ A prominent place is also occupied by the fraternal strife between Atreus and Thyestes. Lucan includes references to the cosmic repercussions

⁴⁹⁷ On Lucan’s life and issues of dating Lucan’s works see Fantham (2011), with further references.

⁴⁹⁸ The *Bellum Ciuile* opens with strong verbal parallels to Seneca’s *Phoenissae*, as is discussed by Conte (2010), 53–55. Most critics tend to read these parallels as Lucan responding to Seneca, but Ambühl (2015), 184 n. 15 is right not to discount the possibility that both poems were composed simultaneously.

⁴⁹⁹ Thoroughly argued by Narducci (1979), but a position taken by many other scholars as well. See more recently Casali (2011).

⁵⁰⁰ See e.g. Casali (2011) on Lucan’s exploitation of tensions already inherent in Vergil’s text.

⁵⁰¹ See Wheeler (2002) and Keith (2011).

⁵⁰² Ambühl (2015) – a study as all-encompassing as Lucan’s poem.

⁵⁰³ See Ambühl (2015), 64–135 on mythological similes and exempla in Lucan’s epic (prominently featuring Thebes); and Ambühl (2015), 179–288 on tragic Thebes as a major intertext. Troy and the Argonauts are the two other major systems of tragic myth discussed by Ambühl – no less significant than the references to Thebes, but less relevant to my purposes.

of Thyestes' godless meal at two crucial moments: the eclipse marking the outbreak of civil war is explicitly compared to the flight of the Sun in the tale of Atreus and Thyestes (*BC.* 1.540-44); the Sun's reluctance to rise over the fields of Pharsalus evokes this motif implicitly (*BC.* 7.177-78 and 198-200); and it culminates in the poet's cry of indignation that Jupiter had chosen to darken the skies over Thyestes' meal, but chooses not to intervene at the climax of this far more gruesome manifestation of fraternal strife (*BC.* 7.451-54). It is hard not to imagine Lucan responding directly to his uncle's *Thyestes* in these passages.⁵⁰⁴ Finally, we should mention Lucan's description of a Fury haunting a panic-stricken Rome, which the poet explicitly compares with – among others – the Fury haunting Hercules in his madness (*BC.* 1.572-77).⁵⁰⁵ This admittedly very brief overview shows that the Senecan tragic corpus, and particularly its Theban branch, exerted a significant amount of influence on Lucan as he conceived his epic project.⁵⁰⁶ It also shows that Lucan shares Seneca's interest in challenging Vergil's teleology and divine framework.⁵⁰⁷ Lucan does not betray any poetic anxiety in his reception of the work of his uncle, quite the contrary: without hesitation, he employs it to further his own aims.

Seneca and Lucan met their ends in 65; the Julio-Claudian dynasty followed shortly after, with Nero's suicide in 68. After a year of horrifying civil war, the Empire found renewed stability under the Flavian dynasty.⁵⁰⁸ Much of the literature written under the Flavians is concerned not just with celebrating the new dynasty, but also with coming to terms with the civil war that brought it to power.⁵⁰⁹ We may assume that this challenge was most acutely felt in the epic genre, which had witnessed Lucan's literary civil war just a few years before the outbreak of an actual civil war. Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* is probably the first epic to be completed after 69.⁵¹⁰ The *Argonautica* is the most elusive ancient Latin epic to have come down to us. It has been hailed as an

⁵⁰⁴ For discussion of the tragic connotations of these and other passages see Narducci (2002), 51-74 – who stresses the Senecan intertext – and Ambühl (2015), 73-78.

⁵⁰⁵ Discussed by Ambühl (2015), 84.

⁵⁰⁶ Of course, Lucan's reception of Seneca's Theban tragedies is embedded in his broader reception of Theban myth, in which Greek tragedy occupies a place that is just as important as Senecan tragedy.

⁵⁰⁷ On Lucan's gradual expulsion of the gods, see Feeney (1991), 250-301.

⁵⁰⁸ On the Flavian age, also in relation to the literature it produced, see e.g. the essays in Boyle/Dominik (2003).

⁵⁰⁹ On this topic, see now the essays collected in Ginsberg/Krasne (2018), with further references.

⁵¹⁰ On the date of the *Argonautica* see Stover (2012), 7-26, who argues for composition during Vespasian's reign and shortly thereafter.

epic of restoration and recuperation⁵¹¹ following Lucan's destructive experiment;⁵¹² an epic of poetic and cosmic destruction;⁵¹³ a critique of Vespasian's ascension through civil war;⁵¹⁴ and several combinations and variations of the above.⁵¹⁵ But one thing that all Valerian scholarship has in common is an awareness of Valerius' highly self-conscious position in literary history, as is manifested by his extremely subtle allusive technique.⁵¹⁶

Like Valerius and Seneca, but unlike Lucan, Statius chooses myth to treat very real historical Roman themes like civil war.⁵¹⁷ In this way, Lucan's poetry of civil war and the events of 69 can be approached by Valerius and Statius from a distance, through the lens of myth.⁵¹⁸ This strategy may create a "safe" distance from Lucan for Valerius and Statius; but among the poetic consequences of a return to mythological⁵¹⁹ epic is the need to respond directly to Seneca's challenge to mythological epic in his mythological tragedies. Valerius, whose *Argonautica* has as its implied *telos*⁵²⁰ both the tragic crimes of Medea and the epic deification of the Argo *and* Hercules, had to respond to Seneca's treatment of both Hercules and Medea, and made this response to Seneca an integral part of his epic.⁵²¹ In the following chapters, I will trace Statius' comparably self-aware response to Seneca's *Hercules Furens*, *Oedipus*, *Thyestes*

⁵¹¹ Most notably in Hershkowitz (1998b).

⁵¹² Stover (2012) makes the case for the *Argonautica* as an epic of restoration, to be compared with Vespasian's politics of restoration. For a different take on Valerius and Lucan, see Zissos (2004).

⁵¹³ Krasne (2014) and (2018).

⁵¹⁴ Penwill (2018).

⁵¹⁵ See e.g. Buckley (2010) and (2014) and the persuasive argument made by Cowan (2014).

⁵¹⁶ On Valerian intertextuality, the work of Zissos is fundamental, particularly Zissos (1999). Valerius' allusive metapoetics are situated in the Greek and Latin poetic tradition about Hercules' companion Hylas in Heerink (2015). See also Van der Schuur (2014) and Nelis (2020).

⁵¹⁷ Compare Franchet d'Espérey (1999), 21: 'Stace a choisi le mythe, comme Sénèque dans ses tragédies.'

⁵¹⁸ See – again – the essays in Ginsberg/Krasne (2018) for an overview of the various Flavian responses to the theme of civil war. On Statius, see also Ahl (1986); Henderson (1991); McAuley (2016), 297–344.

⁵¹⁹ Or "Vergilian" epic. On the *Thebaid* as a "Vergilian" epic, see e.g. Franchet d'Espérey (1999) and Criado (2000). The *Thebaid* is read as a radical reworking of and running commentary on the *Aeneid* by Ganiban (2007).

⁵²⁰ The epic stops shortly before the death of Absyrtus. On the question whether the *Argonautica* is finished or unfinished, see most recently Penwill (2018).

⁵²¹ Buckley (2014), with further references. See also Davis (2016), 61–65 on *Thyestes* and *Medea* in Valerius' *Argonautica*. For a critique of the notion that Medea's crimes form the *telos* of Valerius' *Argonautica*, see Zissos (2012), who emphasizes the references in the *Argonautica* to Medea's eventual return to Colchis and her restoration of Aeetes as king.

and *Phoenissae* throughout the *Thebaid*, and show that some of the most important themes of the *Thebaid* – the regressive nature of Theban history, the flight of the gods, the prospect of deification – are best understood through a Senecan lens, as Statius offers an epic reenactment of Seneca’s tragic experiments.

The Thebaid and tragedy

An essential part of Statius’ self-conscious response to the poetic tradition is his all-embracing allusiveness. Hans Smolenaars’ commentary on *Thebaid* 7 in particular brings out this defining quality of Statian intertextuality,⁵²² and studies like Helen Lovatt’s *Epic Games* rightly take a host of intertexts into consideration. In 2007, two major studies appeared (Randall Ganiban’s *Statius and Virgil* and Charles McNelis’ *Statius’ Thebaid and the Poetics of Civil War*) that both take Statius’ relationship to his poetic predecessors as their focus and both trace metapoetic plots running through the epic. Ganiban argues that the *Thebaid* is engaged in a sustained intertextual dialogue with the *Aeneid*, undermining the “Augustan voice” of Vergil’s epic and – in Lucanian fashion – highlighting the triumph of *nefas* at every turn. In addition to this, in a separate article Ganiban has elaborated upon Statius’ indebtedness to Lucan in fashioning this plot.⁵²³ McNelis’ monograph tells a comparably Lucanian tale, in which Statius’ epic poetry of *nefas* is engaged in a constant struggle against narrative forces of delay that often take the form of Callimachean poetry. What both books have in common is the idea that Statius’ response to his predecessors takes the form of a metapoetic story that can be traced through the entire epic, and that is closely connected to some of the poem’s central thematic concerns.

During the past decade, more and more attention has been paid to the role that tragedy, both Greek and Latin, plays in Statius’ all-encompassing epic.⁵²⁴ From these studies, as well as from earlier investigations and from the various commentaries on the *Thebaid*, it becomes clear that tragedy is a major intertextual force in Statius’ epic. This should hardly be surprising, considering the close kinship between epic and tragedy in Latin literature from its inception, as well as the fact that an epic about Thebes cannot *not* be tragic.⁵²⁵ The most perceptive approach to the balance between Senecan tragedy

⁵²² Smolenaars (1994).

⁵²³ Ganiban (2011). See also Roche (2015).

⁵²⁴ See Heslin (2008); Smolenaars (2008); Bessone (2011); Soerink (2014a); Hulls (2014); Marinis (2015); Augoustakis (2015); Davis (2016).

⁵²⁵ As is observed by Bessone (2011), 75.

and Greek tragedy as intertexts is probably offered by Federica Bessone, who argues that the first eleven books are predominantly concerned with Seneca's poetics of *nefas*, which – following the flight of the gods – makes way for a more nuanced perspective, offered by the Greek intertexts that dominate the final book.⁵²⁶ Of course, this view can and should be nuanced;⁵²⁷ but there is no denying the strong Senecan thrust of the first eleven books and the dissipation of Senecan energy after the climax of the fratricidal duel.⁵²⁸

In the two following chapters I will argue that Statius' assessment of Seneca's tragic oeuvre, and its reconfiguration of the epic genre in particular, forms an integral part of Statius' intertextual project. The first chapter sets the stage, and investigates Statius' incorporation of the "Senecan system" in the first half of his *Thebaid*, more specifically the Theban concept of reversed history on the one hand and a more Herculean or Thyestean exploration of the boundaries between Heaven, earth and Hell on the other hand. We will see that Statius is aware of the fact that Seneca had developed these concepts in connection and response to each other; therefore he does not just use Senecan tragedy to further explore the limits of the epic genre, but also uses his own epic as a way to study Seneca's tragic corpus. The second chapter will investigate what happens when Statius, in the second half of the *Thebaid*, truly sets his intertextual plot in motion and uses Senecan tragedy to test the cosmic and narrative structures of epic. I will also show that Statius, in addition to this, plays off Senecan tragedy's different poles against each other.⁵²⁹

Oedipus again

Statius' epic begins with Oedipus. *Limes mihi carminis esto / Oedipodae confusa domus* (*Theb.* 1.16-17) the poet states in his proem, dismissing both the house of Cadmus and the exploits of Domitian as topics suitable for his lyre. And indeed, as

⁵²⁶ Bessone (2011).

⁵²⁷ Greek tragic intertexts are far from lacking in the first eleven books; see for example Smolenaars (2008) and Marinis (2015) on the Theban saga in Greek tragedy as a whole and Soerink (2014a) on Euripides' *Hypsipyle*. The relationship between the Latin and Greek tragic intertexts in the *Thebaid* still merits further consideration, but is something that would go far beyond the scope of my investigation.

⁵²⁸ Bessone (2011) has not been the only one to observe this; a Senecan plot is also traced by, among others, Criado (2000) and Augoustakis (2015), with further references, who argues that Senecan tragedy is in the end overcome by epic.

⁵²⁹ Augoustakis (2015), 377-78 also argues that the interaction between the two genres that Statius stages forms a continuation of Seneca's intergeneric project.

soon as the proem is over Statius begins his narrative with the blind Oedipus cursing his sons (*Theb.* 1.46-87). As has often been observed, Statius' claim that Oedipus' *confusa domus* forms the firm starting point of his poem is inherently problematic. The boundaries of and within Oedipus' house are blurred: fathers become brothers, mothers become wives and ancestral sins (the battle of the Sown Men, Oedipus' incest) come back to haunt later generations.⁵³⁰ Oedipus' and Thebes' very nature are defined by an eternal return to beginnings, and their stories defy linear narration.⁵³¹ In beginning with Oedipus, Statius faces the same challenge that Seneca had faced in his *Phoenissae*: how do you move a story forward that is always moving backward?⁵³²

It should come as no surprise then that Statius' portrayal of Oedipus in this scene is reminiscent of Seneca's *Oedipus* and *Phoenissae*. Statius' Oedipus has exacted his punishment on himself, just as Seneca's Oedipus had (compare *Theb.* 1.46: *scrutatus lumina dextra*; with *Oed.* 965: *scrutatur ... lumina* and 1002: *nil ... dexterarum debes tuarum* (Oedipus to himself))⁵³³ and has achieved the state of limbo desired by Seneca's Oedipus (*Oed.* 945-51).⁵³⁴

In the three lines introducing his narrative, Statius depicts Oedipus' self-blinding as described in Seneca's play as finished, as is indicated by Statius' *iam ... scrutatus* (*Theb.* 1.46) instead of Seneca's *scrutatur* (*Oed.* 965). The epic's point of departure, then, is Oedipus' state of limbo following his self-blinding.⁵³⁵ As we have seen in the chapter concerning Seneca's *Oedipus*, central to this scene is the paradoxical notion of an open-ended form of final punishment. Furthermore, we have seen how Oedipus' desired closure, expressed through his self-punishment, is frustrated in *Oedipus* by the suicide of Jocasta. This closure remains elusive still in *Phoenissae*. Almost as if seeking

⁵³⁰ See Ahl (1986), 2817 in particular.

⁵³¹ See Heinrich (1999) on the importance of this problem to a reading of the *Thebaid*.

⁵³² In a further case of Theban regression, Statius' Oedipus is also modelled on Ovid's Cadmus, as Keith (2002), 383-86 argues.

⁵³³ Parallel noted by Heuvel (1932) *ad Theb.* 1.46, 47. See also Vessey (1973), 72.

⁵³⁴ Cf. *longa ... morte* (*Theb.* 1.48) with *morere, sed citra patrem* (*Oed.* 951) and *mors eligatur longa* (*Oed.* 949). Parallels noted by Heuvel (1932) *ad Theb.* 1.48. See also Davis (2016), 66-67. Of course, Seneca's Oedipus is not the only intertext involved in *Theb.* 1.46-87. The events running from Oedipus' discovery of the truth to Polynices' attack on Thebes have often been treated in epic, tragic and lyric poetry in both Greek and Latin. As Smolenaars (2008) has argued, Statius' portrayal of Oedipus and Jocasta draws on this poetic tradition in its full complexity, combining or excluding story elements from Sophocles, Euripides and Seneca in particular to arrive at his own version of the tale.

⁵³⁵ Cf. Vessey (1973), 72: 'The Oedipus of the *Thebaid* is the Senecan Oedipus; it is as if Statius was continuing the story from the point at which the tragedian had left it.' For a response to this statement see Delarue (2000), 144. On the significance of Statius' *iam* (*Theb.* 1.46) see Delarue (2000), 144-45.

a way to escape from Oedipus' regressive desire for self-punishment, the latter play gradually zooms out to continue the story of Thebes through Oedipus' sons, but then fails to actually reach this goal. In other words, Statius inserts the beginning of his epic at precisely the point where the tension between the open- and closedness of Seneca's Theban poetry is at its highest. It is from this point of departure that the "return to epic" that the tragedies had foreshadowed can most successfully be realized.

In his Oedipus scene Statius alludes to several moments of the biography of Seneca's Oedipus following his self-blinding.⁵³⁶ In *Oedipus*, Seneca's messenger had concluded his report of Oedipus' self-punishment with a description of Oedipus scanning the sky (*Oed.* 972: *cauis ... lustrans orbibus caeli plagas*) and calling upon the gods in triumph (*Oed.* 974-75: *uictor deos / conclamat omnis*). Statius refers to this moment in the lines leading up to Oedipus' curse (*Theb.* 1.53-54): *tunc uacuos orbes, crudum ac miserabile uitae / supplicium ostentat caelo*. The first word that Statius' Oedipus utters is *Di* (*Theb.* 1.56). But unlike Seneca's Oedipus, who calls upon *deos ... / omnis* (*Oed.* 974-75), Statius' Oedipus calls upon the gods of Hell alone (*Theb.* 1.56-57: *Di, sontes animas angustaque Tartara poenis / qui regitis*), upon the Styx and Tisiphone in particular (*Theb.* 1.57-59), and is angry at Jupiter for ignoring his shame (*Theb.* 1.79-80: *et uidit ista deorum / ignauus genitor?*).

In Seneca's tragedy Oedipus scans the sky directly after his self-punishment; in Statius' epic Oedipus seems to turn his empty sockets upwards after a somewhat longer period of blindness (*Theb.* 1.48: *longaque animam sub morte trahebat*). As in Seneca's *Phoenissae*, blindness is a condition to which Oedipus has gotten used.⁵³⁷ But unlike the Oedipus of Seneca's *Phoenissae*, he has not gone into exile but is rather – as in Euripides' tragedy of the same name – still residing in Thebes.⁵³⁸ Gone too is Oedipus' self-loathing and desire for death with which Seneca's *Phoenissae* had opened. Rather, Oedipus takes a perverted pride in his life-long association with Tisiphone (*Theb.* 1.57-74).⁵³⁹

Oedipus' twisted enjoyment of his condition can be traced at least partially to Seneca's plays. The self-blinding is described in terms reminiscent of Seneca's:

⁵³⁶ Compare the complementary analysis by Delarue (2000), 144-49 and the notes provided by Briguglio (2017).

⁵³⁷ See e.g. *Phoen.* 46-48: *omitte poenas languidas longae morae / mortemque totam recipe; quid segnis traho / quod uiuo?* As discussed in the previous chapter, Oedipus was not satisfied with this limbo there. See also Caviglia (1973) *ad Theb.* 1.48.

⁵³⁸ Cf. Heuvel (1932) *ad Theb.* 1.46.

⁵³⁹ Compare Delarue (2000), 146, who also discusses some of the Senecan passages featured in the following paragraph.

compare *avidus poenae digitis cedentibus ultro / incubui miseraque oculos in matre reliqui* (*Theb.* 1.71-72) with *contra truces / oculi steterunt et suam intenti manum / ultro insecuntur, uulneri occurrunt suo* (*Oed.* 962-64).⁵⁴⁰ Statius' description of Oedipus as *indulgentem tenebris* (*Theb.* 1.49) matches Seneca's Oedipus' statement *iuuant tenebrae* (*Oed.* 999). In addition to this, Oedipus' self-conscious association with the forces of Hell in his monologue in the *Thebaid* finds its Senecan germ in the final lines of the tragedy (*Oed.* 1059-61), in which Oedipus leaves the stage rejoicing in the Theban hellish plagues as his guides.⁵⁴¹ Statius' Oedipus concludes his invocation of Tisiphone with the following words (*Theb.* 1.85-87):

da, Tartarei regina barathri, 85
quod cupiam uidisse nefas. nec tarda sequetur
mens iuuenum: modo digna ueni, mea pignora nosces.

These lines echo Oedipus' "curse" uttered at the end of the first half of Seneca's *Phoenissae*. Seneca's Oedipus also suspects that his sons will be true to their father in their criminality (*Phoen.* 336-38): *aliquid facite propter quod patrem / adhuc iuuat uixisse. facietis, scio: / sic estis orti*.⁵⁴²

In short, Statius' portrait of Oedipus is composed from a wide range of Senecan sources. The variety of Senecan passages on which Statius draws betrays his awareness of the complexity of Seneca's portrayal of Oedipus. But Statius has clearly been selective. Allusions to lines in which Oedipus' sense of triumph or sadomasochist enjoyment of his crime and punishment are expressed abound, but the desperation of Oedipus' self-destruction is conspicuously absent. Statius has appropriated Seneca in typically Senecan fashion. Seneca's Atreus had tendentiously reduced Ovid's Procne to her most extreme traits and tried to surpass them. Similarly, Statius has brought some of the most extreme traits of Seneca's Oedipus together in his portrayal of the tragic king, and then goes beyond them.

Statius' wide-ranging allusions to Senecan tragedy in his portrayal of Oedipus are proof of his acknowledgement of the Senecan tragic corpus as a sophisticated and interconnected poetic oeuvre. Consequently, a poet so self-consciously responding

⁵⁴⁰ Heuvel (1932) *ad Theb.* 1.71. See also Caviglia (1973) *ad loc.* The precise interpretation of line 72 is the point of departure for Smolenaars' article.

⁵⁴¹ Compare Delarue (2000), 148.

⁵⁴² See Delarue (2000), 150-51; Ganiban (2007), 28-29.

to Seneca's tragic oeuvre will also respond to the problems, tensions and paradoxes running through these tragedies. In other words, Statius responds to Seneca as Seneca himself had responded to Vergil and Ovid. Statius' reworking of Seneca's Oedipus figure brings out some crucial aspects of the way in which he tackles Seneca's challenge. Statius exploits the open-endedness of Senecan tragedy, and that of its most open-ended character in particular, to be able to begin again. In addition to this – and as Seneca himself had done in his *Phoenissae* –, he taps into the violent side of Oedipus' character to provide this beginning with the necessary momentum. Statius is very much aware of the problems that his tragic predecessor had encountered in tragic Thebes and his response to them is extremely self-conscious.⁵⁴³ Finally, as I will discuss in the following section, Statius incorporates Senecan tragedy into the cosmic framework of epic. As we have seen in the preceding chapters, it was the cosmic framework of epic that Seneca had challenged and deconstructed in his poetry. Statius' poem can be read as an epic reenactment of Seneca's tragic experiment. The very fact that Statius' *reenacts* Seneca's experiment once again reveals the extent to which he is in control of his own epic experiment.

Tisiphone's intervention

How does Statius incorporate Senecan tragedy into the epic cosmos? One of the defining features of Statius' *Thebaid* is its tripartite universe: the forces of Heaven and Hell both try to influence the war for rule over earthly Thebes.⁵⁴⁴ Consequently, most studies of the *Thebaid* have devoted much attention to the way in which the action on the mortal plane is directed by Olympian and Infernal forces struggling for control. As I have discussed above, Statius' Oedipus is beset by the same tension between moving the plot forward and moving it backward as Seneca's Oedipus is. In the *Thebaid* it is the very existence of this cosmic framework that ensures that the plot gets going and that the regression characteristic of Thebes and Oedipus is avoided: Tisiphone, representing the Infernal forces, and Jupiter, representing the Olympian forces, make Oedipus' wishes reality.

It is precisely this epic framework, however, with its familiar poles of Heaven and Hell, Jupiter and the Furies, that Seneca had challenged in his tragedies in the first place. Paradoxically, Senecan tragedy – or, more specifically, Seneca's Theban

⁵⁴³ See Feeney (1991), 338–44 and Micozzi (2015) on this aspect of Statius' *Thebaid* in general.

⁵⁴⁴ Feeney (1991), 345.

tragedies – can only move forward when incorporated into epic, a genre which by their very nature they will go on to destroy from the inside. With Oedipus' curse, Statius has set the stage for a direct confrontation between Latin epic and Senecan tragedy that will unfold throughout the *Thebaid*.

It is through Oedipus' curse that this cosmic framework is introduced. Although Statius' Oedipus does not call upon *deos ... / omnis* as Seneca's had (*Oed.* 974-75), both the upper world and the Underworld are included in his curse: Tisiphone is addressed throughout; Jupiter is scorned for his lack of involvement (*Theb.* 1.79-80). The first half of *Phoenissae* offers the most obvious Senecan parallel for Statius' opening with Oedipus.⁵⁴⁵ Structurally speaking, Statius' opening with a call upon a hellish Fury is of course reminiscent of Juno's call upon Allecto at the beginning of *Aeneid* 7.⁵⁴⁶ From the very beginning of the *Thebaid*'s narrative, Statius has fused Senecan tragedy with Augustan epic.

But *Phoenissae* is not the only Senecan intertext being invoked. A Fury setting in motion a cycle of crime within a royal family or igniting strife between brothers does not just call Allecto to mind, but also inevitably reminds the post-Senecan reader of the Fury setting the events of *Thyestes* in motion.⁵⁴⁷ The pairing of these two tragedies at the beginning of his epic is another sign of Statius' awareness of the connections and contrasts upon which Seneca had founded his tragic oeuvre. The two extremes of Senecan tragedy – its endless regressiveness and repetitiveness, symbolized by Oedipus, and its ever-expanding and cosmos-consuming criminality, represented by the Fury and Atreus – are brought together from the very beginning. Senecan tragedy had tried to deconstruct the epic opposition between Jupiter and Juno, but Statian epic in its turn fuses and confuses the two poles governing Senecan tragedy. In its engagement with Senecan tragedy the *Thebaid* traces two plots simultaneously: one assesses the impact of Senecan tragedy on Latin epic, the other explores the problems and tensions governing the Senecan tragic corpus as if it were another *Aeneid*.

In its careful assessment of the relationship between Latin epic and Senecan tragedy through a sustained intertextual plot, Statius' *Thebaid* is perhaps most similar

⁵⁴⁵ See above.

⁵⁴⁶ As has often been noted. See especially the discussions in Hardie (1993), 62-63; Hershkowitz (1998a), 247-48 and Ganiban (2007), 30-33.

⁵⁴⁷ See Feeney (1991), 347 n. 116 on *Thyestes* as the clearest parallel for Statius' cosmic disruption at the beginning of his epic. See also Frings (1992), 16-19 and Delarue (2000), 256-69 on the role of *Thyestes*, as well as other Senecan tragedies, in Statius' treatment of Oedipus and Tisiphone's intervention at Thebes. Criado (2000), 26-30 emphasizes the general importance of the models of Aeschylus' *Eumenides* and Seneca's *Thyestes* and *Hercules Furens* to the overture of Statius' epic. See also the following paragraph.

to *Hercules Furens*. In addition to that of *Oedipus*, *Phoenissae* and *Thyestes*, the opening sequence of *Hercules Furens* is also mirrored in the first book of the *Thebaid*. Just as Juno summons the Furies to drive Hercules to self-destruction, so does Oedipus summon Tisiphone to drive his sons to self-destruction. A first allusion to Seneca's *Hercules* may be contained in this very beginning of the narrative of the poem when, answering Oedipus' call, Tisiphone *Taenariae limen petit irremeabile portae* (*Theb.* 1.96). As we have seen, Taenarus was the place where Hercules entered and left the Underworld in Seneca's tragedy – but, Taenarus being a rather conventional entrance to the Underworld, this may not (yet) signify much.

As soon as Tisiphone ascends from the Underworld, Senecan tragedy and Latin epic begin to interact. Statius starts by further sharpening the distinction that Oedipus had established between Heaven and Hell as he called upon Tisiphone and dismissed Jupiter. Tisiphone emerges from the Underworld *igne Iouis lapsisque citatior astris* (*Theb.* 1.92). Feeney comments on the disturbing overtones of this line, which once again emphasizes the fact that Tisiphone acts before Jupiter does, but which also features a 'disquieting arrogation of celestial language' which implies that the initiative in this epic poem has shifted from Heaven to Hell.⁵⁴⁸

As soon as Tisiphone reaches the threshold of the Taenarian gate, the order of the cosmos is disrupted. Tellingly, the first god to respond to her presence on earth is the Sun (*Theb.* 1.97-98): *sensit adesse Dies, piceo Nox obuia nimbo / lucentes turbauit equos*. These lines call to mind the confusion of the Sun and the early onset of night in Seneca's *Thyestes* (cf. e.g. *Thy.* 120-21; 784-87; 789-827; 993-95). In *Thyestes*, the chorus also fears a more general cosmic disturbance, and Thyestes himself remarks that *magis magisque concussi labant / conuexa caeli* (*Thy.* 992-93). This is indeed what follows the confusion of the Sun in the *Thebaid* (*Theb.* 1.98-99): *procul arduus Atlans / horruit et dubia caelum ceruice remisit*. Atlas, the symbol of Jovian stability in Vergil's *Aeneid*,⁵⁴⁹ shudders at the arrival of Tisiphone. This moment of cosmic destabilization is very Senecan indeed, as Feeney rightly points out.⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁸ Feeney (1991), 346-47. See also Hershkowitz (1998a), 261.

⁵⁴⁹ Hardie (1986), 272, 374.

⁵⁵⁰ Feeney (1991), 347-48. Feeney also points to an interesting allusion to Ovid in *Theb.* 1.96-98. Statius' lines echo the moment in the *Metamorphoses* when Tisiphone – together with several personifications – steps on the threshold of Athamas' house and the sun retreats as it does in the *Thebaid* (*Met.* 4.486-88): *limine constiterant; postes tremuisse feruntur / Aeolii pallorque fores infecit acernas / solque locum fugit*. Feeney rightly comments that Statius has raised the stakes by turning Ovid's doorstep into the threshold between two cosmic realms. The intertextual dialogue with Ovid's Tisiphone is further explored by Keith (2002), 394-97.

There is still more to Tisiphone's crossing of the *Taenariae limen ... irremeabile portae*. The word *irremeabilis* was introduced by Vergil, both in his description of the Cretan labyrinth (*Aen.* 5.591: *irremeabilis error*) and of the Styx, when Aeneas flees the *ripam irremeabilis undae* (*Aen.* 6.425). The phrase is echoed by Seneca in the second choral ode of his *Hercules Furens*, when the chorus asks Hercules why he has gone off to walk the *uias inremeabiles* (*HF.* 548) of the Underworld – as Fitch points out, this is the first attested use of the word since Vergil and the only one in Senecan tragedy.⁵⁵¹ The Fury's repeated crossing of the *irremeabilis* boundary between earth and Hell is implicitly compared to that of Aeneas and Hercules.⁵⁵² A comparable effect is achieved by Statius' claim that there is no road that Tisiphone travels along as frequently and quickly as that to Thebes (*Theb.* 1.101-02): *neque enim uelocior ullas / itque reditque uias cognataue Tartara mauult*. In this infernal context, the words *itque reditque uias* at the beginning of the line echo Aeneas' statement to the Sibyl that Pollux *itque reditque uiam totiens* (*Aen.* 6.122).⁵⁵³ In both cases, Statius integrates allusions to *katabaseis* of heroes associated with Jupiter in a Fury's ascent from Hell, signaling that Ovid's and Seneca's infernal intertextual experimentation is far from over.

Tisiphone's ascent continues with a scene that reworks Allecto blowing her war horn in the seventh book of the Aeneid (*Aen.* 7.514-18).⁵⁵⁴ Having left the Underworld, Tisiphone "lands" at the top of Mount Cithaeron, as the snakes in her hair hiss, a *signum terris, unde omnis Achaei / ora maris late Pelopeaque regna resultant* (*Theb.* 1.116-17). All of Greece's horror in response to this is described in somewhat greater detail in the following lines (*Theb.* 1.114-22). With this scene, the opening movement of the poem continues in Thyestean fashion. This becomes clear when we learn that the top of mount Cithaeron *occurrit caelo* (*Theb.* 1.115). Although this is of course a natural thing for a mountain to do, the phrase fits the larger theme of Tisiphone's assault on Heaven that will unfold over the course of the epic. Statius' integration of Seneca's Argive tragedy *Thyestes* at the beginning of his Theban epic is further hinted at through the elements of Greek topography that are featured in this particular passage. Mountains close to Thebes are combined with elements of Argive topography several times. Tisiphone stands on top of Mount Cithaeron, from which she makes the coast

⁵⁵¹ Fitch (1987) *ad loc.* See also Austin (1977) *ad Aen.* 6.425 on the word's occurrence in Vergil, Seneca and Statius.

⁵⁵² On the Furies' Thyestean independence in the *Thebaid* see e.g. Bessone (2011), 20 and 96.

⁵⁵³ Cf. Heuvel (1932) *ad loc.*

⁵⁵⁴ Heuvel (1932) *ad Theb.* 1.114sq. See also Delarue (2000), 68 and Criado (2000), 31.

of the Achaean Sea and the realm of Pelops resound with the hissing of her snakes, which is heard by both Mount Parnassus and the river Eurotas, and which affect both Mount Oeta and the Isthmus of Corinth (*Theb.* 1.114–20). *Vice versa*, when Tantalus and the Fury make their presence felt in *Thyestes*, it is not just the lands of Argos that are affected, but even the snow on Theban Cithaeron disappears (*Thy.* 111–19).⁵⁵⁵

Allusions to *Thyestes* become particularly strong in the following passage. Tisiphone reaches Thebes itself (*Theb.* 1.123–24: *Cadmeo ... culmine ... / constitit*), infects the royal palace with her presence (*Theb.* 1.124: *assuetaque infecit nube penates*) and immediately the strife between Eteocles and Polynices is set in motion (*Theb.* 1.125: *protinus attoniti fratrum sub pectore motus*). The image of *penates* being affected by a cloud of evil (*Theb.* 1.124) is a direct reference to Seneca's *Thyestes*. When the smoke rises from Atreus' grim sacrifice at the end of the messenger's report, it oppresses the *penates* (*Thy.* 773–75): *et ipse fumus, tristis ac nebula grauis, / non rectus exit seque in excelsum leuat: / ipsos penates nube deformi obsidet*. In *Thyestes*, this particular mention of the *penates* forms the culmination of several references to the Argive *lares* and *penates*. In the prologue, the Fury commands Tantalus *penates impios furiis age* (*Thy.* 24) and *Misce penates* (*Thy.* 52). In the second act, Atreus notes that *moti lares / uertere uultum* (*Thy.* 264–65) in response to his evil plotting.⁵⁵⁶ Moreover, the mentions of *lares* and *penates* connect the intervention of the Fury to the actual fraternal strife in the rest of the play, just as it marks the transition between Tisiphone's divine intervention and Statius' treatment of the conflict on earth that it causes (*Theb.* 1.125–96).

Theb. 1.124 also refers to *Thy.* 24's *penates impios furiis age* at a structural level: the Fury's command to Tantalus to create chaos in the royal house of Pelops forms the starting point for her elaborate description of the cycle of intra-familial violence and war that her intervention is to set in motion (*Thy.* 25–51). In similar fashion, Statius' mention of Tisiphone infecting the Theban *penates* introduces a more detailed analysis of the rivalry between Eteocles and Polynices. There are other links between both passages. In the Thyestean passage, the Fury wishes that *mentes caecus instiget furor* (*Thy.* 27), which is echoed by Statius' *gentilis ... animos subiit furor* (*Theb.* 1.126). In

⁵⁵⁵ On Tisiphone's impact on her surroundings in relation to Seneca's *Thyestes* see also Delarue (2000), 261–63. See Criado (2000), 30–33 for an overview of the impact of Furies on the upper world in the *Aeneid*, the *Metamorphoses*, *Hercules Furens*, *Thyestes* and the *Thebaid*.

⁵⁵⁶ As Tarrant (1985) notes *ad Thy.* 264 and 775 the words *Lares* and *Penates* in these lines are – certainly in case of the first, probably in case of the latter – used to refer to the gods rather than a metonymy for the house.

the same passage, Statius describes the brothers' deal to alternate rule over Thebes, a deal that can only result in constant anxiety both on the part of the exile and that of the king (*Theb.* 1.138-41):

*alterni placuit sub legibus anni
exsilio mutare ducem. sic iure maligno
Fortunam transire iubent, ut sceptrum tenentem
foedere praecipiti semper nouus angeret heres.* 140

Although this alternation of rule is agreed upon by both Polynices and Eteocles, the dynamics of alternated rule are in the end not all that different from the way the throne changes hands in Seneca's Argos, where the Fury wishes that *superbis fratribus regna excidant* (*Thy.* 32) and *fratrem expauescat frater* (*Thy.* 40).⁵⁵⁷ In addition to this, Statius states that *perit ius fasque bonumque / et uitae mortisque pudor* (*Theb.* 1.154-55) as a result, lines that echo Seneca's *et fas et fides / iusque omne pereat* (*Thy.* 47-48).⁵⁵⁸

In short, Statius' description of Tisiphone's intervention serves as a second, Thyestean prologue to his epic that supplements the preceding "*Oedipus-Phoenissae*" prologue.⁵⁵⁹ Both of these Senecan prologues are integrated in a more general cosmic and epic framework. This becomes particularly evident in this passage that reworks the prologue of *Thyestes* so closely.

The echoes of *Thyestes* just discussed form part of a more general exploration of the rivalry between both brothers. It begins with a general description of their mutual hatred and strife (*Theb.* 1.123-30), which is further illustrated by the famous comparison of Eteocles and Polynices to two bulls confusing their furrows (*Theb.* 1.131-38). The aforementioned power-sharing deal follows (*Theb.* 1.138-43). Next, the poet expresses his astonishment at the fact that Eteocles and Polynices would fight for such a poor and small realm (*Theb.* 1.144-64), for naked power (*Theb.* 1.150: *nuda potestas*). The section is concluded by a brief description of the actual moment of Eteocles' elevation and Polynices' exile, which is followed by a speech by an anonymous citizen musing on Theban history (*Theb.* 1.164-96).

⁵⁵⁷ Compare Criado (2000) 29, with n. 27.

⁵⁵⁸ Caviglia (1973) *ad loc.*

⁵⁵⁹ Compare again Criado (2000), 26-30.

A major epic intertext in this part of Statius' epic is Lucan's *Bellum Civile*.⁵⁶⁰ Like Statius, Lucan explores the causes of the conflict that forms the subject of his epic. Part of the chain of results of Tisiphone's intervention are *ruptae ... uices iurisque secundi / ambitus impatiens, et summo dulcius unum / stare loco, sociisque comes discordia regnis* (*Theb.* 1.128-30). Similarly, Lucan's Caesar is driven on by *impatiens loci fortuna secundi* (*BC.* 1.124) and *nescia uirtus / stare loco* (*BC.* 1.144-45), and Lucan states that *nulla fides regni sociis, omnisque potestas / impatiens consortis erit* (*BC.* 1.92-93).⁵⁶¹ Just as Crassus had formed a *mora belli* in Lucan's epic (*BC.* 1.100), so does the pact between the brothers form a *mora pugnae* in Statius' poem (*Theb.* 1.142).⁵⁶² Finally, Statius' amazement that Eteocles and Polynices would fight for a small kingdom as if they were fighting for the cosmos (*Theb.* 1.144-64) corresponds to Lucan's claim that Rome's penchant for civil war can be traced back to Romulus and Remus, who fought for a small asylum rather than cosmic dominion (*BC.* 1.95-97).⁵⁶³ In spite of Thebes' small size, the scale of Statius' epic is just as cosmic as that of Lucan.⁵⁶⁴ These allusions to Lucan serve to emphasize that Statius' epic will be engaged with all the grand themes of the epics that had preceded the *Thebaid*. But from the start, Senecan tragedy is fully integrated in the grand structures of epic, and it will not be long before it will begin to transform them.

Jupiter and the Theban plot

Following Oedipus' curse and Tisiphone's response, Statius' epic seems to be well on its way and to have escaped *Phoenissae*'s regressive tendencies quite easily. Additionally, the epic's cosmic framework seems to be limited to the driving forces behind Seneca's two most extreme tragedies: the Fury from *Thyestes* and Oedipus' anger from *Phoenissae*. But these appearances are deceptive: as the epic goes on, the circular nature of Theban history will assert itself time and again. Moreover, it will not be long before Statius introduces his Jupiter, who tries to come up with his own epic plot but ends up fulfilling the plots inherited from Senecan tragedy instead. Statius introduces both his Jupiter and the theme of Theban history in the first half of his first book (*Theb.* 1.168-96 and 197-311 respectively), and closely connects the two in the process.

⁵⁶⁰ See the comments by Delarue (2000), 99 on *Theb.* 1.125-96.

⁵⁶¹ Cf. Heuvel (1932) and Caviglia (1973) *ad locc.*

⁵⁶² Heuvel (1932) *ad loc.*

⁵⁶³ Cf. Heuvel (1932) *ad Theb.* 1.150 and Caviglia (1973) *ad Theb.* 1.143-64.

⁵⁶⁴ On the latter point see Hardie (1993), 95.

Following his psychological analysis of Eteocles' and Polynices' power-sharing deal (*Theb.* 1.164-68), Statius introduces an anonymous Theban citizen who complains about this compromise, which leads to anxiety among the Theban populace. Halfway during this monologue, the Theban citizen wonders about the deeper causes behind the inherently unstable power-sharing deal. He wonders whether this was Jupiter's intention (*Theb.* 1.178-80), or if conflict between brothers might go back to Thebes' very beginnings (*Theb.* 1.180-85):

tibi, summe deorum
terrarumque sator, sociis hanc addere mentem
sedit? an inde uetus Thebis extenditur omen, 180
ex quo Sidonii nequiquam blanda iuuenti
pondera Carpathio iussus sale quaerere Cadmus
exsul Hyanteos inuenit regna per agros,
fraternasque acies fetae telluris hiatus
augurium seros demisit ad usque nepotes? 185

Is Jupiter to blame for Thebes' current political troubles, or is the conflict between Eteocles and Polynices the prelude to another manifestation of the tragic curse of fratricide haunting Thebes? With this question, the anonymous citizen introduces the possibility that Jupiter might be presiding over an epic in which the city that forms its subject is driven to destruction. Of course, in the *Aeneid* Jupiter had been complicit in the destruction of Troy (*Aen.* 2.617-18)⁵⁶⁵ and, indirectly, in that of Carthage. In Lucan's *Bellum Ciuile*, the bare fact that Pharsalus happened constitutes proof that the gods do not preside over Roman history and Lucan's epic (*BC.* 7.445-55).⁵⁶⁶ But an epic poem in which Jupiter supervises or is trying to supervise a regressive epic plot that has the protagonists' self-destruction as its *telos* would be a novelty in the history of Latin epic. But this – the *Thebaid* being a Theban epic ostensibly under Jovian supervision – seems to be precisely the epic poem that we are reading.

Next, the anonymous citizen wonders whether the conflict between Eteocles and Polynices may go back to the battle between the Sown Men. Apparently, for this Theban citizen the battle sown by Cadmus forms a more obvious cause for the current conflict than any curse Oedipus may have uttered. The repetition of the poem's opening words

⁵⁶⁵ With Feeney (1991), 142.

⁵⁶⁶ E.g. Feeney (1991), 281-82 with notes.

fraternas acies in line 184 forges a strong link between Thebes' foundational war between brothers and the current one.⁵⁶⁷ In addition to this, Statius had established another strong intratextual link between Oedipus and Cadmus early on. Cadmus is introduced as *scrutantem ... aequora* (*Theb.* 1.6) in the proem, whereas Oedipus is introduced as *scrutatus lumina* (*Theb.* 1.46).⁵⁶⁸

In short, the conflict between Eteocles and Polynices can be traced back both to Oedipus' curse and the battle between the Sown Men. In establishing this uniquely Theban "doppelte Motivation" early on in his poem, Statius enters a tragic tradition that includes Euripides⁵⁶⁹ and Seneca. Indeed, it has been noted that the citizen's tracing back of Thebes' troubles to Cadmus' quest is comparable to the chorus' notion in *Oedipus* that Thebes' current predicament finds its cause in the divine anger haunting Thebes since Cadmus (*Oed.* 709-15).⁵⁷⁰ This allusion to Seneca emphasizes the point that Theban history is inherently repetitive and circular, moving back to its origins rather than forward. This regressive drive is at odds with Tisiphone's rather more Thyestean intervention, which promises an increase of *nefas* ultimately challenging the heavens. Statius will continue to negotiate the tension between these two Senecan poles throughout the *Thebaid*, while incorporating this tension in an epic framework.

Nowhere is this more evident than when the Senecan opening movements of Oedipus and Tisiphone are followed by a divine council (*Theb.* 1.197-302). The positioning of this divine council, some 200 lines into the poem's first book, is comparable to Vergil's positioning of Jupiter's consolation to Venus⁵⁷¹ and Ovid's divine council preceding the Flood. Both structural parallels are highly significant for our interpretation of Statius' divine council.

Vergil had opened his epic with a symbolic overture (*Aen.* 1.8-296), introducing to the reader the themes that govern the *Aeneid*: order against chaos, symbolized by Jupiter against Juno and – at a slightly lower level – Neptune against Aeolus. The quelling of the destructive storm by Neptune is followed by Jupiter's prophecy, outlining the Trojans' and Romans' conquest of all obstacles and culminating in Augustus' quelling of civil strife. Vergil presents the struggle between order and chaos, between Rome's destiny of cosmic rule and the forces trying to oppose it, as the central

⁵⁶⁷ See Heuvel (1932) *ad Theb.* 1.1 for the parallel, as well as Ahl (1986), 2828.

⁵⁶⁸ Ahl (1986), 2824. See also Henderson (1993), 176. On Statius' response to Ovidian characters like Cadmus, see especially Keith (2002).

⁵⁶⁹ See Arthur (1977) on the choral odes of Euripides' *Phoinissai*.

⁵⁷⁰ Heuvel (1932) *ad Theb.* 1.180.

⁵⁷¹ Delarue (2000), 66-67.

theme of his poem.⁵⁷² Ovid's epic opens with a similar panorama of order and chaos, in which Jupiter and Neptune play an important role (*Met.* 1.5-415). More specifically, both epics open with the following sequence: an increase in chaos, a comparison between a god and a Roman statesman and an easing of the tension afterwards. Vergil had begun his epic with a storm, comparing Neptune's calming of the raging sea to a pious statesman calming an angry mob (*Aen.* 1.148-56) and following it with Jupiter's prophecy of the future of Aeneas' descendants. In similar fashion, Ovid opens with the story of the creation and the chaos and criminality of the Iron Age and the Giants, follows it with a divine council which has at its heart the gods' outrage at Lycaon's attack on Jupiter, compared to the Roman people's outrage at an assassination attempt at Caesar or Augustus (*Met.* 1.199-205),⁵⁷³ and concludes with the destruction of the Iron Race and the survival of two pious people who "create" a new race.⁵⁷⁴

Statius continues this tradition of "epic overtures". The introduction of a Jovian scene following an explosion of chaos and criminality is the clearest signal that our poet could possibly give. The *Thebaid's* divine council has been the focus of much scholarly attention, and many scholars have commented on Jupiter's tyrannical nature and tendentious and incoherent argumentation in this scene.⁵⁷⁵ In the following paragraphs, I will of course draw on these earlier discussions. However, my aim is not a full review of the "evilness" of the *Thebaid's* Jupiter – which has by now been sufficiently established – but rather a discussion of how Statius' portrayal of Jupiter fits in with his metageneric plot.

Before Jupiter actually appears, his inaction has already been commented upon by Oedipus (*Theb.* 1.79-80), he has already been addressed by the anonymous citizen (*Theb.* 1.178-80), and already been superseded by Tisiphone (*Theb.* 1.92-93).⁵⁷⁶ But

⁵⁷² Pöschl (1977³), 13-23 and Otis (1964), 227-34. Feeney (1991), 129-42 similarly takes the appearances of Jupiter and Juno in this passage as the point of departure for his discussion of the divine in the *Aeneid*.

⁵⁷³ Whether Ovid is referring to the successful assassination of Julius Caesar or one of the failed attempts to take Augustus' life is uncertain. See Janan (2009), 61 n. 20 for an overview of opinions on the matter. Hardie (2002b), 254-55 offers the elegant solution that Ovid is playing with the continuity between Julius Caesar and Augustus, both "Caesar" and so, in a sense, one and the same man.

⁵⁷⁴ This paragraph is largely based on Nicoll (1980), 178-79. The similarity is also noted by Otis (1966), 99-100.

⁵⁷⁵ On Statius' divine council see Hill (2008), Dominik (2012) and the studies referenced in the following notes.

⁵⁷⁶ On Statius' preparation for Jupiter's "belated" entrance through Oedipus' and the anonymous Theban's challenges compare Schubert (1984), 72-74; Feeney (1991), 346 and 348; Hershkowitz (1998a), 261-62.

when Jupiter enters the poem himself, he does so with pomp and circumstance, almost as if he is trying to compensate for his absence up until this point. Statius introduces the council with the words *At Iouis imperiis* (*Theb.* 1.197), words that constitute a sharp break with what has preceded. When Jupiter enters, he is described as *placido quatiens ... omnia uultu* (*Theb.* 1.202), the gods dare not sit down until Jupiter gives them leave to do so (*Theb.* 1.202-05).⁵⁷⁷ As the council begins *siluit ... exterritus orbis* (*Theb.* 1.211). But in spite of Jupiter's apparent grandeur, when he begins to speak, we meet a god who is tired of hurling his perennial thunderbolt – in other words, 'tired of behaving like Jupiter'⁵⁷⁸ (*Theb.* 1.214-18):

*Terrarum delicta nec exsaturabile Diris
ingenium mortale queror. quonam usque nocentum
exigar in poenas? taedet saeuire corusco
fulmine, iam pridem Cyclopum operosa fatiscunt
braccia et Aeoliis desunt incudibus ignes.*

Like all Flavian epicists, Statius reintroduces Jupiter following his absence in Lucan's *Bellum Ciuile*. Statius seems to introduce his Jupiter as Vergil and Ovid had left him, but apparently severely traumatized by his absence from Lucan's epic and Seneca's tragedies. The opening movement of the *Thebaid* mirrors the course of Latin literary history. Following Oedipus' and the citizen's incriminations and the Fury's speed, Jupiter is reintroduced. More generally speaking the Flavian poets reintroduce Jupiter following the dominion of Hell and self-destructive mortals in Lucan's and Seneca's poetry. Jupiter had been deaf to Lucan's cries of despair, deaf to Hercules' and Thyestes' curses, but Oedipus is heard at last (*Theb.* 1.239-41): *iam iam rata uota tulisti, / dire senex. meruere tuae, meruere tenebrae / ultorem sperare Iouem*. In Jupiter's desire to punish Argos together with Thebes (*Theb.* 1.224-26; 243-47) we may even see a belated answer to the calls for divine and specifically Jovian (*Thy.* 1076-96) retribution in *Thyestes*.

As lines 214-18 clearly show, Jupiter has punishment on his mind as he enters the *Thebaid*. And indeed, Jupiter goes on to make explicit his wish to punish the royal

⁵⁷⁷ Compare Dominik (1994), 7–8. See also Ahl (1986), 2837–41; Feeney (1991), 353–54 (with reference to Schubert (1984)) and Dominik (1994), 1–33 more generally on Jupiter's autocratic nature. Most of these discussions rightly take Ovid's characterization of Jupiter as their frame of reference (see below).

⁵⁷⁸ A point well observed by Feeney (1991), 343.

houses of Thebes and Argos (*Theb.* 1.224-25): *nunc geminas punire domos, quis sanguinis auctor / ipse ego, descendo*. This desire for punishment was a defining character trait of Ovid's Jupiter, who all but exterminated mankind for Lycaon's crime. This first impression that Statius' Jupiter is a continuation of Ovid's⁵⁷⁹ is confirmed by the following lines, in which Jupiter states that the Flood and Phaethon's chariot ride – both featuring prominently as primeval stories of cosmic destruction in the first books of the *Metamorphoses* – have taught mankind nothing (*Theb.* 1.219-23). In fact, Statius' Jupiter even surpasses Ovid's by assuming responsibility for not just the Flood, but for Phaethon's conflagration as well, which he did not stop (*tuleram* (*Theb.* 1.219)).⁵⁸⁰ Statius has turned Jupiter's punishment of the royal houses of Thebes and Argos into the latest instalment in a sequence of primeval Jovian punishment. Indeed, one wonders if Jupiter, in his recollection of Tantalus' banquet, the *saeuae ... iniuria mensae* (*Theb.* 1.247), is not also remembering the original criminal banquet: Lycaon's.

Juno is also present at the council. Not just in person, delivering a speech in an attempt to counter Jupiter's decision to punish Argos as well for crimes long in the past (*Theb.* 1.250-82), but also in Jupiter himself. Feeney and Ganiban have observed that Statius' Jupiter is similar to Vergil's Juno in his undying anger,⁵⁸¹ and both scholars point to *Theb.* 1.246-47 in particular as evidence of Jupiter's Junonian nature. In these lines, as we have seen, Jupiter states that he still remembers Tantalus' criminal banquet: *neque enim arcano de pectore fallax / Tantalus et saeuae periit iniuria mensae*. These Statian lines echo lines from the *Aeneid* that defined Juno's character (*Aen.* 1.25-26): *necdum etiam causae irarum saeuique dolores / exciderant animo*⁵⁸² and (*Aen.* 1.36) *Iuno aeternum seruans sub pectore uulnus*.⁵⁸³ As Ganiban points out, Jupiter usurps Juno's *ira* and will continue to do so throughout the epic.⁵⁸⁴ In Statius' version of the divine council, the Ovidian Jupiter is fused with the Vergilian Juno, in a continuation of the Ovidio-Senecan tradition of short-circuiting the poles of Heaven and Hell.

⁵⁷⁹ Compare Feeney (1991), 354; Dominik (1994), 8.

⁵⁸⁰ Jupiter's responsibility is pointed out by Ganiban (2007), 54-55 with n. 51 on *tuleram*, in his comments on Statius' reworking of Ovid in these lines.

⁵⁸¹ Feeney (1991), 254; Ganiban (2007), 52-54.

⁵⁸² Feeney (1991), 354 n. 137 and Ganiban (2007), 53.

⁵⁸³ Ganiban (2007), 53.

⁵⁸⁴ Ganiban (2007), 53 and 96-116.

A reason for this may be found at the beginning of Jupiter's monologue. Jupiter begins by complaining that the Dirae are unable to force mankind into submission (*Theb.* 1.214-15). The notion of the Dirae as Jupiter's weapon of choice against mortals that he wants to subdue (among them cities that deserve to be terrorized by war! (*Aen.* 12.854)) is of course familiar from the closing movement of Vergil's *Aeneid*. In fact, one of these Dirae was one of the most important instruments for Jovian closure at the end of the *Aeneid*. But as Latin literary history has shown time and again, any closure that we thought Jupiter and his Dirae might impose is only temporary. Jupiter's Dirae form the clearest representatives of his punitive side in the *Aeneid*. Ovid had further developed this side to Jupiter's character, and we have seen above how Statius carries Ovid's version of Jupiter into his epic. In the poetry of Lucan and Seneca, Jupiter had been absent and – in the case of Seneca – Vergil's and Ovid's counterforces (Juno, the Furies and the Iron Age) had been triumphant. In carrying out Oedipus' wishes, Jupiter becomes complicit in carrying out a criminal, infernal plot.⁵⁸⁵

Hell on earth: the first summoning of Laius

As revealed in the divine council, Jupiter's plan to bring about the war between Argos and Thebes consists of two parts. First, he announces that he will use Polynices' marriage to one of Adrastus' daughters as a way to set the war between Oedipus' sons in motion (*Theb.* 1.243-45): *belli mihi semina sunt / Adrastus socer et superis adiuncta sinistris / conubia*. Second, he orders Mercury to summon Laius from the Underworld to rouse Eteocles to war with news that Polynices is plotting his overthrow from Argos (*Theb.* 1.292-301). *hinc causae irarum, certo reliqua ordine ducam* (*Theb.* 1.302), Jupiter states. Both parts of his plan set in motion events that have their clearest precedents in Senecan tragedy. The summoning of Laius is quite similar to the summoning of Tantalus in *Thyestes*, and the concept of Adrastus *socer* and Polynices *gener* invading Polynices' homeland to return him home is reminiscent of Seneca's inversion of the teleological plot of the *Aeneid* in his *Oedipus* and *Phoenissae*. So Jupiter's personality may be Ovidian, but his methods are decidedly Senecan. The only problem is that neither method was employed by Jupiter in Senecan tragedy. Both of these methods were tools used by either the poet or his characters to challenge and subvert Jovian and epic authority.

⁵⁸⁵ On Jupiter's identification with the Underworld and Oedipus, see Ganiban (2007), 50-52 in particular.

Let us begin with Mercury and Laius. Following Jupiter's commands to his son, we get a brief scene of Mercury preparing himself for the journey and taking flight (*Theb.* 1.303-11), after which the scene shifts to Polynices in exile. We follow Polynices for the rest of the book as he arrives and is welcomed at the court of Adrastus. Statius returns to Mercury and Laius with the word *interea*, which opens the second book of the *Thebaid*. Laius and Mercury leave the Underworld at Taenarus, and Laius, in the guise of Tiresias, arrives at the bedside of his grandson Eteocles to summon him to war (*Theb.* 2.1-133).

"Jupiter sending Mercury down from Olympus" is of course a quintessentially epic scene, and Statius' scene is most closely modeled on Jupiter sending Mercury down to urge Aeneas to abandon Dido in the fourth book of the *Aeneid*.⁵⁸⁶ The similarity to the Vergilian scene is signaled by Statius' Jupiter himself, who addresses his son as *Cyllenia proles* (*Theb.* 1.293). Vergil had called Mercury *Cyllenia proles* (*Aen.* 4.258) at the end of his description of the god's descent; Statius uses the words to open the scene.⁵⁸⁷ Mercury obeys immediately (*Theb.* 1.303): *Paret Atlantiades dictis genitoris*, lines that recall Vergil's *ille patris magni parere parabat / imperio* (*Aen.* 4.238-39).⁵⁸⁸

But in this scene, too, Statius is merging Vergil's Jupiter with his antagonists. By sending Mercury down to earth, Vergil's Jupiter had tried to undo an epic counterplot set in motion by Venus and Juno in which Dido and Aeneas are to marry and unite their peoples in one nation (*Aen.* 4.90-128).⁵⁸⁹ Venus had independently put the first step into this direction by telling her son Cupid to poison Dido with one of his arrows so that she will fall in love with Aeneas (*Aen.* 1.657-90). Cupid does as his mother tells him (*Aen.* 1.689): *paret Amor dictis carae genetricis*. As commentators have observed, Statius works an allusion to this line into Mercury's carrying out of Jupiter's commands (*Theb.* 1.303, quoted above), thereby fusing two scenes in which two quite different divine sons obey their parent.⁵⁹⁰

In fact, the double-sidedness of Jupiter's character is evidenced in his command to his son as well. Jupiter states that Laius' visit to Eteocles, as well as Polynices' marriage to one of Adrastus' daughters, will surely set the conflict in motion (*Theb.* 1.302): *Hinc causae irarum*. Of course, *causae irarum* were precisely what Juno was

⁵⁸⁶ Noted already by Legras (1905), 34.

⁵⁸⁷ For the allusion see Heuvel (1932) and Caviglia (1973) *ad loc.*

⁵⁸⁸ Heuvel (1932) and Caviglia (1973) *ad loc.*

⁵⁸⁹ See Schiesaro (2005) on the Carthaginian counternarrative.

⁵⁹⁰ Heuvel (1932) and Caviglia (1973) *ad loc.*

going over in her mind at the beginning of Vergil's epic (*Aen.* 1.25):⁵⁹¹ Jupiter himself states that he is about to set in motion a Junonian epic, but he goes about it through means – sending down Mercury – that are quintessentially Jovian. As has been discussed above, – in granting Oedipus' request for revenge and punishment Jupiter becomes complicit in setting a criminal plot in motion. But there is a further twist to this. We know from the fourth book of the *Aeneid* that it is only a natural reaction for Jupiter to respond to such a cry for divine vengeance. As Léon Legras has pointed out, Oedipus' *et uidet ista deorum / ignauus genitor?* (*Theb.* 1.79-80) is very similar to Iarbas' indignation upon hearing of Dido's affair, as he questions Jupiter's concern for mortal affairs (*Aen.* 4.208-10).⁵⁹²

But although Jupiter's response may be a natural one, the epic cosmos in which he is operating is different from the one he was used to. As a result, his actions now further a plot that he would have put a stop to in the *Aeneid*. This becomes particularly evident when we arrive at the beginning of the second book of the *Thebaid*, when Statius describes Mercury's and Laius' ascent from the Underworld. In this scene, Laius is addressed by an anonymous shade, asking whether Laius has been summoned by Jupiter, a Fury or a Thessalian witch (*Theb.* 2.19-22):

'uade,' ait, 'o felix, quoscumque uocaris in usus,
seu Iouis imperio, seu maior adegit Erinys 20
ire diem contra, seu te furiata sacerdos
Thessalis arcano iubet emigrare sepulcro.

Apparently, all possibilities are equally plausible to the anonymous shade. In these lines then, as so often in the *Thebaid*, the strict opposition between Jupiter and the forces of the Underworld is undermined.⁵⁹³

The opening of the second book of the *Thebaid* is densely allusive, with allusions to Vergil's *Aeneid* and Senecan tragedy overshadowing the others.⁵⁹⁴ The Senecan character of this passage has long been noticed. For example, Legras has argued that the Erinys mentioned in line 20 is Seneca's Fury, summoning the shade of Tantalus in *Thyestes*, and goes on to argue that Statius' idea for the scene as a whole must also

⁵⁹¹ Observed by Heuvel (1932) *ad loc.*

⁵⁹² Legras (1905), 34; see also Hershkowitz (1998a), 59 n. 249.

⁵⁹³ See e.g. Feeney (1991), 349; Dominik (1994), 70. See Gervais (2017) *ad loc.* on Statius' dense network of allusions here.

⁵⁹⁴ For the parallels see Mulder (1954) and Gervais (2017).

have the opening of *Thyestes* as its source.⁵⁹⁵ Other scholars too have pointed to the general similarities between the opening of the *Thebaid*'s second book and the opening of Seneca's *Thyestes*.⁵⁹⁶ A closer look at the allusions contained in this passage will reveal the quite subtle intertextual way in which Statius undermines the traditional opposition between Jupiter and the Underworld.

In the first two lines of the book, we are again introduced to Mercury in typically epic fashion (*Theb.* 2.1-2): *Interea gelidis Maia satus aliger umbris / iussa gerens magni remeat Iouis*.⁵⁹⁷ But the vapors of Hell delay his usually swift progress (*Theb.* 2.2-5): *undique pigrae / ire uetant nubes et torpidus implicat aër, / nec Zephyri rapuere gradum, sed foeda silentis / aura poli*.⁵⁹⁸ The sluggishness of the airs of Hell slowing Mercury down is clearly derived from Theseus' topography of the Underworld in *Hercules Furens*. Theseus tells Amphitryon that, in the Underworld, *immutus aer haeret et pigro sedet / nox atra mundo* (*HF.* 704-05).⁵⁹⁹ The fact that Mercury, for all his traditional epic qualities evoked here, is slowed down by the force of the Underworld once again emphasizes the point that the traditional epic Jovian machinery is now operating in a universe that can do without it – indeed, has done without it, and perceives the return of this machinery as an intrusion.

On the other hand, the power of the Underworld should not be overemphasized. After all, Mercury and Laius do manage to reach the upper world again. To her own amazement, Earth opens up for them (*Theb.* 2.13-14): *ipsaque Tellus / miratur patuisse retro*. The most serious threat to Laius' crossing of the boundary is Cerberus, who is efficiently soothed by Mercury's Lethean wand (*Theb.* 2.26-31). Having passed Cerberus, Mercury and Laius reach Taenarus, which Statius goes on to describe at some length (*Theb.* 2.32-54). Although strong allusions to Seneca's *Hercules* are fewer than one might expect in these two passages, Statius' very juxtaposition of Cerberus and Taenarus (the connection between the two is strengthened by Statius' mention of

⁵⁹⁵ Legras (1905), 41.

⁵⁹⁶ See Vessey (1973), 70 (pointing to *Agamemnon* as well, as do Frings and Gervais); Feeney (1991), 347 with n. 116; Frings (1992), 19-20; Hershkowitz (1998a), 59; Gervais (2017), xlv and in his commentary on the scene.

⁵⁹⁷ See the commentaries on parallels in Latin epic for most of the words contained in these lines. See Gervais (2017) *ad loc.* for an interesting discussion of *Interea* as the opening word of books of epics. Gervais observes that Vergil's fifth book opens with *Interea*, and notes that whereas Vergil's reader moves from death to life upon leaving the fourth book and entering the fifth, Statius reverses course and moves his reader back to the Underworld when entering the second book.

⁵⁹⁸ Contrary to Jupiter's orders, as is observed by Gervais (2017) *ad loc.*

⁵⁹⁹ Mulder (1954) and Gervais (2017) *ad loc.*

Cerberus at the end of the Taenarus-passage (*Theb.* 2.53-54)) ensures that Senecan tragedy remains at the back of the reader's mind.⁶⁰⁰ In addition to this, Statius' statement that *hoc ... loco pallentes deuius umbras / trames agit* (*Theb.* 2.48-49) calls to mind Seneca's *nec ire labor est: ipsa deducit uia* (*HF.* 675),⁶⁰¹ a line spoken by Theseus when describing the descent at Taenarus as Hercules sets out to capture Cerberus. Finally, David Vessey observes that Statius' discussion of the local Arcadians' report that the punishments of Hell can be heard at Taenarus (*Theb.* 2.50-54) is reminiscent of Amphitryon's question to Theseus whether the reports are true that people are judged and punished for their crimes in the Underworld (*HF.* 727-29).⁶⁰²

As soon as Mercury reaches the upper world, he dispels the clouds of the Underworld (*Theb.* 2.55-57): *Hac et tunc fusca uolucer deus obsitus umbra / exsilit ad superos, infernaque nubila uultu / discutit et uiuis afflatibus ora serenat*. In an unsettling paradox Mercury, about to let the shade of Laius help set Hell on earth in motion, washes off the gloom of Hell with a breath of fresh air. The irony of these lines is increased through an allusion to Seneca's *Oedipus*. The play's second choral ode consists of a hymn to Bacchus, in which the chorus begs the god to cleanse the earth and rid it of the infernal vapors that have taken possession of it (*Oed.* 409-11): *huc aduerte fauens uirgineum caput, / uultu sidereo discute nubila / et tristes Erebi minas / auidumque fatum*. Statius has brilliantly inverted Seneca's meaning by using the ablative *uultu* in a different way than his predecessor. As Heine Mulder points out when adducing this parallel, the ablative with *discutio* is rarely used of separation (as it is in the Statian passage), but far more often to signify the instrument.⁶⁰³ Bacchus is asked to remove the darkness *with* his face, not *from* his face – as the divine messenger in the *Thebaid* does. Mercury may have cleansed himself, but he is about to pollute the earth. This unsettling impression of Mercury is further reinforced through an allusion to *Aen.* 7.408, *protinus hinc fuscis tristis dea tollitur alis*, in *Theb.* 2.55. In Vergil, this line formed part of Vergil's treatment of Allecto, but Statius uses it to paint a 'sinister' picture of Mercury.⁶⁰⁴

⁶⁰⁰ The technique mirrors Seneca's framing of Hercules' *katabasis* with passages devoted to the gate at Taenarus in his *Hercules*. Vessey (1973), 232 states that 'Statius remembered Seneca's description of Taenarus (*Herc. Fur.* 662 ff.)' in this passage; For possible allusion to Seneca's Cerberus see Mulder (1954) and Gervais (2017) *ad Theb.* 2.30.

⁶⁰¹ Mulder (1954) and Gervais (2017) *ad loc.*

⁶⁰² Vessey (1973), 232. Gervais (2017) *ad Theb.* 2.50-54 observes allusions to the grove in which Atreus had slaughtered his brother's sons in *Thyestes*.

⁶⁰³ Mulder (1954) *ad loc.*

⁶⁰⁴ Mulder (1954) and Gervais (2017) *ad loc.* for the parallel and Gervais for the sinister interpretation.

Laius and Mercury arrive at Thebes, but Laius is reluctant to go on (*Theb.* 2.65-70):

<i>uentum erat ad Thebas; gemuit prope limina nati</i>	65
<i>Laius et notos cunctatus inire penates.</i>	
<i>ut uero et celsis suamet iuga nixa columnis</i>	
<i>uidit et infectos etiamnum sanguine currus,</i>	
<i>paene retro turbatus abit: nec summa Tonantis</i>	
<i>iussa sed Arcadiae retinent spiramina uirgae.</i>	70

Many scholars have observed that Laius' reluctance to cross the threshold and his desire to return the Underworld echo Tantalus' reluctance to enter the palace and his request *abire in atrum carceris liceat mei / cubile* (*Thy.* 70-71).⁶⁰⁵ Indeed, the entire passage is rich in Senecan resonance. Both Laius and Tantalus approach a palace that they primarily associate with their son rather than their grandsons: Laius *gemuit prope limina nati* (*Theb.* 2.65) and Tantalus speaks of the house of Pelops (*Thy.* 22: *Pelopea domo*).⁶⁰⁶ For both men, the location stirs memories of violence connected to their sons. But Pelops is dead, Oedipus powerless, and the primary task of both men is to set in motion a struggle for power among their grandchildren.⁶⁰⁷ Relevant too is the fact that Laius almost flees at the sight of his very own yoke and his chariot, still stained with blood (*Theb.* 2.67-68). The reader may recall that Pelops' spoils, the *fracti ... currus, spolia Myrtoi maris* (*Thy.* 660) are kept in the Argive royal palace in Seneca's *Thyestes*.

Statius goes on to describe Thebes as Laius and Mercury find it (*Theb.* 2.71-88). The Thebans have spent the night in revelry, celebrating the birth of Bacchus. The king is asleep (*Theb.* 2.89-93). Laius takes on the appearance of the seer Tiresias (*Theb.* 2.94-101) and informs Eteocles that Polynices is planning an assault on Thebes with help from Argos (*Theb.* 2.102-19). Just before returning to the Underworld, Laius removes his Tiresian guise and pours ghostly blood from his wound over his grandson. As he awakens, Eteocles is possessed by desire for war against his brother (*Theb.* 2.120-33).

⁶⁰⁵ See e.g. Legras (1905), 41; Mulder (1954) *ad loc.* for the parallel and earlier scholarship. Gervais (2017) *ad Theb.* 2.65-70: 'Laius' consternation looks to the ghosts of Senecan drama'.

⁶⁰⁶ On Laius' association of the palace with his son rather than his grandson, see also Mulder (1954) *ad loc.*

⁶⁰⁷ Compare Mulder (1954) *ad Theb.* 2.55-71, stating that Laius and Tantalus are fetched from the Underworld *eadem de causa*.

Although Laius' "infection" of Eteocles with his blood (*Theb.* 2.124) may continue the Thyestean allusions by recalling Tantalus' infection of the palace of Pelops, the scene's most significant predecessor is Allecto's visit to Turnus (*Aen.* 7.415-66). There are many strong parallels between both scenes: both Allecto and Laius appear at night, when the prince they are commanded to visit is asleep; both take on the appearance of someone else; both incite the prince to war, and ensure he wakes up in a frenzied lust for war.⁶⁰⁸ In short, what we have here is one of the most obviously Junonian moments in the *Thebaid*.⁶⁰⁹

Simultaneously, Statius continues to emphasize that this scene is embedded in a Jovian framework. Statius marks the transition between his description of Thebes at night by stating how *uolucer Cyllenius* (*Theb.* 2.89) arrives at Eteocles' bedside: Laius is only mentioned again in line 94 (*tunc senior quae iussus agit*). Eteocles is portrayed as a decadent eastern monarch, sprawled out on *Assyriis ... tapetibus* (*Theb.* 2.91). We may compare Mercury's first sight of Aeneas, wearing a cloak of Tyrian purple (*Aen.* 4.262-63: *Tyrio ... ardebat murice laena / demissa ex umeris*). An even stronger allusion to Mercury's visit to Aeneas can be found in Laius' claim that *ipse deum genitor tibi me miseratus ab alto / mittit* (*Theb.* 2.115-16), which echoes Mercury's *ipse deum tibi me claro demittit Olympo / regnator* (*Aen.* 4.268-69).⁶¹⁰ But Statius also alludes to the dead Anchises' visit to Aeneas at the end of the fifth book of the *Aeneid* (*Aen.* 5.721-45). The speeches of Laius and Anchises are introduced with the words *has uisus Fatorum expromere uoces* (*Theb.* 2.101) and *uisa ... facies ... parentis / Anchisae subito talis effundere uoces* (*Aen.* 5.722-23) respectively. Both emphasize that they have arrived on Jupiter's command (*Theb.* 2.115-16; *Aen.* 5.726) and both leave at the break of dawn (*Theb.* 2.120-21; *Aen.* 5.738).⁶¹¹ Once again, Statius fuses the infernal and celestial forces active in the *Aeneid*.

⁶⁰⁸ See e.g. Legras (1905), 40; Mulder (1954) *ad locc.*; Vessey (1973), 234; Ahl (1986), 2840 and 2843; Hershkowitz (1998a), 59 for these and other similarities.

⁶⁰⁹ For a comprehensive overview of all sources reworked by Statius in *Theb.* 2.94-133 see Gervais (2017) *ad loc.* with further references.

⁶¹⁰ Mulder (1954) *ad loc.*

⁶¹¹ See most recently Gervais (2017) *ad loc.* on Statius' fusion of both Vergilian passages.

Theban teleology and the second summoning of Laius

With the first summoning of Laius, the *Thebaid's* Thyestean plotline is well under way. Simultaneously, Statius' Theban plotline has also been set in motion. Statius connects the hellish intervention of Tisiphone to Oedipus' regressive nature. He also lets Jupiter set the war in motion through both Mercury's Thyestean summoning of Laius as well as Polynices' marriage to Adrastus' daughter. In this way, Statius announces that he will fully explore the implications of these two tragic plotlines that Seneca had crafted to challenge the epic genre. The *Thebaid* is a Senecan tragic epic, and as such it is both about the explosion of evil as well as the implosion of family relations and history in reverse. And just as Statius uses *Thyestes* to set in motion the poem's infernal plotline, so he follows Seneca's *Oedipus* and *Phoenissae* in reversing the course of the *Aeneid*.

Polynices is 'in many ways the *Thebaid's* Aeneas figure'.⁶¹² As Ganiban observes, 'he is also an exile who seeks military and political alliances from others and eventually fights a war', and both Aeneas and Polynices 'arrive in a city whose king has received an oracle about the marriage of his daughters, and both are believed to be the fated husbands'.⁶¹³ Of course, Adrastus' role as the *Thebaid's* Latinus has long been recognized.⁶¹⁴ And as Ruth Parkes observes in her commentary on the fourth book of the *Thebaid*, Statius' use of the terms *gener* and *socer* to signify Polynices and Adrastus 'could bring forth memories of the conflict between Caesar and Pompey [...] or Latinus and Aeneas'.⁶¹⁵ Statius uses the terms *socer* and *gener* not just because they happen to cover the family relationship between Adrastus and Polynices, but also because they serve as a continuous reminder of these two conflicts throughout the epic, inviting the reader to view the Theban conflict through a Roman lens – and *vice versa*.

As I have discussed in the final chapter on Senecan tragedy, Seneca had preceded Statius in his application of the terms of *socer* and *gener* to the Theban conflict. Seneca used these terms to draw attention to the implications of his intertextual strategy in the Theban plays. In Vergil's epic, Aeneas' journey is both a journey to a new land as well as a return to origins. Seneca exploited these possibilities for reversal instead of forward movement inherent to the plot and conception of history of the *Aeneid*. Aeneas finds his *socer* in a strange land that is to become his new home; Polynices finds his *socer* in a strange land in order to *return* home. In fact, what both Seneca's

⁶¹² Hershkowitz (1997), 42.

⁶¹³ Ganiban (2007), 191.

⁶¹⁴ On Adrastus' Latinus-like role in the first book see Legras (1905), 220; Vessey (1973), 94-95.

⁶¹⁵ Parkes (2012) *ad Theb.* 4.74-75.

and Statius' Polynices attempt to make reality is Aeneas' impossible wish to return to Troy, expressed by Vergil's hero as he abandons Dido (*Aen.* 4.340-44, discussed in earlier chapters).

Because his epic features Adrastus as a character and manages to carry the narrative beyond the Jocasta-point where Seneca's *Phoenissae* stopped, Statius is able to make much more out of the *gener-socer* relationship than Seneca is. In the *Thebaid*, Polynices' *socer* offers him not only the hand of his daughter, but also the possibility of an alternative view of his own identity. At the very end of the epic's first book, Polynices is reluctant to reveal his identity as Oedipus' son, but ends up naming Cadmus his ancestor, Thebes his homeland and Jocasta his mother. Adrastus responds that everybody knows about the terrible history of the Theban house, and also tells Polynices that it is possible to escape one's origins – his own success in breaking away from Argos' criminal history being sufficient proof (*Theb.* 1.673-95).⁶¹⁶

We have seen that Aeneas' stay in Carthage had presented the hero with an alternative to the course of destiny as organized by Jupiter, an alternative trajectory of history created by Juno and Venus and propagated by Dido.⁶¹⁷ Similarly, Adrastus presents Polynices with an alternative conception of his own identity and the possibility of a different direction to his life, away from Thebes and his ancestors, by marrying him to his daughter Argia (*Theb.* 2.152-72).⁶¹⁸ Indeed, Aeneas' reception and stay at Dido's court is evoked several times by Statius. Statius' narration of the reception that Polynices and Tydeus enjoy at Adrastus' court is composed from references to Aeneas' reception at the courts of Dido, Latinus and Euander.⁶¹⁹ These references do more than simply evoke the fact that the unions that Dido and Latinus proposed would lead to their own demise (or that Euander's alliance with Aeneas would lead to the death of his son Pallas).⁶²⁰ Statius' combined references to these Vergilian reception scenes form a clear example of the technique of combined allusion to the *Aeneid* characteristic of Flavian epic.⁶²¹ In fusing the *Aeneid's* regressive Dido-plotline with the more forward-looking moments from the second half of Vergil's epic, Statius has created a disconcerting Theban version of the *Aeneid* in which – in rather sweeping Vergilian

⁶¹⁶ See Bernstein's (2003) discussion of this passage and its wider thematic relevance.

⁶¹⁷ Once again paraphrasing Schiesaro (2005).

⁶¹⁸ Bernstein (2003), 265.

⁶¹⁹ See Mulder (1932) and Caviglia (1973) *ad Theb.* 1.512-61 in particular.

⁶²⁰ Both Adrastus and Latinus 'propose dynastic marriages that lead to destructive wars'. (Bernstein (2003), 368, referring to Delarue (2000), 300 and Keith (2000), 74) Both Dido's and Adrastus' offer of hospitality is ultimately self-destructive, as Hill (1989), 115-16 and Bernstein (2003), 368 point out.

⁶²¹ Hardie (1989).

terms – Aeneas marries Dido and returns to Troy to conquer it with a Carthaginian army. Ironically, in spite of Adrastus’ optimistic outlook that challenges Theban determinism, it is his Argive wealth and power that makes Polynices’ very Theban return to origins possible.⁶²²

Statius continues his Theban reversal of the Vergilian epic plot in the following books. The possibility that Polynices’ marriage to Adrastus’ daughter Argia could really open up a different, non-Theban future is quickly discarded. In fact, the possibility is undermined from the moment the marriage is announced. When both Tydeus and Polynices have agreed to their marriage with Adrastus’ daughters, Adrastus promises his future *generi* that he will restore them to their kingdoms (*Theb.* 2.198-200).⁶²³ The Argives, upon hearing about the marriage, are described as *alacres* (*Theb.* 2.201). Although its primary meaning here must be something like “cheerful”, it is a word that ‘often suggests battle fervour’ in the *Thebaid*.⁶²⁴ The wording Statius uses to describe the spread of the rumor in the city, *fuso rumore per urbem / aduenisse duci generos* (*Theb.* 2.201-02), echoes the *Aeneid*’s *diditur hic subito Troiana per agmina rumor / aduenisse diem quo debita moenia condant* (*Aen.* 7.144-45).⁶²⁵ Statius once again invokes the *Aeneid*’s *gener-and-socer*-motif, and once again this invocation stresses the self-destructive path that the *Thebaid*’s characters take, in contrast with the *Aeneid*’s.⁶²⁶

The rumors about the marriage are also spread to Thebes, by none other than a very Vergilian Fama (*Theb.* 2.205-213).⁶²⁷ This allusion to Fama sets in motion the second step of Statius’ reworking of Vergil’s tale of Aeneas and Dido. Just as Aeneas had abandoned Dido for Italy, so will Polynices eventually abandon Argia for Thebes.⁶²⁸ As Statius himself states explicitly, Fama’s intervention is parallel to that of Laius (*Theb.* 2.210: *praemissae consona nocti*).⁶²⁹

⁶²² Compare Bernstein (2003) on the way in which the *Thebaid* falsifies Adrastus’ views on kinship.

⁶²³ See Gervais (2017) *ad loc.* on Adrastus’ dangerous over-enthusiasm in this passage.

⁶²⁴ Gervais (2017) *ad loc.*

⁶²⁵ Mulder (1954) and Gervais (2017) *ad loc.*

⁶²⁶ Cf. Gervais (2017) *ad loc.* on the ‘teleological differences between the two epics’.

⁶²⁷ Cf. Mulder (1954) and Gervais (2017) *ad loc.* for the parallels and Hardie (2012), 201-04 for discussion. Hardie emphasizes Statius’ alignment of the work of Fama with the plan of Jupiter.

⁶²⁸ Paraphrasing Gervais (2017), xl.

⁶²⁹ Once again, Lucan is present in the background. The self-destructive nature of the coming war is hammered home by the poet’s outburst *quae tanta licentia monstro, / quis furor?* (*Theb.* 2.212-13) and the statement that Fama *iam bella canit* (*Theb.* 2.213). These lines echo Lucan’s *quis furor o ciues, quae tanta licentia ferri?* (*BC.* 1.8) and his *Bella ... / ... canimus ...* (*BC.* 1.1-2) respectively. See Mulder (1954) and Gervais (2017) *ad loc.* for the allusion to *BC.* 1.8, Gervais (2017) *ad Theb.* 2.213 for the allusion to the opening of Lucan’s epic.

When the wedding between Polynices and Argia takes place, it is haunted by disturbing omens. In addition to this, the bride wears a most disturbing heirloom that she received from her husband: the infamous necklace of Harmonia. In his epythras of this necklace, forged by Vulcan to avenge the adultery of his wife Venus (*Theb.* 2.269-73), Statius merges several of his epic's core concerns, and it has become a commonplace of Statian criticism that the necklace mirrors the epic as a whole.⁶³⁰ Statius' statement introducing the history of the necklace, *longa est series, sed nota malorum / persequar, unde nouis tam saeua potentia donis* (*Theb.* 2.267-68),⁶³¹ echoes the poet's introduction to his summary of Theban history (*Theb.* 1.7-9: *longa retro series, trepidum si Martis operti / agricolam infandis condentem proelia sulcis / expeditam penitusque sequar*), an echo that 'points to the necklace's synecdochic relationship with the entire epic'.⁶³²

No wonder then that the Senecan elements of the *Thebaid* are represented in Harmonia's necklace as well. Just like Statius' epic, the necklace is infused with Tisiphone's venom (*Theb.* 2.282-83).⁶³³ Indeed, Statius associates several infernal personifications with the forging of the necklace (*Theb.* 2.286-88):

*non hoc Pasithea blandarum prima sororum,
non Decor Idaliusque puer, sed Luctus et Irae
et Dolor et tota pressit Discordia dextra.*

As Kyle Gervais' commentary reveals, most of the personifications co-forging the necklace can be traced back to Vergilian epic and Senecan tragedy and are paralleled in Silius' epic. Gervais points out that Luctus is found in Vergil's (*Aen.* 6.274), Seneca's (*HF.* 694) and Silius' (13.581) Underworlds and opens the catalogue in Statius just as it does in Vergil and Silius. Similarly, Statius follows Vergil (*Aen.* 6.280) and parallels Silius (13.586) in placing Discordia last.⁶³⁴ Dolor is the personification that carries the strongest Senecan associations: it is found in the Underworld of *Hercules Furens* (*HF.* 693) and accompanies Seneca's Oedipus out of Thebes (*Oed.* 652, 1060).⁶³⁵

⁶³⁰ For a full discussion of Harmonia's necklace, see McNelis (2007), 50-75. For a Valerian take, see Stover (2018).

⁶³¹ Following an alternative interpunction not adopted in Shackleton Bailey's text.

⁶³² Gervais (2013) *ad loc.*, referring to Lovatt (2002), 84-85; McNelis (2007), 57-61. The allusion is also noted by Mulder (1954) *ad loc.*

⁶³³ McNelis (2007), 56-57.

⁶³⁴ Gervais (2017) *ad loc.*

⁶³⁵ Gervais (2017) *ad loc.*

Through this particular list of personifications, Statius once again emphasizes that his “Vergilian” epic is taking a very Senecan turn.

Following the wedding of Polynices and Argia, Statius gives us the most Didoesque scene of the second book. As Gervais has convincingly shown, Argia’s conversation with Polynices about her husband’s desire for Thebes (*Theb.* 2.332-62) is heavily indebted to Aeneas’ abandonment of Dido.⁶³⁶ But Statius offers the clearest hint at the purpose of his allusions to Vergil’s Dido a little earlier, in his treatment of the theme of Polynices’ homesickness. The poet states that after the wedding, Polynices *respicere ad Thebas iamque et sua quaerere regna* (*Theb.* 2.308). This line echoes Aeneas’ reproach to Dido that *et nos fas extera quaerere regna* (*Aen.* 4.350).⁶³⁷ Gervais observes Statius’ reversal of Vergil: ‘Marriage to Argia facilitates Polynices’ “mission” (the Theban war) rather than hinders it (as Dido does Aeneas), and the **regna** that Polynices seeks is not *extera*, but rather **sua**: the tragedy of the *Aeneid* is separation [...], while the tragedy of the *Thebaid* is joining – an entire epic devoted to a horrific family reunion.’⁶³⁸ In addition to this, we should also observe that through this allusion Statius shows that Polynices chooses the path denied to Aeneas, even though the Trojan hero desires it: the return home.

By the time we reach the mid-point of the fourth book, the Argive army is firmly on the march, and the Theban people begin to feel anxious about the approaching assault on their city. Thebes is hardly ready for war. The famous walls, raised by Amphion’s lyre, are crumbling and a raging Bacchante predicts terrible civil and fraternal strife. The poem seems firmly on its way towards its *telos* of *nefas*. Yet at the same time, it is precisely in the second quarter of the epic that its narrative unity, and indeed its very narratability, are most under threat, as is most clearly evidenced by the Argive army’s long delay in Nemea.⁶³⁹ Similarly, Statius continues to emphasize the two sides to his

⁶³⁶ See Gervais (2017) *ad loc.* and xxxix-xli for a more general discussion. See Hershkowitz (1997) on Statius’ reception of Vergil’s *parce metu, Cytherea* (*Aen.* 1.223-96)-scene in this passage and elsewhere in his epic.

⁶³⁷ Mulder (1954) and Gervais (2017) *ad loc.*

⁶³⁸ Gervais (2017) *ad Theb.* 2.332-62.

⁶³⁹ On the tension in the *Thebaid* between epic teleology and the constant threat of its dissolution see Heinrich (1999). On delay in the fourth book in particular see Parkes (2012), xvii-xx, with n. 7 for bibliography on the role of delay in the *Thebaid*. See also Parkes (2012), xxxii-xxxiii with n. 91 on Statius’ regressive intertextuality in his books 4-6, moving from *Aeneid* 7 (war preparations) to 6 (*katabasis* of sorts) to 1 (reception of leaders by a woman). On the tension between epic teleology and delay in the *Thebaid* in general see especially McNelis (2007), as well as Parkes (2014) on delays on the way to Thebes. On the importance of being Opheltes, see Soerink (2014b), who offers a detailed interpretation of the final third of the *Thebaid*’s fifth book and its thematic significance to the epic as a whole.

incorporation of Senecan tragedy into his epic: on the one hand, the reader is briefly reminded of the poem's Thyestean stakes. On the other, he gets the opportunity to have a look into a decidedly Theban Underworld.

A Thyestean note is struck when the poet describes the state of Thebes' walls (*Theb.* 4.356-60):

*ipsa uetusto
moenia lapsa situ magnaue Amphionis arces
iam fessum senio nudant latus, et fide sacra
aequatos caelo surdum atque ignobile muros
firmat opus.*

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In her commentary, Ruth Parkes compares this passages to other "rebuilding the walls"-scenes from Seneca, Lucan and Silius.⁶⁴⁰ The Senecan passage comes from the third choral ode of *Thyestes*, in which the effects on the population of the threat of fraternal warfare between Atreus and Thyestes are described by the chorus (*Thy.* 567-68): *ille labentes renouare muros / hic situ quassas stabilire turres*. Statius has fused Seneca's *labentes ... muros* and his *situ quassas ... turres* into his own *moenia lapsa situ*.

This allusion serves as a "quick reminder" of Statius' Thyestean plotline. But more importantly, this allusion to *Thyestes* is combined with one to *Phoenissae*. In this passage from the *Thebaid* the magical origins of the walls are contrasted with the 'mundane' efforts of the Theban citizens to restore them.⁶⁴¹ Parkes observes that this contrast 'may have been inspired by *Phoen.* 566-71 *poteris has Amphionis / quassare moles? nulla quas struxit manus / stridente tardum machina ducens onus, / sed conuocatus uocis et citharae sono / per se ipse summas uenit in turres lapis: haec saxa franges?*'⁶⁴² As we have seen in the final Senecan chapter, both the third choral ode in *Thyestes* and Jocasta's intervention in *Phoenissae* are concerned with the pivotal moment at which the conflict between brothers could descend into civil war. Even though the actual conflict is still three books off, Statius here incorporates the first in a series of his reworking of Seneca's "on the brink of civil war"-moments.

⁶⁴⁰ Parkes (2012) *ad loc.*

⁶⁴¹ Parkes (2012) *ad Theb.* 4.359-60.

⁶⁴² *Ibidem*. See also Reitz (2013), 182-83 on Amphion in Seneca (with references) and 188-90 on Amphion's wall in the fourth book of the *Thebaid*.

The fusion of *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae* in this passage looks forward to Statius' ever stronger merging of both Senecan plotlines as his epic progresses.

But it is the typically Theban reversed teleology that is most strongly present in this part of the *Thebaid's* fourth book. This may be the point in the epic at which the Argive army loses its way, but it is also the point at which Thebes tries to discover its essence. Statius stresses this both in the speech of the maenad (*Theb.* 4.377-405) and Tiresias' necromancy (*Theb.* 4.406-645). It is telling that both scenes, but particularly the latter, are strongly indebted to Seneca's *Oedipus*.

In the maenad's speech, Statius emphasizes both the repetitive nature of Theban history and its regressive course, its tendency to return to origins or to move towards self-destruction. The first point is introduced in one of the omens before the maenad's speech. The Sphinx is reported to have spoken again (*Theb.* 4.375-76): *iterum ... locutam / Spbinga petris*. The word *iterum* has become a well-known metapoetic sign for critics of Latin poetry, alerting the reader to the fact that the text that he is reading is a repetition of an earlier one.⁶⁴³ At the very least then, Statius' tale of Oedipus' sons is a repetition of the tale of Oedipus. But it is possible to be more specific. After all, the Sphinx has spoken before – in the second book of the *Thebaid*.

When, in the second book, Eteocles' men prepare their ambush for Tydeus on his way back to Argos from his failed embassy to Thebes, they do so at the very spot where the Sphinx used to have its lair, the *Oedipodioniae domus alitis* (*Theb.* 2.505). With these very words Statius reminds us of Seneca's Oedipus, who had boasted that *triste carmen alitis solui ferae* (*Oed.* 102).⁶⁴⁴ And indeed, Statius goes on to describe the Sphinx and the rock at which she sits in terms highly reminiscent of Oedipus' description of the monster in Seneca's tragedy (*Oed.* 92-102).⁶⁴⁵ In addition to this we should note that the Sphinx' face and gaze (*Theb.* 2.505-07: *fera ... / pallentes erecta genas suffusaque tabo / lumina*) are similar to those of Vergil's tragic queens: the frenzied Dido (*Aen.* 4.642-44) and Amata (*Aen.* 7.399).⁶⁴⁶ Statius has fused Seneca's Sphinx on his way to self-knowledge and self-destruction with Vergil's doomed queens.

⁶⁴³ See for example the discussion of *iterum* and repetition in my chapter on *Oedipus*, with references.

⁶⁴⁴ For the allusion see Mulder (1954) and Gervais (2017) *ad loc.*

⁶⁴⁵ For the parallels see Mulder (1954) and Gervais (2017) *ad loc.* as well as Smolenaars (2004).

⁶⁴⁶ Gervais (2017) *ad loc.*, who also refers to Ovid's Hecuba, another mad queen and one that had served as an important model for Oedipus' self-blinding. Indeed, as Gervais observes, Statius stresses the similarity of Oedipus to the Sphinx in this passage (*Theb.* 2.517: *heu simili deprensa uiro*) – again, a Senecan notion (cf. *Oed.* 640-41; *Phoen.* 138-39).

The Sphinx-omen in the fourth book repeats the “appearance” of the Sphinx in the second book, itself a repetition of her appearance in Seneca’s *Oedipus*. In its turn, the omen introduces a long sequence of repetitions that will dominate the next 300 or so lines.⁶⁴⁷ Statius’ catalogue of omens (*Theb.* 4.369-405) is concluded by the appearance of the frenzied maenad running down *uertice ab Ogygio* (*Theb.* 4.380) and filling the terrified city with her cries (*Theb.* 4.381-82): *ardens / erectam attonitis implet clamoribus urbem*. In his portrayal of this Bacchante, Statius combines Vergil’s Laocoon, prophesying the city’s doom,⁶⁴⁸ and the Bacchic queen Amata⁶⁴⁹ with the Cassandra from Seneca’s *Agamemnon*⁶⁵⁰ and Lucan’s prophetic *matrona*.⁶⁵¹ The allusions to Laocoon and Amata are contained in the lines introducing the prophecy of Statius’ maenad (*Theb.* 4.377-82). Just as Vergil’s Laocoon and Amata scenes form the prologue to the doom of their cities, so does the appearance of this frenzied maenad foreshadow the Theban descent into tragic madness.⁶⁵²

In Statius’ epic all of these intertextual repetitions of prophecies concerning the repetitively doomed histories of cities are returned to their Theban source. The same is true of the necromancy conducted by Tiresias that follows the maenad’s prophecy, as we will see shortly. Of course, the necromancy conducted by Tiresias in Seneca’s *Oedipus* is a direct ancestor of Statius’ scene. Moreover, Statius’ reader is prepared for this Tiresian necromancy through allusions to Seneca’s Bacchus-choral ode (*Oed.* 403-508) in the maenad’s address to Bacchus.⁶⁵³ But Tiresias’ necromancy is also a reworking of Aeneas’ *katabasis*, and the maenad’s vision prepares the reader for this as well. In yet another comparison of Eteocles and Polynices to fighting bulls, the maenad urges Eteocles to be the first to cease hostilities (*Theb.* 4.401-02): *tu peior, tu cede, nocens qui solus auita / gramina communemque petis defendere montem*. An allusion has been observed here to Anchises’ exhortation to the shade of Caesar, paired with that of Pompey in the Underworld (*Aen.* 6.834-35): *tuque prior, tu parce, genus qui ducis Olympo, / proice tela manu, sanguis meus*.⁶⁵⁴ Also, the Bacchante’s silence

⁶⁴⁷ For bibliography on the fourth book I am much indebted to Parkes (2012).

⁶⁴⁸ On the allusions to Laocoon see Parkes (2012), *ad Theb.* 4.379-80, 381.

⁶⁴⁹ E.g. Legras (1905), 56; Parkes (2012) *ad Theb.* 4.378-82, 380-81, 381, 382.

⁶⁵⁰ Taisne (1994), 191 and more cautiously Parkes (2012) *ad Theb.* 4.377-405.

⁶⁵¹ The maenad’s introduction, the contents and aftermath of her prophecy are all indebted to Lucan. See e.g. Legras (1905), 56-57; Hardie (1993), 23-24; Taisne (1994), 191-92; Hershkowitz (1998a), 46-47; Ganiban (2007), 62-65 (for other intertexts as well); Roche (2009) *ad BC.* 1.673-95; Parkes (2012) *ad Theb.* 4.378-82 and *ad locc.*

⁶⁵² Cf. Hershkowitz (1998a), 46.

⁶⁵³ Parkes (2012) *ad Theb.* 4.383-404, 386-87, 389.

⁶⁵⁴ See Parkes (2012) *ad Theb.* 4.401 for bibliography on the matter.

upon the departure of Bacchus, who had inspired her frenzy (*Theb.* 4.404-05) calls to mind the Sibyl's falling silent after her prophecy in the sixth book of the Aeneid (*Aen.* 6.102).⁶⁵⁵ In Statius' epic, Rome is among the doomed cities.

Statius goes on to describe the ultimate necromancy in Latin poetry (*Theb.* 4.406-645).⁶⁵⁶ In doing so he engages with the full literary tradition on the topic, from Homer to Lucan and Seneca.⁶⁵⁷ As Statius shifts from the maenad's vision to the necromancy, he introduces some of his major intertexts while emphasizing the fact that *his* necromancy is very belated. His necromantic narrative will walk a fine line between Homer, Vergil, Seneca and Lucan (among many others)⁶⁵⁸ and it is precisely through the making of careful choices along the way in the handling of all of these intertexts that the narrative remains firmly Statian.⁶⁵⁹

Statius' necromancy opens with Eteocles' anxious consultation of Tiresias (*Theb.* 4.406-09). The Theban seer dismisses other means of divine consultation in favour of necromancy and begins his preparations (*Theb.* 4.409-18). This opening scene is heavily indebted to both Sextus Pompey's consultation of Erichtho in Lucan's *Bellum Civile* and Oedipus' consultation of Tiresias in Seneca's *Oedipus*. Like Sextus, Eteocles is plagued by fear for the future.⁶⁶⁰ Also like Sextus, Tiresias dismisses other mantic means in favour of summoning the dead – the most powerful prophetic tool available. Finally, Statius' Tiresias shares this dismissal with Seneca's Tiresias.⁶⁶¹ But there is a significant difference between the two. Seneca's Tiresias had actually employed many other means of prophecy before moving on to necromancy, Statius' Tiresias dismisses them straightaway, 'as if in recognition of his earlier wasted effort'.⁶⁶² This recognition of the all too familiar nature of many elements of the necromantic tradition is characteristic of Statius' Tiresias and Manto, as Feeney has argued.⁶⁶³

⁶⁵⁵ Parkes (2012) *ad Theb.* 4.404-05.

⁶⁵⁶ Only to be topped by the thirteenth book of Silius' *Punica*, on which see Van der Keur (2015).

⁶⁵⁷ For overviews of Statius' sources see e.g. Legras (1905), 174-76; Vessey (1973), 235-58; Parkes (2012) *ad Theb.* 4.406-645. For a complementary reading of Statius' engagement with Seneca in the necromancy see Augoustakis (2015), 378-85.

⁶⁵⁸ Compare Vessey (1973), 254-55 on *Theb.* 4.503-11, lines in which Tiresias comes dangerously close to becoming a Medea or Erichtho but manages to narrowly avoid this. See also Parkes (2012) *ad Theb.* 4.500-18. See Parkes (2013) 173-76 on Statius' engagement with the twin chthonic tradition of *katabasis* and necromancy.

⁶⁵⁹ On Statius' originality in handling the necromancy see now especially the work of Parkes (2010), (2012) *ad locc.* and (2013).

⁶⁶⁰ Parkes (2012) *ad Theb.* 4.406-09.

⁶⁶¹ See Parkes (2012) *ad Theb.* 4.409-14 for a discussion of the parallels in these lines.

⁶⁶² Parkes (2012) *ad Theb.* 4.409-14.

⁶⁶³ Feeney (1991), 341-43. This notion is further developed in Augoustakis (2015), 378-80.

In these very first lines, then, Statius sets the scene for a thoroughly Lucanian and Senecan necromancy – no matter how significant his debt to Homer and Vergil may be. Ganiban has argued for a Lucanian interpretation of the ritual as a whole. Like Lucan's, Statius' Underworld is divided in two factions (*optimates* against *populares* and Argives against Thebans respectively). The prophecy of Eteocles' grandfather Laius is as enigmatic as that of the anonymous corpse in Lucan's *Bellum Ciuile*. Also, Ganiban observes a clear reversal of the relationship between father Anchises and son Aeneas in the sixth book of the *Aeneid*. Instead of a father leading his son and his descendants to further glory, we have a grandfather urging his grandchildren towards self-destruction.⁶⁶⁴

As we have seen in the chapter on Seneca's *Oedipus*, this particular type of *Aeneid*-reversal can also be found in Seneca's speech of Laius (*Oed.* 626–58), in which the father curses the son.⁶⁶⁵ Statius emphasizes the fact that his necromancy continues the regressive efforts of both Lucan and Seneca by composing the grove of Diana, in which his Tiresias' ritual takes place (*Theb.* 4.419–33), from groves that had loomed large in both Lucan (Caesar's Massilian grove (*BC.* 3.399–452)) and Seneca (the groves in *Oed.* 530–47 and *Thy.* 650–87)).⁶⁶⁶ In the Senecan chapters I have already commented on the allusive density of these literary forests, and Statius' grove of Diana is no different.

As befits a Theban location like Statius' grove of Diana, it is a place haunted by a continuous return to origins. Adjacent to the *lucus* is the site where Cadmus' Sown Men had fought their battle, and where their ghosts are still fighting it (*Theb.* 4.434–42). In keeping with the theme of returns to Theban origins, Statius echoes earlier treatments of this foundational fight between brothers. Statius' *putria sanguine prata* (*Theb.* 4.437) are indebted to the earth drenched in blood of Euripides' *Phoinissai*⁶⁶⁷ and Statius' *consanguineas acies* (*Theb.* 4.436) echo Seneca's *agmina ... cognata* (*Oed.* 738), used of the Sown Men in the third choral ode of *Oedipus*.⁶⁶⁸ Moreover, this particular allusion to the Sown Men is part of a sequence of allusions to them running

⁶⁶⁴ Ganiban (2007), 65–69. As Parkes (2013), 176–79 notes, Statius also reworks Lucan's cyclical view of history in this part of his epic. For more on this, see below.

⁶⁶⁵ See Taisne (1991) for Statius' allusions to Seneca's *Oedipus* (*non uidit*). Augoustakis (2015), 384–85 notes the similarities.

⁶⁶⁶ Statius' fusion of the Theban and the Thyestean grove in this passage continues Statius' long-term engagement with both threads running through Seneca's tragic oeuvre. For the parallels see Taisne (1994), 210 and Parkes (2012) *ad Theb.* 4.419–42 and *ad loc.*, also for parallels with other poets than Seneca and Lucan.

⁶⁶⁷ Parkes (2012) *ad loc.*, referring to Eur. *Phoin.* 674.

⁶⁶⁸ Parkes (2012) *ad loc.*

through the entire *Thebaid*⁶⁶⁹ and responding to Ovid's tale of Cadmus.⁶⁷⁰ Fittingly, and in repetitive Theban fashion,⁶⁷¹ the Sown Men return for nightly battle frequently (*Theb.* 4.440-41). To keep up Statius' other "long term poetic engagements", there are echoes of the shades haunting the site of Pharsalus in the seventh book of Lucan's epic as well as of the shades haunting the Argive palace grove in the messenger speech of Seneca's *Thyestes*.⁶⁷²

Tiresias' ritual goes on, always hovering between Homer, Vergil, Ovid, Seneca and Lucan all at once (*Theb.* 4.443-548).⁶⁷³ When the Underworld has opened and the shades finally appear, those of the Theban ancestors first, Statius treats his readers to a full-scale repetition of Theban history and – more specifically – Latin poetry on Thebes. Tiresias and his daughter Manto summon Cadmus and his wife Harmonia, the Sown Men and all of Cadmus' children and grandchildren (*Theb.* 4.553-78) – all of whose tragedies were the very subject of Ovid's Theban books.⁶⁷⁴ The final "Theban" character to appear is Niobe (*Theb.* 4.575-78), the wife of Amphion and daughter of Tantalus. Ovid had connected her story in the sixth book of his *Metamorphoses* to the Theban tales in the third and fourth books by having Manto, daughter of Tiresias, warn her against hubristic behaviour; Statius follows Ovid in this incorporation of Niobe into Theban history through Manto.⁶⁷⁵ But of course, in Tiresias' necromancy in Seneca's *Oedipus* too the Theban shades were summoned, and Statius also reworks Seneca's catalogue in these lines.⁶⁷⁶

Tiresias is then suddenly able to witness the Argive shades and the Thebans ambushed by Tydeus two books ago (*Theb.* 2.579-603).⁶⁷⁷ Contemplating the fate of these shades, the seer remarks that they may have been freed from the terrors of war, but that Thebes will be sure to suffer more (*Theb.* 4.601-02): *existis casus: bella horrida nobis, atque iterum Tydeus*. These words 'bring out the repetitive nature of Theban history'⁶⁷⁸ and echo the *Aeneid*. The words *bella horrida* refer the reader

⁶⁶⁹ See Parkes (2012) *ad Theb.* 4.434-42 for an overview.

⁶⁷⁰ On (Ovid's) Cadmus and the Sown Men in the *Thebaid* see Keith (2002).

⁶⁷¹ Parkes (2012) *ad Theb.* 4.440-41.

⁶⁷² For the parallels see Parkes (2012) *ad locc.*

⁶⁷³ See Parkes (2012) *ad locc.* for an extensive overview of the parallels. See also Parkes (2013), 166 for discussion of Statius engagement with Vergil in *Theb.* 4.443-68.

⁶⁷⁴ Keith (2002), 398-99.

⁶⁷⁵ Keith (2002), 399-400.

⁶⁷⁶ Juhnke (1972), 274. For detailed parallels see Parkes (2012) *ad Theb.* 4.553-645 and *ad locc.*

⁶⁷⁷ On Statius' innovation in response to Seneca here, see Parkes (2010).

⁶⁷⁸ Parkes (2012) *ad loc.*, referring to Cowan (2002), 230 (*non uidi*).

back to Vergil's Sibyl exclaiming *bella, horrida bella* (*Aen.* 6.86).⁶⁷⁹ The word *iterum* very likely has its specific source here in the prophecies of Vergil's Sibyl and Lucan's *matrona*.⁶⁸⁰ In these lines Statius continues the Senecan technique of turning the repetitive nature of Vergilian history inwards rather than forwards at Thebes.⁶⁸¹

Nowhere is Statius' Theban alignment with Seneca more evident than in the final part of the necromancy, when Tiresias finally discerns Laius (*Theb.* 4.604-45). Even within the *Thebaid* itself, the scene is characterized by an abundance of repetitions. As Parkes points out, this summoning through necromancy mirrors Laius' summoning on Jupiter's command at the beginning of *Thebaid* 2, when an anonymous shade entertained both options as possible causes for Laius' ascension (*Theb.* 2.19-25).⁶⁸² In addition to this, Eteocles meets the shade of Laius once again, and Laius meets Tiresias, whose appearance he had assumed in his previous encounter with Eteocles (*Theb.* 2.94-100).⁶⁸³

But of course, in addition to responding to Vergil's and Lucan's infernal scenes as discussed above, the passage also forms a repetition of Tiresias' earlier encounter with Laius in Seneca's *Oedipus*. Parkes observes that Tiresias seems to remember this encounter. In addressing Laius as *o iam satis ulte* (*Theb.* 4.612) and going on to describe Oedipus's punishments (*Theb.* 4.614-18) the seer seems to recall Laius' curse of his son in *Oed.* 642-46.⁶⁸⁴ Laius is ultimately responsive to the seer's request but begins by referring him to the earlier Theban history he has just witnessed (*Theb.* 4.628): *satis est meminisse priorum*. He then once again verbally attacks his son (*Theb.* 4.630-32): *illum, illum sacris adhibete nefastis, / qui laeto fodit ense patrem, qui semet in ortus / uertit et indignae regerit sua pignora matri*. 'The lines rework his Senecan necromantic ranting' in *Oed.* 634-40⁶⁸⁵ and the words *semet in ortus / uertit et indignae regerit sua pignora matri* (*Theb.* 4.631-32) are almost a quotation of Seneca's Laius' *egitque in ortus semet et matri impios / fetus regessit* (*Oed.* 638-

⁶⁷⁹ Parkes (2012) *ad loc.*

⁶⁸⁰ Parkes (2012) somewhat cautiously, citing *Aen.* 6.94-95 (*causa mali tanti coniunx iterum hospita Teucris / externique iterum thalami*) and *BC.* 1.692-93 (*consurgunt partes iterum, totumque per orbem / rursus eo*).

⁶⁸¹ The technique is Lucanian as well, of course, and the allusion to *BC.* 1.692-93 stresses the fact that Statius is responding to both Annaei. But Seneca's *Oedipus* is very likely earlier than Lucan's *Bellum Ciuile* and Statius shares the Theban setting of his poem with Seneca. On the theme of inescapably repetitive Theban history in the necromancy see Parkes (2013), 176-79.

⁶⁸² Parkes (2012) *ad Theb.* 4.604-45.

⁶⁸³ Parkes (2012) *ibidem*.

⁶⁸⁴ Parkes (2012) *ad Theb.* 4.612.

⁶⁸⁵ Parkes (2012) *ad Theb.* 4.631-32.

39).⁶⁸⁶ But this very Senecan Laius also ends up speaking very Vergilian words – and repeating Tiresias – issuing the warning that *bellum, innumero uenit undique bellum / agmine* (*Theb.* 4.637-38) – once again echoing the Sibyl's *bella, horrida bella*.⁶⁸⁷

It is fitting that this hauntingly repetitive necromancy with its cyclical view of history takes place as the very narrative of the *Thebaid* itself seems to be imploding. The Argive army's march will not properly continue until the beginning of the seventh book. For a moment, then, we seem to have reached a stand-still reminiscent of Seneca's Oedipus at the beginning of *Phoenissae*. However, the very fact that Laius reappears calls to mind his Thyestean appearance at the beginning of the second book, and Statius has sprinkled further hints at his ongoing Thyestean plotline throughout the fourth book. The clearest is no doubt the one at the end of Statius' Argive catalogue (*Theb.* 4.305-08). Statius explains the absence of troops from Mycenae to aid the Arcadians as follows:

hos belli coetus iurataque pectora Marti 305
milite uicinae nullo iuuere Mycenae;
funerae tunc namque dapes mediique recursus
Solis, et hic alii miscebant proelia fratres.

In short, Mycenae is absent from the fraternal war between Eteocles and Polynices because it is itself engaged in fraternal warfare between Atreus and Thyestes.⁶⁸⁸

And indeed, as Parkes has observed, the parallelism between fraternal strife in Mycenae and fraternal strife in Thebes is also emphasized at the beginning of the fourth book, when the changes of the seasons are described (*Theb.* 4.1-3):

Tertius horrentem Zephyris laxauerat annum
Phoebus et angusto cogebat limite uernum
longius ire diem[.]

Parkes notes that 'the notion of force, and the pun on *horrentem*, "shivering" with cold and fear, suggest the sun's reluctance to appear' and that these lines call to

⁶⁸⁶ As observed by Delarue (2000), 154.

⁶⁸⁷ Parkes (2012) *ad Theb.* 4.601-02. and 637.

⁶⁸⁸ Frings (1992), 15 takes this passage as the point of departure for her comparison of Seneca's *Thyestes* with Statius' *Thebaid*. Also Parkes (2012) *ad loc.*: 'Statius is careful to bring out the similarities in situation (see 308: two other brothers locked in hatred and revenge), and so place the war against Thebes on a par with the notorious events at Mycenae'.

mind the similarly reluctant sun at the beginning of Seneca's *Thyestes* (*Thy.* 120-21): *En ipse Titan dubitat an iubeat sequi / cogatque habenis ire peritulum diem.*⁶⁸⁹

Statius' Theban epic may be a prime example of "epic history in reverse", but these allusions to the myth of Thyestes serve to remind the reader that it is also, and has been from the very start, an epic of cosmos-shaking Thyestean *nefas*. Recognizing these two opposed drives in Seneca's tragic oeuvre, Statius takes great care to make them an integral part of his *Thebaid*. Now that the stage has been set in the first half of his epic, Statius' Senecan machinery will truly begin testing the limits of epic once we reach the seventh book.

⁶⁸⁹ Parkes (2005), 364-65.

CHAPTER 5

THE COSMOS AT WAR⁶⁹⁰

⁶⁹⁰ Along with the sections on civil war in the final Senecan chapter and some observations on Statian epic and Oedipus from the preceding chapter, some of the Jocastan paragraphs in this chapter have been published in a somewhat different form in Van der Schuur (2018).

The summoning of Mars

The seventh book of the *Thebaid* opens with another attempt by Jupiter to regain control over the plot of the epic. The supreme god is angry at the *cunctantes Tyrii primordia belli* / ... *Pelasgos* (*Theb.* 7.1-2). To finally bring the war he desires about, Jupiter sends Mercury down to Thrace to summon Mars. As has long been observed, this Jovian intervention at the beginning of the seventh book mirrors the one at the beginning of the epic. In both cases Jupiter sends Mercury down from Olympus to bring about the war he desires.⁶⁹¹ We have already seen in the previous chapter that Jupiter and Mercury caused a disturbingly Senecan blurring of the boundaries between earth and Hell in *Thebaid* 2, and the effects of their intervention will be no different this time. In addition to this, the seventh book of Statius' epic continues the struggle for control over the epic plot between Jupiter and Tisiphone.

Statius' account of the summoning of Mars (*Theb.* 7.1-89) simultaneously reworks three major scenes – from the *Odyssey*, *Aeneid* and Valerius' *Argonautica* respectively.⁶⁹² In all of these scenes the supreme god has to kick-start the epic plot again after it has temporarily been side-tracked or delayed because of a hero's involvement with a woman. In the *Odyssey* Zeus sends Hermes to tell Calypso that she must send Odysseus on his way to Ithaca. In the *Aeneid* Jupiter sends Mercury to remind Aeneas of his mission and make him abandon Dido. In the *Argonautica* Jupiter is angry at Juno for exercising her traditional resentment against Hercules by removing him from the poem in the Hylas episode. *sic Iuno ducem fouet anxia curis / Aesonium, sic arma uiro sociosque ministrat* (V.Fl. 4.7-8) the supreme god complains, memorably translated by Feeney as “So this is your idea of how to run an epic”.⁶⁹³

Feeney's translation reveals the question that, just like their Jupiter all three Roman poets are considering at this point: what kind of epic do I want to run? Statius' Jupiter does everything in his power to keep his epic on track and enters the seventh book with an intimidating display of cosmic power (*Theb.* 7.3-4): *concussit ... caput*

⁶⁹¹ Hershkovitz (1998a), 265 compares both interventions and observes that the fact that Jupiter has to send Mercury down to earth twice is a sign that his grip on the direction of the poem is doubtful at best.

⁶⁹² Smolenaars (1994) *ad loc.*, building on Juhnke (1972), 114-15 for Vergil and Homer. On the date of Valerius' *Argonautica* see the discussion in Stover (2012), 7-26, who dates the poem and Valerius' death no later than 80 CE – which would mean that the composition of the *Argonautica* preceded the completion of the *Thebaid*. I find this argument convincing and think that Statius is indeed reworking Valerius in this scene and elsewhere in the *Thebaid*. However, in this case parallelism is more important than priority.

⁶⁹³ Feeney (1991), 324. See also Heerink (2010), 186, who replaces “epic” with the more specific “*Aeneid*”.

motu quo celsa laborant / sidera proclamatque adici ceruicibus Atlans.⁶⁹⁴ Smolenaars observes that Statius makes use of Catullus' (Cat. 64.204-06) and Ovid's (*Met.* 1.179-80 – the divine council preceding the Flood) description of Jupiter's nod in particular: Statius' phraseology is indebted to Catullus, Jupiter's anger is derived from Ovid.⁶⁹⁵ Interestingly, Statius limits the impact of Jupiter's nod to the heavens (*Theb.* 7.4: *sidera*), following Homer but diverging from Catullus and Ovid, who had included not only Heaven, but also earth and sea.⁶⁹⁶ Nevertheless, Atlas still complains that the weight he has to carry is increased.

As Smolenaars points out, '[t]he picture of Atlas crying out is a typically Statian elaboration of the humanizing descriptions of the man-mountain in e.g. *Aen.* 4.247-51 and Ov. *Met.* 2.296f.'⁶⁹⁷ The mention of Atlas activates two Augustan intertexts: the flight of Mercury to warn Aeneas (Vergil) and the flight of Phaethon disrupting the cosmos (Ovid). The former is consistently reworked in this part of the seventh book; the latter may be considered less significant, being only a vague echo heard in the fourth line.

Both "Atlas-allusions" point the reader to larger thematic concerns of the poem. If we recognize the *Aeneid* 4 intertext, the mention of Atlas in combination with a "Jupiter sends Mercury to earth"-scene, we will be reminded of the cosmic setting in which Vergil had staged the tragedy of the fourth book of his epic.⁶⁹⁸ I will elaborate upon this cosmic Vergilian setting below, but for now we should note that the allusion to Ovid serves to destabilize the connotations evoked by the Vergilian one. The allusions to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in lines 3 and 4, taken together, call to mind the cosmic dislocations (Flood and pseudo-*ecpyrosis*) over which Ovid's Jupiter had and had not presided. Moreover, Statius' Jupiter had himself referred to both events in the first book's very Ovidian divine council (*Theb.* 1.219-23).⁶⁹⁹ It is as if Statius has placed these allusions to Ovid's Jupiter here as a warning to his reader: do not be fooled by this Vergilian framework. As it had in the *Metamorphoses*, Jupiter's insatiable lust for *poena* will once again be complicit in cosmic dislocations.⁷⁰⁰

⁶⁹⁴ On Jupiter's tendency to (over)assert his authority in the *Thebaid* see Schubert (1984), 144-51.

⁶⁹⁵ Smolenaars (1994) *ad loc.*

⁶⁹⁶ Smolenaars (1994) *ad loc.*

⁶⁹⁷ Smolenaars (1994) *ad loc.*

⁶⁹⁸ See Hardie (1986), 267-85, further developed in (2012), 81-98.

⁶⁹⁹ See the discussion in the previous chapter.

⁷⁰⁰ Compare the observation by Lovatt (2013), 38 on *Theb.* 7.1-4: 'Jupiter here is a cosmic, Lucretian god, not composing the universe but throwing it into confusion'.

At the beginning of Jupiter's address to his son Mercury (*Theb.* 7.6-33) Statius again strikes an Ovidian note. According to Jupiter's GPS-instructions Mercury's destination is Thrace, in the far north, *Oceano uetitum qua Parrhasis ignem / nubibus hibernis et nostro pascitur imbri* (*Theb.* 7.8-9). Jupiter's use of *Parrhasis* to refer to Callisto goes back to the *Metamorphoses*, the poem which also contains a lengthy account of why her constellation was forbidden to touch the Ocean:⁷⁰¹ Juno's anger at the *paelex* now occupying the heavens. To provide Callisto with the nutrition that stars need,⁷⁰² Jupiter feeds her with his own (*nostro* (*Theb.* 7.9)) waters. Jupiter's continuing affection⁷⁰³ for Callisto is striking, and is yet another indication that Jupiter's Ovidian – and Senecan, we might add, having considered the prologue of *Hercules Furens* – nature persists in the *Thebaid*.

However this may be, Jupiter's instructions to Mercury are most fundamentally indebted to those found in Homer and Vergil, as Smolenaars' commentary testifies. But Statius makes Jupiter's commands more impatient and autocratic.⁷⁰⁴ The supreme god complains that Mars is not his usual self (*Theb.* 7.22-23): *at si ipsi rabies ferrique insana uoluptas / qua tumet, immeritas cineri dabit impius urbes*. These lines evoke *saeuit amor ferri et scelerata insania belli* (*Aen.* 7.461) in particular – Turnus' state of mind after Allecto has thrust he torch – and also *saeuit toto Mars impius orbe* (*Geo.* 1.511), Vergil's description the civil wars laying waste to the Roman Empire. Both allusions form a grim announcement of what is to come in the following five books.⁷⁰⁵

Mercury descends and is tossed this way and that way by the storms plaguing Thrace (*Theb.* 7.34-39). He shudders at the sight of Mars' palace (*Theb.* 7.41). Statius makes clear from the start that this is a hellish place. Mercury sees the *steriles delubra ... Mauortia siluas* (*Theb.* 7.40). As Smolenaars points out, barren woods were a traditional element of Underworld descriptions.⁷⁰⁶ Similarly, the fact that Mars' palace seems to be made entirely out of iron (*Theb.* 7.42-43) evokes not only Vergil's

⁷⁰¹ Smolenaars (1994) *ad loc.*, who refers to *Parrhasis erubuit* (*Met.* 2.460) and the story of Juno's anger at Callisto (*Met.* 2.512-30).

⁷⁰² See Smolenaars (1994) *ad loc.* for further references.

⁷⁰³ Observed by Smolenaars (1994) *ad loc.*

⁷⁰⁴ Smolenaars (1994) *ad Theb.* 7.6-33 *passim* (sarcastic and impatient); *ad Theb.* 7.32-33 (autocratic).

⁷⁰⁵ Compare also Smolenaars (1994) *ad Theb.* 7.40-63 on Statius' reworking of the *Aeneid* in his description of Mars' palace: 'In paying full homage to the 'divina Aeneis' (*Th.* 12.816), Statius in this debasement of 'war' in fact elaborates on *G.* 1.511 *saeuit toto Mars impius orbe*.'

⁷⁰⁶ Smolenaars (1994) *ad loc.*, adducing as parallels Hom. *Od.* 10.510; *HF.* 700-01; *Theb.* 2.12; *Silv.* 2.1.187 and 203-04.

Gates of War, but also descriptions of the gates and walls of the Underworld as made out of iron.⁷⁰⁷

But the clearest markers of the palace's connections to the Underworld, and Vergil's in particular, may be found in the list of personifications guarding the threshold (*Theb.* 7.47-53). Of course, Statius' catalogue is primarily indebted to that of the personifications located at the threshold of the Underworld in Vergil's *Aeneid* (*Aen.* 6.273-81).⁷⁰⁸ In fact, the links that Statius establishes between Mars and the Underworld are thoroughly Vergilian: the war that marches through Vergil's gates is a war unchained by the infernal Fury Allecto after Juno's visit to the Underworld. In anticipation of this, Vergil had already placed *mortiferum ... bellum* (*Aen.* 6.279) on the threshold of his entrance to Hell.⁷⁰⁹ Statius has recognized this Vergilian connection, and has his Jupiter and Mars imitate Vergil's Juno and Allecto in setting in motion a hellish war.⁷¹⁰ At least at the beginning of the seventh book, Jupiter seems to finally have seized the initiative from Tisiphone.

However, even in this scene Jupiter's authority is questionable. Mars is quick to obey his father, to be sure (*Theb.* 7.81-84), but Jupiter's divine messenger is frightened at the sight of his brother and his palace (*Theb.* 7.41, 74-75) – a reaction characteristic of those visited by Mercury in earlier epic, not of Mercury himself.⁷¹¹ Indeed, Statius remarks that Jupiter himself would have diminished the harshness of his commands and threats had he himself been confronted by Mars (*Theb.* 7.75-76): *ipsi reuerentia patri, / si prope sit, dematque minas nec talia mandat*. Moreover, Jupiter's orders seem to converge with Mars' own attitude towards the Greeks' lack of progress. Statius describes the war god as *resides in proelia Graios / ipse etiam indignans* (*Theb.* 7.83-84).

In short, the Jupiter of *Thebaid* 7 is no different from the Jupiter of *Thebaid* 1: in a desperate attempt to regain the control over the epic plot that was denied to him by Seneca, he continues to more or less identify his plot with that of the hellish forces that had taken it away from him. Jupiter's implicit self-alignment with the forces of Hell is especially notable because of the fact that it occurs in the seventh

⁷⁰⁷ Smolenaars (1994) *ad locc.*, referring to *Aen.* 1.293, 7.609-10 and 622 (Gates of War) and *Hom. Il.* 8.15; *Aen.* 6.280; *Prop.* 4.11.4 (gates and walls of the Underworld).

⁷⁰⁸ Compare Smolenaars (1994) *ad loc.* on Statius' sources.

⁷⁰⁹ On the confusion of Heaven and Hell in Vergil's *Aeneid*, of which scenes of battle are a major part, see Hardie (1993), 73-76.

⁷¹⁰ Hardie (1993), 78-79.

⁷¹¹ Smolenaars (1994) *ad loc.*

book. It was in the seventh book of the *Aeneid* that Juno's infernal counterplot had most fundamentally challenged the Jovian one, which had seemed to be nicely on its way after the safe arrival of Aeneas and his people in Latium and the successful Trojan embassy to Latinus' court. To be sure, just as Aeneas had arrived "home" in *Aeneid* 7 so Polynices returns "home" in *Thebaid* 7. But in the *Thebaid*, as in Seneca's *Oedipus* and *Phoenissae*, a return to origins forms a guarantee for (self-)destruction rather than progress of any kind.

To drive home this point, Statius reworks Vergil's description of Latinus' palace (*Aen.* 7.170-91) in his own description of Mars' palace (*Theb.* 7.43-63).⁷¹² Vergil's ecphrasis may serve to emphasize that, in spite of the proto-civil war that is about to break out, the Trojans will eventually join their fate with that of the Latins, who had originally welcomed them before Juno and Allecto would sow discord. In the case of Polynices, civil war is the world to which he comes home, right from the start of the seventh book.⁷¹³ Moreover, in fusing Vergil's palace description with – as has been discussed above – Vergil's Underworld, Statius is following Senecan precedent. This is brought out most clearly by the presence of *uacui currus* (*Theb.* 7.58) in Mars' palace, a two-tier allusion echoing Vergil's *captiui currus* (*Aen.* 7.184) and Seneca's *fractique currus* (*Thy.* 660) simultaneously.⁷¹⁴ It should come as no surprise then that Statius' catalogue of personifications is not only indebted to Vergil, but also owes something to the Senecan ones.⁷¹⁵ Finally, we should not forget that in *Thyestes* infernal forces had risen from Atreus' palace that would expel the gods. In the *Thebaid*, it is Jupiter himself who summons the forces that will be used by Tisiphone to eventually banish him from the epic he is trying to run.

Jupiter and Allecto

As the Argive host completes the rituals in honor of Opheltes (*Theb.* 7.90-104), Mars arrives upon the human scene. The god of war has reached the coast of Ephyre, *qua summas caput Acrocorinthos in auras / tollit et alterna geminum mare protegit umbra* (*Theb.* 7.106-07). These lines too serve to compare Mars' intervention

⁷¹² As discussed by Smolenaars (1994) *ad loc.*

⁷¹³ Criado (2000), 63 observes the contrast between Jupiter's ultimately benevolent concern for Aeneas' mission in *Aeneid* 4 and the cruelty of destiny in the *Thebaid* – both in this scene in particular as in the epic as a whole.

⁷¹⁴ Smolenaars (1994) *ad Theb.* 7.40-63.

⁷¹⁵ Smolenaars (1994) *ad Theb.* 7.47-54.

to an invasion of the earth by hellish forces. Laius, guided by Mercury, had left the Underworld at Taenarus, *qua formidatum Maleae spumantis in auras / it caput* (*Theb.* 2.33-34).⁷¹⁶ Both of Mercury's Jovian missions result in the spread of infernal madness.

Mars orders one of his minions, Pavor, to make the minds of the Argive host ready for war. As Smolenaars has observed, Statius has composed Pavor and his effects from many poetic sources,⁷¹⁷ the two most important ones being, for my purposes here, Vergil's Fama and Allecto. As Hardie has argued, Fama and Allecto are closely related characters in the *Aeneid*.⁷¹⁸ Among other things, both are notorious shapeshifters, transforming both themselves as well as information and human action (compare *Aen.* 4.182-83 with *Aen.* 7.328-29).⁷¹⁹ In addition to this, both present challenges to Jupiter and his plans with Aeneas and the Romans – although this is more obviously the case with Allecto than with Fama.

Vergil's influential description of Fama (*Aen.* 4.173-95) is intimately connected with the cosmic framework of the fourth book and that of the poem as a whole.⁷²⁰ At the beginning of the fourth book Jupiter appears to have abandoned all initiative and Juno's counterplot of a merging of Carthaginians and Trojans seems to be succeeding. Fama, a chthonic goddess (*Aen.* 4.178-80) who walks the earth but whose head touches the clouds (*Aen.* 4.176-77), spreads the rumor of this union, which eventually reaches the ears of Iarbas, a local king spurned by Dido. He calls upon Jupiter, his father, to intervene, claiming that the supreme god's divine authority is at stake if he fails to do so (*Aen.* 4.206-18).⁷²¹ Jupiter sends Mercury to get Aeneas moving again, and the messenger of the gods complies, pausing briefly to view Atlas along the way (*Aen.* 4.246-53).

The figure of Fama presents a challenge to the authority of Jupiter. Both *fama* and *fatum* are derived from *fari*,⁷²² and we may discern at this point a struggle for control over the (poetic) voice of the epic: does this story belong to Fama or to Jupiter and

⁷¹⁶ Parallel observed by Smolenaars (1994) *ad loc.*

⁷¹⁷ See Smolenaars (1994) *ad Theb.* 7.105-30 for an overview.

⁷¹⁸ Hardie (2009), 99-101 and (2012), 101-02, with further references.

⁷¹⁹ Hardie (2012), 101, with n. 77.

⁷²⁰ Hardie (1986), 273-80, an argument further developed and expanded in several directions in Hardie (2012), 81-98.

⁷²¹ Hardie (1986), 276: '*Fama* rises to the clouds; the ascending movement is continued with the prayer of Iarbas, which takes us to the seat of the highest god, Jupiter.'

⁷²² See Commager (1981) on *fari* and *fatum* in the *Aeneid* and Bettini (2008) on *fari*, *fatum*, *fama* and more in Roman literature and culture.

Fate?⁷²³ Fama is opposed to Jupiter in other ways too. Vergil states that she *mobilitate uiget uirisque acquirit eundo* (*Aen.* 4.175), and in this sense she is comparable to Jupiter's thunderbolt. After all, Lucretius had said the following of thunderbolts (*DRN.* 6.340-42): *denique quod longo uenit impete, sumere debet / mobilitatem etiam atque etiam, quae crescit eundo / et ualidas auget uiris et roborat ictum*.⁷²⁴ Proving that he will not let his position of thunderbolt-hurler be usurped, Jupiter *oculos ad moenia torsit* (*Aen.* 4.220), thereby reasserting his divine control over the poem.⁷²⁵ The reader will recall a similar dynamic in the first book of the *Thebaid*, discussed in the previous chapter: only after Tisiphone had begun to take care of Oedipus' revenge, faster than Jupiter's lightning-bolt (*Theb.* 1.92), did Jupiter himself intervene. Statius' modification is significant: Fama was challenging a Jovian plot already on its way; Tisiphone fully usurps it, putting Jupiter in a belated position from the poem's beginning – a set-back from which he will never recover. Statius stresses Jupiter's slippery control over the plot in this particular scene by having Jupiter unleash forces that are associated with his archenemies in Vergil's epic. A few hundred lines later still, Tisiphone will use these forces for her own purposes.

Statius picks up on the Jupiter-challenging aspect of Fama right from the beginning of his treatment of Pavor's intervention. Let us return to the lines *qua summas caput Acrocorinthos in auras / tollit et alterna geminum mare protegit umbra* (*Theb.* 7.106-07). Not only do these lines contain an intratextual allusion to the emergence of Laius' shade, they also contain an intertextual allusion to Vergil's description of Fama (*Aen.* 4.176-77): *mox sese attollit in auras / ... et caput inter nubila condit*⁷²⁶ and of Atlas (*Aen.* 4.248-49), the symbol of cosmic stability that Mercury visits on his way down to Aeneas.⁷²⁷ The neat opposition between Atlas and Mercury, associated with Jovian order, and chaotic Fama is 'collapsed' by Statius.⁷²⁸ To finish it off, Mars' selection of *unum dira comitum de plebe Pauorem* (*Theb.* 7.108) echoes Jupiter's selection of the Dira as his weapon of choice (*Aen.* 12.853): *harum unam celerem demisit ab aethere summo*.⁷²⁹ Pavor and Mars are intervening on earth

⁷²³ See Hardie (2012), 103-06 on the interaction between *fama* and *fatum* in the *Aeneid*. See also Hardie (1986), 276 on Iarbas' question to Jupiter, and Hejduk (2009) for a rather different interpretation of the relationship between Jupiter and *fama*.

⁷²⁴ Hardie (2009), 71.

⁷²⁵ Hardie (2009), 73, with Estevez (1982) on the expression *oculos ... torsit*.

⁷²⁶ Smolenaars (1994) *ad loc.* and Hardie (2012), 209.

⁷²⁷ Hardie (2012), 209-10. See again Hardie (1986), 276-78 on the parallels and contrasts that Vergil establishes between Fama on the one hand and Mercury and Atlas on the other.

⁷²⁸ Hardie (2012), 210.

⁷²⁹ Hardie (2012), 210, with n. 88 on the kinship between the Dira and Fama.

on Jupiter's orders, but once again this intervention takes on a decidedly chthonic, even infernal character. Statius' allusions show that the Vergilian opposition between Heaven and Hell can be undermined from within the *Aeneid*, continuing Ovidian and Senecan practice.

But Statius goes even further than this, turning Pavor into a reincarnation of that archchallenger of the Jovian plot: Allecto. Like Fama and Allecto, Pavor is a shapeshifter. Compare *Theb.* 7.112: *et facies quamcumque uelit* with *Aen.* 7.328-29: *tot sese uertit in ora, / tam saeuae facies*.⁷³⁰ The clearest parallel between Pavor and Allecto, however, can be found in the effect that their intervention has on their respective victims. As a result of Pavor's⁷³¹ intervention *arma, arma insani sua quisque ignotaque nullo / more rapit ... / ...ferus omni in pectore saeuit / mortis amor caedisque* (*Theb.* 7.135-38). These lines echo Allecto's maddening attack on Turnus (*Aen.* 7.460-62): *arma amens fremit, arma toro tectisque requirit; / saeuit amor ferri et scelerata insania belli, / ira super*.⁷³² Pavor's first step towards achieving this effect is his creation of the illusion that the Theban army is approaching. As part of this, Pavor *arma uirum pulsusque imitatur equorum* (*Theb.* 7.120). The allusion to the opening of the *Aeneid* as a whole is clear,⁷³³ and it is significant that it should occur during this Allecto-like intervention. *arma uirum* and *horrida bella* have become indistinguishable.

After this intervention the scene shifts back to Jupiter, as Bacchus witnesses the Argive army's approach and goes to his father to complain about the imminent destruction of his city of origin, Thebes. Statius' frequent scene changes up and down the vertical cosmic axis at the beginning of this seventh book⁷³⁴ draw the reader's attention to the fact that nothing less than the relationship between the three cosmic realms – Heaven, earth and Hell – is at stake in this epic.⁷³⁵ In summoning Allecto-like Mars and Pavor, Jupiter tries to claim the role of Vergil's Juno in setting the second half of the epic in motion.⁷³⁶ We might even say that he is outdoing Juno in this respect, summoning infernal warfare right from the start of the book. However, when Bacchus

⁷³⁰ Smolenaars (1994) *ad loc.* and Hardie (2012), 210.

⁷³¹ Or Mars'. On the confusion surrounding *ipse* (*Aen.* 7.131) see Smolenaars (1994) *ad loc.* and Hardie (2012), 212-14.

⁷³² Smolenaars (1994) *ad loc.* and Hardie (2012), 210-11.

⁷³³ Compare Smolenaars (1994) *ad loc.*

⁷³⁴ Compare Lovatt (2013), 38.

⁷³⁵ See Burck (1979), 334 and Feeney (1991), 345 on the central importance of the struggle for control over the cosmic realms in the *Thebaid*.

⁷³⁶ Compare Ganiban (2007), 96-116, an important discussion of the role of Vergil's Juno and Allecto in the fourth and seventh book of Statius' *Thebaid*.

supplicates him to spare Thebes, Statius' Jupiter finds himself in the increasingly awkward role of the Vergilian Jupiter.

The scene of Bacchus' supplication and Jupiter's response (*Theb.* 7.145-226) reworks many scenes from earlier epic poetry, but most importantly it reworks Venus' plea to Jupiter on behalf of Aeneas at the beginning of the *Aeneid* (*Aen.* 1.223-96).⁷³⁷ This scene forms a crucial part of Statius' treatment of the role of Bacchus in his epic, which has been discussed in great detail by Ganiban.⁷³⁸ Bacchus had tried to usurp the role of the Vergilian Juno in the fourth book of the *Thebaid*, by delaying the Argives' advance towards Thebes with a drought.⁷³⁹ Surprisingly, in the seventh book he does not improve upon his first attempt at delay, as Vergil's Juno had, but rather takes on the role of Venus – thereby abandoning his original attempt to become this epic's Juno.⁷⁴⁰

Bacchus' taking on of the role of Venus conforms to his rivalry with Juno that runs through all of the poem's Bacchus scenes.⁷⁴¹ For Bacchus, Juno is the evil stepmother (*Theb.* 4.672: *indomitae ... ira nouercae*; 7.177: *nouercales ... Mycenae*) from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Seneca's *Hercules Furens*, forever intent upon undoing her stepsons' achievements. Even though he had tried to usurp Juno's Vergilian role, he conceives of Jupiter's and Juno's rivalry in Ovidian terms (*Theb.* 7.155-63):⁷⁴²

<i>excindisne tuas, diuum sator optime, Thebas?</i>	155
<i>saeua adeo coniunx? nec te telluris amatae</i>	
<i>deceptique laris miseret cinerumque meorum?</i>	
<i>esto, olim inuitum iaculatus nubibus ignem,</i>	
<i>credimus: en iterum atra refers incendia terris,</i>	
<i>nec Styge iurata, nec paelicis arte rogatus.</i>	160
<i>quis modus? an nobis pater iratusque bonusque</i>	
<i>fulmen habes? sed non Danaeia limina talis</i>	
<i>Parrhasiumque nemus Ledaeeque ibis Amyclas.</i>	

⁷³⁷ See Smolenaars (1994) *ad Theb.* 7.145-226 for Statius' models.

⁷³⁸ Ganiban (2007), 96-116.

⁷³⁹ Ganiban (2007), 96-101.

⁷⁴⁰ Ganiban (2007), 101-04.

⁷⁴¹ See *Theb.* 4.671-72 and 7.156 in particular.

⁷⁴² On Ovid's recasting of Vergil's cosmic rivalry between Jupiter and Juno in marital terms and turning it into an important plot running through much of his *Metamorphoses*, see Wheeler (2000), 70-106. See Smolenaars (1994), *ad Theb.* 7.160 and 162-63 for Ovidian echoes in these lines. See also *Theb.* 7.189-92 for references to Hercules and Europa. See Ganiban (2007), 104-06 for the fascinating suggestion that Statius is continuing the Bacchus-Juno rivalry from *Metamorphoses* 3 and 4.

In attributing to Bacchus this Ovidian perspective on the rivalry between Jupiter and Juno, particularly where Thebes is concerned, Statius acknowledges that, after Ovid, there is no way back to the Vergilian conception of this rivalry. However, the balance between both divinities is strikingly different in both poems – something of which Bacchus seems to be unaware.⁷⁴³ Having discussed the various ways in which Juno plagues the city of Thebes in *Metamorphoses* 3 and 4, Hardie concludes: ‘Of Jupiter there is no trace; and yet one might expect that the god who started it all off when he led Cadmus on a merry dance round the world to end up in Boeotia would feel some responsibility for the well-being of Thebes.’⁷⁴⁴ In the *Thebaid*, Juno has been sidelined by Jupiter.⁷⁴⁵ Unfortunately for Thebes, this does not result in any Jovian sense of responsibility for the city’s well-being.

Jupiter’s reply to Bacchus (*Theb.* 7.193–221) has been the subject of much scholarly debate. At the beginning of his speech, Jupiter notoriously claims that he is subject to Fate (*Theb.* 7.197–98): *immoto deducimur orbe / Fatorum*. This is one of the passages supporting Vessey’s claim that the *Thebaid*’s universe is a Stoic one.⁷⁴⁶ This view has been frequently challenged,⁷⁴⁷ but no matter how we view the relationship between Jupiter and Fate in the *Thebaid*, the picture painted by Jupiter’s “consolation” of Bacchus is shockingly bleak. The war will go on, and Thebes will suffer and eventually be destroyed – Bacchus’ only comfort is that this destruction will be left to another generation (*Theb.* 7.219–21).⁷⁴⁸ As Smolenaars rightly observes, ‘[Jupiter’s] apocalypse of the destruction of both cities [i.e. Argos and Thebes] is a deliberate inversion of his magnificent outline of the Trojans’ great future in *Aen.* 1.227–96.’⁷⁴⁹

At the outset of the seventh book then, Jupiter once again confirms his allegiance to a Senecan and Lucanian view of history.⁷⁵⁰ The *telos* of the epic he is trying to run is destruction rather than progress, and he seems to have no problem

⁷⁴³ Compare Ganiban (2007), 99–100 on Bacchus’ apparent ignorance of Jupiter’s plans with Thebes as expressed in the divine councils in *Thebaid* 1 and 3.

⁷⁴⁴ Hardie (1990), 235.

⁷⁴⁵ *Theb.* 1.285–92. See Feeney (1991), 343 on the different role of Juno in the *Thebaid*.

⁷⁴⁶ Vessey (1973), 82–91.

⁷⁴⁷ See e.g. Schubert (1984), 151–54 and 166–72; Neri (1986); Ahl (1986), 2840–41; Feeney (1991), 354–57; Dominik (1994), 7–33; Fantham (1997); Hill (1989), (1996) and (2006). See Criado (2000) *passim* on Statius’ gods and Stoicism.

⁷⁴⁸ See especially Hershkowitz (1997) and Ganiban (2007), 106–10 on the failure of Statius’ Jupiter to live up to the consolatory skills of his predecessor, and on the surprising fact that Bacchus actually is consoled by this message.

⁷⁴⁹ Smolenaars (1994) *ad Theb.* 7.193–226. See also Ganiban (2007), 107–08.

⁷⁵⁰ On the Lucanian plot-structure of Statius’ epic see Ganiban (2011).

with this whatsoever. In making sure that this destruction actually comes to pass, Jupiter usurps the role of Juno, and Statius often fuses Vergilian scenes characteristic of Jovian intervention with Vergilian scenes characteristic of Junonian intervention to emphasize this point.⁷⁵¹ However, Jupiter's attempts at reclaiming epic are too little, too late. We will see that one of the main reasons for this is the fact that he is trying to control a genre that has already been visited by Senecan tragedy.

Jocasta's intervention

The seventh book of the *Thebaid* abounds in scenes marking epic (re-) beginnings. We have already seen how Statius had reworked three such scenes into the first 200-odd lines of the book: Jupiter sends Mercury down to earth to get the poem going again; infernal forces drive an army towards war; Jupiter explains the Fates to one of his children. The sequence has not yet ended: the seventh book will also feature a teichoscopy-cum-catalogue (reworking passages preparing the reader for the actual battle narrative in the *Iliad*);⁷⁵² a river-crossing (echoing Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon, the event marking the outbreak of war in Lucan's *Bellum Civile*);⁷⁵³ and another Allecto-like intervention (to be discussed in this section). The sequence even spills over into the eighth book, where it reaches its climax as Hell is once again unleashed – this time by Dis himself.

These repeated epic beginnings serve to emphasize the fact that Statius is finally, but very reluctantly, removing all the remaining barriers for the actual war.⁷⁵⁴ The last such barrier is presented by Polynices' and Eteocles' mother, Jocasta. Jocasta's intervention had figured prominently in two tragedies about Polynices' assault on Thebes: Euripides' *Phoinissai* and Seneca's *Phoenissae*. Statius alludes extensively to both plays in his own account of Jocasta's intervention, and also reworks Veturia's visit to Coriolanus' camp in *AUC.* 2.40 (*Theb.* 7.470-563).⁷⁵⁵ In this section I will discuss Statius' reworking of Seneca's *Phoenissae* and *Thyestes* in particular as part of his ongoing engagement with Senecan tragedy in his refashioning of epic.

⁷⁵¹ See my discussion above and the complementary argument made in Ganiban (2007), 96-116.

⁷⁵² See Smolenaars (1994) *ad Theb.* 7.243-373 on the sources.

⁷⁵³ See Smolenaars (1994) *ad Theb.* 7.424-40 on the sources.

⁷⁵⁴ On the Lucanian tension between Statius' attempt at delaying the war and the irresistible drive of the poem towards *nefas* in the catalogue and river-crossing scenes see McNelis (2007), 97-123.

⁷⁵⁵ See Smolenaars (1994) *ad locc.* for an overview of the parallels. On the Coriolanus intertext see Soubiran (1969).

To fully appreciate the role that Senecan tragedy plays in the seventh book, we have to begin our analysis a little earlier, at the moment when news of the Argive army's approach reaches Thebes (*Theb.* 7.227-42). This news is reported to Eteocles by a messenger. Eteocles calls his troops to arms, and the women and children of Thebes mount the walls to look at the Theban army standing on the future battlefield. Admittedly, the Senecan echoes traced in the two following paragraphs are rather faint and easily drowned out by the louder Vergilian and Homeric ones. However, they set the scene for the full-scale engagement with Senecan tragedy that is to come.

The messenger's report to Eteocles of the enemy's approach is not without epic precedent: we may compare the messenger report breaking up the Latin war council upon Aeneas' approach (*Aen.* 11.447-50) and Iris telling the Trojans of the approach of the Achaeans (*Il.* 2.786-88).⁷⁵⁶ But I would argue that the sudden appearance of a *nuntius* reporting that Thebes is on the brink of war also calls to mind the sudden arrival of the *nuntius* in Seneca's *Phoenissae*. First of all, there is a structural parallel. The arrival of Statius' messenger marks the end of the conversation on Olympus between a father planning the destruction of Thebes and a son attempting to avert it; the arrival of Seneca's messenger abruptly cuts short the exchange between Oedipus and Antigone that had been going on for more than 300 lines. In this dialogue between father and daughter, Antigone had desperately tried to keep Oedipus from self-destruction and suggested that his intervention might put a stop to the destruction that fraternal warfare would bring to Thebes (*Phoen.* 288-95). In addition to this, both messengers emphasize that the conflict between brothers is not far off: Statius' *nuntius* reports that *Graios / ire duces nec iam Aoniis procul afore campis* (*Theb.* 7.229-30); Seneca's warns that *iam propius accessit malum* (*Phoen.* 323). Finally, the sudden shift from the divine to the human level, marked by Statius through the use of the word *nuntius* at the beginning of the line following Jupiter's and Bacchus' scene on Olympus, may be read as a metapoetic sign that we are moving from epic to tragedy: no more divine councils, but messengers reporting bad news to kings.⁷⁵⁷ Of course, the messenger's report – in itself not without epic pedigree – will shortly be followed by an epic catalogue. After all, Statius' engagement with Senecan tragedy always takes place within a larger epic framework.

The messenger scene forms the beginning of Statius' response to the "civil war on the horizon"-theme that had featured so prominently in *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae*. This

⁷⁵⁶ Smolenaars (1994) *ad Theb.* 7.227-42.

⁷⁵⁷ Compare Soerink (2014b), 183 on *nuntius* in *Theb.* 5.717.

response is continued in the Argive women's mounting of the walls of Thebes (*Theb.* 7.240-42): *nondum hostes contra, trepido tamen agmine matres / conscendunt muros, inde arma nitentia natis / et formidandos monstrant sub casside patres*. This scene has antecedents in Latin epic, but also calls to mind Andromache's climbing the walls with Astyanax to watch the fighting (*Il.* 6.386-87) and Astyanax' fear at the sight of his father's helmet (*Il.* 6.467-70).⁷⁵⁸ The epithet *trepido* is derived from Vergil's *et trepidae matres pressere ad pectora natos* (*Aen.* 7.518),⁷⁵⁹ a line which had been reworked by Seneca in his *pallidae natos tenere matres* (*Thy.* 563). He had followed this line with *uxor armato timuit marito*. In Statius we find the same combination of children, frightened mothers and terrifying armed husbands – the *patres* could very well be *formidandos* not only to their children, but also to their wives – in a city on the brink of war.⁷⁶⁰

Following the catalogue of the Theban army and the description of the arrival of the Argive host, Statius focuses in greater detail on the Thebans' psychological response to the arrival of the enemy (*Theb.* 7.452-69). The connection with the previous description of the situation at Thebes is emphasized through Statius' use of the word *attonitas* at the beginning of both passages (*Theb.* 7.227 and 452, of Eteocles' ears and Thebes itself respectively).⁷⁶¹ It has been observed that Statius' description of the effects of Pavor is reminiscent of the panic spreading upon Caesar's approach in the first book of the *Bellum Civile*, re-infusing Lucan's psychological account with supernatural elements.⁷⁶² Likewise, Statius' account of the panic seizing Thebes upon the Argive army's arrival (*Theb.* 7.452-69) is a reworking of Lucan's treatment of the panic that comes with Caesar's approach in the first book of the *Bellum Civile*,⁷⁶³ that is followed by four lines placing the general panic in a divine framework (*Theb.* 7.466-69):

⁷⁵⁸ Smolenaars (1994) *ad locc.*

⁷⁵⁹ Smolenaars (1994) *ad Theb.* 7.240-41.

⁷⁶⁰ Smolenaars (1994) *ad Theb.* 7.240-41 does not refer to this passage in *Thyestes*, but he does refer to *Ag.* 622. Jörn Soerink suggests to me that Leucothea pressing Palaemon close upon hearing Tisiphone's hisses earlier in the epic (*Theb.* 1.121-22) also forms part of this intertextual network of terrified mothers.

⁷⁶¹ The account of panic in the city is concluded through repetition of the word *attonitis* (*Theb.* 7.465), as Smolenaars (1994) *ad Theb.* 7.464-65 observes.

⁷⁶² Smolenaars (1994) *ad Theb.* 7.105-30 and 123-26 more specifically. See Hardie (2012), 181-83 on Lucan's treatment of panic in Italy and 211-12 on Statius' response.

⁷⁶³ See Smolenaars (1994) *ad Theb.* 7.452-69 on Lucan and other sources.

*it geminum excutiens anguem et bacchatur utrisque
Tisiphone castris; fratrem huic, fratrem ingerit illi,
aut utrique patrem: procul ille penatibus imis
excitus implorat Furias oculosque reposcit.*

As his epic is on the brink of war between brothers, Statius reactivates the infernal, tragic inter- and intratexts that had formed the driving forces behind this war from the beginning of the *Thebaid*. Tisiphone wields her snakes in both camps, just as she had against Ino and Athamas earlier in Theban history, and just as Allecto had against Turnus.⁷⁶⁴ The verb *bacchatur* refers the reader back to two Vergilian moments: *concussam bacchatur Fama per urbem* (*Aen.* 4.666) and *Allecto medias Italum bacchata per urbes* (*Aen.* 10.41).⁷⁶⁵ The reader will recall how both Carthage and Laurentum were conceived of as Theban anti-cities by Vergil: tragically doomed to (self-)destruction, in contrast with Rome. In the *Thebaid*'s reversed history, both Argos and Thebes suffer the fate of Vergil's anti-cities. This is achieved by pitting brother against brother in a way reminiscent of Allecto (*Aen.* 7.335-36: *tu potes unanimos armare in proelia fratres / atque odiis uersare domos*) and Seneca's Fury, who could implicate the father in this cycle of violence as well (*Thy.* 40-41: *fratrem expauescat frater et gnatum parens / gnatusque patrem*).⁷⁶⁶ The section concludes with a reminder and repetition of Oedipus' summoning of the Furies at the beginning of the *Thebaid*.⁷⁶⁷ We may even hear an echo of Seneca's *ab imo Tartari fundo excitae / Eumenides* (*HF.* 86-87) in Statius' *ille penatibus imis / excitus*,⁷⁶⁸ again emphasizing the close connection established between Oedipus and the Furies in his epic.

In short, all the Vergilian, Ovidian and Senecan pieces are set to finally drive Argos and Thebes, Polynices and Eteocles to destruction. In addition to this we should note that these infernal causes provide a supernatural backdrop not just to the naturalistic, Lucanian panic description that had preceded it, but also to Statius' reworking of Seneca's "threat of civil war"-moments. These moments had already been present in the background in *Theb.* 7.227-42 and will shortly occupy center stage in the *Thebaid*. Both *Thyestes*' third choral ode and *Phoenissae* as a whole are characterized

⁷⁶⁴ Smolenaars (1994) *ad Theb.* 7.466.

⁷⁶⁵ Smolenaars (1994) *ad Theb.* 7.466-67.

⁷⁶⁶ Smolenaars (1994) *ad Theb.* 7.466-69.

⁷⁶⁷ Smolenaars (1994) *ad Theb.* 7.469. See also Ganiban (2007), 114 on the association between Oedipus and the Furies in this passage.

⁷⁶⁸ Smolenaars (1994) *ad Theb.* 7.468-69 adduces the parallel.

by a focus on the human plane, and therefore Statius' emphasis on the role of Tisiphone just before the entrance of Jocasta is significant. He is about to rework the second half of Seneca's "godless" *Phoenissae*, but has attached to it a brief Thyestean prologue that calls to mind his Senecan overture in books 1 and 2, which gained much of its energy from Statius' fusion of the first half of *Phoenissae* and the prologue of *Thyestes*.

Central to the structure of Seneca's *Phoenissae* is the contrast between Oedipus' encouragement of the war between his sons and Jocasta's attempt to put a stop to this war.⁷⁶⁹ Jocasta's intervention in the seventh book of the *Thebaid* can be opposed to Oedipus' curse in the first.⁷⁷⁰ Statius, then, has chosen to organize his poem along Senecan lines, and the "civil war" within his epic between the need to sing of *fraternas acies* and the desire to avoid or delay it⁷⁷¹ is not just Lucanian, but also very Senecan. It should be observed that this tension between the spread and the delay of (poetic) *nefas* is not only present in the "struggle" between Oedipus and Jocasta in *Phoenissae*, but also in that between the Fury and Tantalus in *Thyestes*.⁷⁷² In the *Thebaid*, Jocasta is up against both Oedipus and a very Thyestean Fury. Through his incorporation of Jocasta's delaying intervention in an epic whose plot is largely driven by Seneca's Fury and his Oedipus, Statius stages a civil war within the Senecan tragic corpus.

In the final chapter on Senecan tragedy we have seen how Seneca's Jocasta was inevitably implicated in the cycle of Theban crime. To be sure, recent scholarship on the *Thebaid* has not been slow to point out that Statius' Jocasta too is implicated in Theban criminality, rendering her attempt at intervention less than credible: Jocasta is compared to a Fury (*Theb.* 7.474-78); she calls herself *impia belli / mater* (*Theb.* 7.483-84) and she states *nupsi equidem peperique nefas* (*Theb.* 7.514).⁷⁷³ Intertextually too, through allusions to Vergil's Allecto, she is associated with *nefas* and the Furies.⁷⁷⁴

⁷⁶⁹ Opelt (1972). This contrast is relevant to the dynamics of Statius' simultaneous reworking of *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae* in response to tensions already present in the Senecan corpus. Gilder (1997), 97-98 has argued that Oedipus assumes the role of Fury, Jocasta that of anti-Fury, thereby drawing *Phoenissae* closer to *Thyestes*.

⁷⁷⁰ See e.g. Bernstein (2008), 88.

⁷⁷¹ McNelis (2007).

⁷⁷² Schiesaro (2003), 36-45, with comparisons to Lucan. Ganiban (2007), 33-38 argues that Statius inserts his *Thebaid* into this tradition. Gilder (1997), 146-54 also discusses the struggle between Tisiphone and anti-Fury Jocasta and argues that Statius is thereby further developing Seneca's opposition between Oedipus and Jocasta in *Phoenissae* (Gilder (1997), 101).

⁷⁷³ On Jocasta's Fury-like nature and/or morally ambiguous status see especially Hershkovitz (1998a), 280-82; Keith (2000), 96; Markus (2004), 118-20; Ganiban (2007), 110-12 (emphasizing continuity between the rhetoric of Seneca's and Statius' Jocasta at 111 n. 56; Bernstein (2008), 88-94; Augoustakis (2010), 62-68; McAuley (2016) 321-24; on whose arguments I have drawn here. See also Korneeva (2011), 205-06 and McAuley (2016), 333-34 on the continuity between Seneca's and Statius' Jocasta.

⁷⁷⁴ Smolenaars (1994) *ad Theb.* 7.474-81.

But however this may be, on the level of the narrative Jocasta still functions as a force of delay, especially because her early morning intervention cuts short Tisiphone's encouragement of war in both camps during the preceding night.⁷⁷⁵ Her anger at her son is most strongly indebted to Livy's Veturia.⁷⁷⁶ On the other hand, much of the sense of urgency that her actual proposal to Polynices (*Theb.* 7.504-27) carries is derived from Seneca's *Phoenissae*. In both poems, Jocasta makes a frenzied entry, which is brought out by implicit and/or explicit comparisons to Furies or similar creatures. In *Phoenissae* Jocasta *attonita cursu fugit* (*Phoen.* 433); in the *Thebaid* *uenit attonitae Cadmeius heros* [i.e. Polynices] / *obuius* (*Phoen.* 492-93).⁷⁷⁷ Statius' Jocasta makes her way *mediosque per enses* (*Theb.* 7.487), which echoes Antigone's plea to her mother in Seneca's play (*Phoen.* 405): *nudum inter enses pectus infestis tene*.⁷⁷⁸

Also like Seneca's Jocasta, Statius' Jocasta emphasizes that the crime of fraternal warfare can still be avoided, but that the situation is at the tipping point (compare *Theb.* 7.505-06: *dum castra silent suspensaque bellum / horrescit pietas* with *Phoen.* 451: *dum piae [manus] sunt*; 455: *sancta si pietas placet*; 526: *dum nullum nefas*). This point is picked up again later, when she says *uestros etiamnum excuso furores* (*Theb.* 7.515). This line summarizes a point Jocasta makes in Seneca's play (*Phoen.* 451-54: *error inuitos adhuc / fecit nocentes, omne Fortunae fuit / peccantis in nos crimen: hoc primum nefas / inter scientes geritur*). As she proposes her son to come to Thebes to talk with his brother, she invites him to pay *patriosque deos arsuraque ... / tecta* (*Theb.* 7.507-08) a visit. As Smolenaars points out, this is an allusion to the motif of Thebes' impending destruction which figures prominently in *Phoenissae* (*Phoen.* 322; 540-41; 547-48; 555-57; 565-66).⁷⁷⁹

Having addressed Polynices, Jocasta turns to the Argive host as a whole (*Theb.* 7.519-27). The soldiers are moved (*Theb.* 7.528-33), and so is their leader, who is ready to go to Thebes and start negotiations (*Theb.* 7.534-38). Significantly, due to Jocasta's intervention *ferri ... avidus mansueuerat ardor* (*Theb.* 7.533). 'The phrase imitates and reverses *Aen.* 7.461f. *saeuit amor ferri*,' Smolenaars observes, who also refers the reader back to *Theb.* 7.137-38: *ferus omni in pectore saeuit / mortis amor caedisque*.⁷⁸⁰ This parallel is very significant: the frenzied war lust, which Jupiter

⁷⁷⁵ Fantham (1997), 206; Keith (2000), 96; Dietrich (2015), 308.

⁷⁷⁶ Smolenaars (1994) *ad Theb.* 7.497-527a.

⁷⁷⁷ Smolenaars (1994) *ad loc.*

⁷⁷⁸ Smolenaars (1994) *ad loc.*

⁷⁷⁹ All parallels Smolenaars (1994) *ad loc.*

⁷⁸⁰ Smolenaars (1994) *ad loc.*

and Mars had awakened in the Argive host and which had continued to possess the soldiers during the march to Thebes (*Theb.* 7.398-423), seems to be running out due to Jocasta's intervention. Luckily Tydeus intervenes just in time to get it going again.⁷⁸¹ However, the dissipation of war lust in this scene serves to illustrate an important point: Jupiter's attempt to appropriate Vergil's onslaught of Allecto for his own epic plot at the beginning of the seventh book has failed, and it is the Fury Tisiphone who will shortly make far more effective use of it.⁷⁸²

But for the moment, Jocasta's intervention seems to have succeeded.⁷⁸³ Statius plays here with the unfinished nature of Seneca's *Phoenissae*, which left the ultimate outcome of the parley hanging in the balance.⁷⁸⁴ However, the scene that Statius presents to us is not yet the actual parley. Smolenaars observes that Statius, in his response to the various accounts of Jocasta's intervention, 'has transposed elements of the celebrated scenes of tragedy to a moment which Euripides merely indicated in passing and which Seneca, for the sake of dramatic tension, did not differentiate from the actual meeting: Jocasta's suggestion to Polynices of a truce during which the matter can be discussed.' In *Phoinissai* this role is performed by a pedagogue, in the *Thebaid* it is performed by Jocasta; but the parley itself never actually takes place in Statius' epic.⁷⁸⁵ Whether the actual parley would have succeeded, Statius' readers will never know, just as the situation in Seneca's *Phoenissae* had remained unresolved.

But perhaps there is more still to Statius' reworking of the second half of Seneca's *Phoenissae*. Statius has split up Jocasta's attempt to stop Polynices and Eteocles, making her intervene both at the Argive camp and in Thebes, when Eteocles goes out to fight his brother (*Theb.* 11.315-53). In dividing Jocasta's intervention between the two

⁷⁸¹ On excessive mad energy possessing Statius heroes, Tydeus in particular, and its dissipation see Hershkowitz (1998a), 249-60.

⁷⁸² An important conclusion reached by Ganiban (2007), 115 at the end of his discussion of the interventions of Bacchus, Jupiter, Mars and Pavor, Jocasta and finally Tisiphone in *Thebaid* 4 and 7, but without reference to *Theb.* 7.533: 'The scenes I have examined, like many others in the *Thebaid*, involve a struggle among the gods to commandeer, as it were, the power of Virgil's Juno, and in particular her actions in *Aeneid* 7. This episode provides a poetic foundation for three of the most important moments of the epic's plot: Oedipus' prayer to Tisiphone (book 1), Dis' injunction to Tisiphone (book 8) and Tisiphone's exhortation to Megaera (book 11). Indeed *Aeneid* 7 represents the most effective model for action in the *Thebaid*, but it is one that Statius' *superi* cannot exploit fully.'

⁷⁸³ Cf. Vessey (1973), 274-75 and Gilder (1997), 151.

⁷⁸⁴ McNelis (2007), 146 hints at a similar idea when discussing Polynices' hesitation shortly before the duel (*Theb.* 11.382-87): 'Particularly in light of the fact that the extant version of Seneca's *Phoenissae* does not relate the conclusive battle between the brothers, Polynices' hesitation raises the possibility that the war will be put off yet again.'

⁷⁸⁵ Smolenaars (1994) *ad Theb.* 7.470-563. Also Marinis (2015), 256-57.

brothers, Statius may be responding to the fact that most of the second half of Seneca's play is concerned with Jocasta's attempt to persuade Polynices to give up his claim to the throne, whereas Eteocles only joins the conversation just before the play as we have breaks off. We may even consider the fact that Polynices is temporarily persuaded by Jocasta to go on with the parley a Statian prefiguration of 20th century interpretations of Seneca's play that claim that Polynices *does* give up his claim to the throne.⁷⁸⁶ In either case, the open-ended nature of Jocasta's intervention in Statius' epic – Tydeus' speech does change the mood to general war lust again (*Theb.* 7.559–62), but nothing is decided yet at this point – matches the unfinished nature of Seneca's play.

As we have seen, Seneca's *Phoenissae* is notable for its lack of a divine framework. However, Statius has inserted this "atheistic" Senecan scene within a wider cosmic framework, and he uses this cosmic framework here to move the story beyond Seneca's stalemate. Of course, Tydeus' speech changes the mood, but it is the Fury Tisiphone who seizes this opportunity to decisively tip the balance towards war and tragic madness (*Theb.* 7.562–63): *arma iterum furiaeque placent; fera tempus Erinys / arripit et primae molitur semina pugnae*. Smolenaars rightly points out that Statius here begins his reworking of the final step in Allecto's sowing of the seeds of war in Latium: the killing of Silvia's stag. The lines echo *saeua ... tempus dea nacta nocendi* (*Aen.* 7.511: Allecto sounding the war horn) and *primae commisit funera pugnae* (*Aen.* 7.542: Allecto having successfully ignited actual fighting between Trojans and Latins).⁷⁸⁷ In starting armed conflict through the maddening of Bacchus' tigresses (*Theb.* 7.564–607), Tisiphone will succeed in seizing the Junonian initiative in a way that Bacchus and Jupiter had not, reclaiming infernal control over the epic's plot.⁷⁸⁸

But although the maddening of Bacchus' tigresses is mostly indebted to the killing of Silvia's stag in the *Aeneid*,⁷⁸⁹ Statius also makes clear that Tisiphone's intervention is a very Senecan one. The Fury drives the tigresses mad with a snake-scurge (*Theb.* 7.579–81): *has ubi uipere tactas ter utramque flagello / Eumenis in furias animumque redire priorem / impulit, erumpunt non agnoscentibus agris*. As Smolenaars points out, this snake-scurge can also be found in Seneca's *Medea* (*Med.* 961–62: *ingens anguis excusso sonat / tortus flagello*) and – more relevant for our purposes – his

⁷⁸⁶ For Flavian epicists prefiguring 20th century interpretative debate see Hardie (1989), 3.

⁷⁸⁷ Smolenaars (1994) *ad locc.*

⁷⁸⁸ Ganiban (2007), 112–16.

⁷⁸⁹ A point often observed. See Smolenaars *ad Theb.* 7.564–607 and on shorter passages or individual lines for the parallels, and Ganiban (2007) n. 62 for bibliography.

Hercules Furens (HF. 87-88).⁷⁹⁰ As soon as Juno has decided that the only way to bring Hercules down is to turn him against himself, she calls upon the Furies (HF. 86-88): *Adsint ab imo Tartari fundo excitae / Eumenides, ignem flammeae spargant comae, / uiperea saeuae uerbera incutiant manus*. What we have here then is a first signal – to be intensified in Amphiarus’ *katabasis* and continuing the allusions to *Hercules Furens* at the beginning of the *Thebaid* – that the upcoming movements up and down the various levels of Statius’ epic cosmos by Amphiarus, Tydeus, Menoeceus and Capaneus will rework the Herculean shuttling between Heaven, earth and Hell in Seneca’s play.

But perhaps the most important thing to be noticed here is that Statius’ Tisiphone is operating on her own initiative. In this she surpasses both Vergil’s Allecto⁷⁹¹ and the Furies summoned by Juno in *Hercules Furens* but parallels the Fury of *Thyestes* – just as she had at the beginning of the epic. Tisiphone’s success is immediate: Jocasta flees ((*Theb.* 7.608-11): *Rumpitur et Graium subito per castra tumultu / concilium; fugit exsertos Iocasta per hostes / iam non ausa preces; natas ipsamque repellunt / qui modo tam mites*) and the Argives and Thebans rush to meet each other in battle (*Theb.* 7.615-27).

Having toyed with the idea of Senecan open-endedness for a while, Statius’ epic moves beyond the incompleteness of Seneca’s tragedy *Phoenissae*. The central conflict governing *Phoenissae*, between the onset of Oedipus’ madness and Jocasta’s attempt to prevent or at least delay it, is finally resolved in Oedipus’ favor by Seneca’s epic successor. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Statius is fully aware of the regressive and repetitive nature of Seneca’s Oedipus and poetry about Thebes in general, which may even pose a threat to a coherent epic narrative.⁷⁹² He recognized the problems that the tragic poet had had in getting his *Phoenissae* going. Statius’ solution to this problem had been to have his Oedipus call upon Tisiphone, a most Thyestean Fury, to set the plot of the *Thebaid* in motion. Much later in the poem, halfway during the seventh book, it is Tisiphone who removes Jocasta, the final obstacle to Seneca’s ever-elusive civil war. In establishing a disturbing pact between Seneca’s regressive Oedipus and his all-conquering Fury, Statius has managed to overcome some of the problems and paradoxes haunting Seneca’s tragic oeuvre – just as Seneca himself had “resolved” problems and paradoxes in Augustan epic, we might add. But as the rest

⁷⁹⁰ Smolenaars (1994) *ad loc.*

⁷⁹¹ Ganiban (2007), 113.

⁷⁹² Compare e.g. Ahl (1986), 2817-22; Henderson (1991), 41-42; Heinrich (1999).

of my analysis will show, Statius is fully aware of the fact that in overcoming Seneca's difficulties he has created a tragic monster that will cause his already unstable epic cosmos to come crashing down.

The opening of Hell

Rumpitur et Graium subito per castra tumultu concilium ... (Theb. 7.608) Statius' war of the Seven against Thebes literally begins at a breaking point, after more than six books of careful preparations, delays and frustrated beginnings. All of a sudden, *nullo uenit ordine bellum (Theb. 7.616)*. After some initial combat, the first major *aristeia* and death in the poem belong to Amphiaraus. The seer, aided by Apollo, goes on a killing spree before being swallowed by the earth (*Theb. 7.690-823*). The earth opens to receive Amphiaraus and then closes again but is opened again as Dis sends Tisiphone up to pollute Heaven and earth. The transition from the seventh book to the eighth is marked by a sequence of events that emphasize that from now on, the war against Thebes will transgress all boundaries.⁷⁹³

At the same time, however, Statius seems to suggest that the war, which has finally begun, is always in danger of coming to a premature end. Amphiaraus' killing spree is compared to a mountainside sliding down, taking everything in its path with it, until it comes to a stop. Debra Hershkowitz uses this simile as the point of departure for her discussion of excessive energy and its dissipation.⁷⁹⁴ Seo emphasizes the tension between closure and continuation in the story of Amphiaraus' disappearance.⁷⁹⁵ Here, I would like to discuss how these Statian phenomena can be better understood when read through the poet's engagement with Senecan tragedy.

The breaking of boundaries between the three cosmic realms has traditionally been a Herculean affair, and was the central theme of Seneca's *Hercules Furens*, as we have seen earlier in this book. The *Thebaid* features various heroes' attempts to emulate Hercules,⁷⁹⁶ and Amphiaraus himself refers to Hercules' *katabasis* when he meets Dis upon his arrival in the Underworld (*Theb. 8.95-98*):

⁷⁹³ Lovatt (2005), 273-75. On the pivotal nature of the eighth book in general, see now Augoustakis (2016), xviii-xxii, with further references.

⁷⁹⁴ Hershkowitz (1998a), 249-51.

⁷⁹⁵ Seo (2013) 161-68.

⁷⁹⁶ Hercules is an important part of the discussions on heroism in Vessey (1973) and Ripoll (1998).

nam nec ad Herculeos (unde haec mihi pectora?) raptus, 95
nec uenerem illicitam (crede his insignibus) ausi
intramus Lethen: fugiat ne tristis in antrum
Cerberus, aut nostros timeat Proserpina currus.

Of course, Amphiaraus is trying to distance himself from Hercules in these lines. But whether or not we find his reconciliation speech to Dis fully convincing,⁷⁹⁷ the fact remains that the effects of his incursion go even beyond those of Hercules' *katabasis*. His descent marks the point at which Statius unleashes the full force of Senecan tragedy upon the epic genre. But before we have a look at the wider consequences of Amphiaraus' incursion, I zoom in on the moments at which the chasm opens and closes. I would like to argue here that Statius marks the opening of the chasm as an event that shakes the very foundations of the epic genre: war and the cosmos.

The infernal chasm breaks open the very field of battle (*Theb.* 7.796): *inferno mugit iam murmure campus*. Next, the soldiers confuse the earthquake with *fragor belli* (*Theb.* 7.797-98), 'a clever transposition of the more common correspondence between the turmoil of war and the violence of nature'.⁷⁹⁸ Statius then moves from confusion to an outright breaking up of the war (*Theb.* 7.798-99, 801-03):

alius tremor arma uirosque
mirantesque inclinat equos. ...
 ...
... exciderunt irae, nutantia figunt 801
tela solo, dubiasque uagi nituntur in hastas
comminus inque uicem uiso pallore recedunt.

If we read lines 798-99 metapoetically, the new tremor is not just bending the arms and men on the battlefield, but bending the direction of Statius' epic. What we have here is a moment comparable to the moment at the beginning of the fourth book of Valerius' *Argonautica*, when Jupiter reproaches his wife for not running his epic properly (V.Fl. 4.7-8). The sense of an epic in transformation is reinforced by two further allusions to the *Aeneid*. The words *exciderunt irae* echo *necdum etiam causae irarum saeuique dolores / exciderant animo* (*Aen.* 1.25-26), the words with

⁷⁹⁷ See Seo (2013), 166 for some reservations.

⁷⁹⁸ Smolenaars (1994) *ad loc.*

which Vergil had introduced Juno's unrelenting anger.⁷⁹⁹ Juno's anger had fuelled the *Aeneid* from the beginning until the end. But suddenly, the soldiers' anger seems to be running out, only 200 lines after it had finally set Statius' epic in motion.⁸⁰⁰ Statius also achieves a sense of closure by alluding to the actions of the Trojan and Latin soldiers at the beginning of the final duel between Turnus and Aeneas. The words *nutantia figunt / tela solo* (*Theb.* 7.801-02) echo Vergil's *defigunt tellure hastas* (*Aen.* 12.130).⁸⁰¹ Of course, this duel between Aeneas and Turnus did prove to be not quite the end after all, as fighting would resume shortly afterwards following Juno's and Juturna's intervention.⁸⁰² And indeed, as I have already mentioned and will discuss in greater detail below, the tension between closure and openness is equally crucial to Statius' Amphiaraus narrative.

As the chasm opens, both the Underworld and the heavens are struck with fear (*Theb.* 7.816-17): *ecce alte praeceps humus ore profundo / dissilit, inque uicem timuerunt sidera et umbrae*. Fear at the opening of the Underworld is a motif that goes back to Homer's *Iliad* (*Il.* 20.61-65) and one that has had a long afterlife in Latin literature, epic in particular, but also in Seneca's *Hercules Furens*.⁸⁰³ Smolenaars observes that Statius innovates by having Heaven fear the opening too and suggests that this celestial fear may have its origins in Vergil's *Aeneid*. When Hercules opens Cacus' cave, Vergil compares this to the opening of the *regna ... / pallida, dis inuisa* (*Aen.* 8.244-45). Statius will reveal the full importance of this somewhat covert allusion to Vergil in the next book.⁸⁰⁴

The fact that Amphiaraus' story continues after his disappearance is a major innovation on Statius' part.⁸⁰⁵ Statius draws attention to this innovation as the eighth book opens, as the shades are shocked to see a *corpus... nouum* (*Theb.* 8.5) in their midst.⁸⁰⁶ Dis immediately assumes that his brothers are waging war against him and swears revenge, announcing the events that will take up the better part of the following

⁷⁹⁹ Smolenaars (1994) *ad loc.*

⁸⁰⁰ We might add to the discussion in Hershkowitz (1998a), 249-51 that it is not just Amphiaraus who is running out of energy at this point.

⁸⁰¹ Smolenaars (1994) *ad loc.*

⁸⁰² On the problematic nature of closure in the final book of the *Aeneid*, see again Hardie (1997b).

⁸⁰³ See e.g. Mulder (1954) *ad Theb.* 2.21 – adduced by Smolenaars (1994) *ad loc.*, who contributes *Hercules Furens* to the list.

⁸⁰⁴ See also Hardie (1993), 79-80, especially: 'the opening of Hell that was a figure of speech for Hercules' tearing open of Cacus' cave in *Aeneid* 8 becomes literal reality (816-17) and the object of Pluto's complaint at the beginning of book 8.'

⁸⁰⁵ See e.g. Vessey (1973), 262 and Franchet d'Espérey (1999), 331.

⁸⁰⁶ Seo (2013), 165.

four books (*Theb.* 8.34-86). This speech has its roots in *Iliad* 20.61-65, in which Hades is terrified at the prospect that the boundaries between earth and Hell may break.⁸⁰⁷ Other important intertexts for the invasion of the Underworld by the Upper World are – again – the confrontation between Hercules and Cacus (*Aen.* 8.243-46), and Seneca's *Hercules Furens*.⁸⁰⁸

Amphiaraus' descent confirms Dis' fears stretching back to the very beginning of the epic genre. In retaliation he commands Tisiphone to invade the earth and heavens. The god's intervention marks the climax of a crescendo of infernal interventions, all echoing Juno's actions in *Aeneid* 7.⁸⁰⁹ But Dis is not just a Vergilian character: not only is the notion of "breaking into the Underworld" a Herculean one, Statius is careful to specifically allude to Seneca's *Hercules*. Among other phrases, Dis' call *i, Tartareas ulciscere sedes*, / *Tisiphone* (*Theb.* 8.65-66) echoes Juno's command to the Furies to punish Hercules for his invasion of the Underworld (*HF.* 104: *poenas petite uitatae Stygis*).⁸¹⁰ Also, the god's threat to unleash the Giants (*Theb.* 8.42-47) is reminiscent of Hercules' mad threat to unleash the Titans in Seneca's play (*HF.* 965-69).⁸¹¹

But Statius adds yet another Senecan intertext at the beginning of his eighth book: *Thyestes*. Pluto's cry *Tartareas ulciscere sedes* continues with the expression of the desire for an unprecedented crime (*Theb.* 8.66-68): *si quando, nouis asperrima monstis / triste, insuetum, ingens, quod nondum uiderit aether, / ede nefas, quod mirer ego inuideantque Sorores*. These lines rework Atreus' desire for an unprecedented crime (*Thy.* 192-95),⁸¹² and we may well emphasize Pluto's mention of the *aether*, which is to be invaded by criminality just as it was in *Thyestes*.⁸¹³ Intratextually, these lines recall and surpass Oedipus' desire for an unprecedented crime (*Theb.* 1.84-87).⁸¹⁴ We have seen in the previous chapter that Oedipus' lines reworked passages from Seneca's *Phoenissae*.⁸¹⁵

⁸⁰⁷ Juhnke (1972), 123-24, with n. 301 on *Aen.* 8.243-46 (the simile in Vergil's Hercules and Cacus story).

⁸⁰⁸ Kroll (1932), 389; Franchet d'Espérey (1999), 331.

⁸⁰⁹ See especially Ganiban (2007), 24-43; 117-51.

⁸¹⁰ See Bessone (2011), 99 n. 3 on the importance of this Senecan line to Pluto's speech.

⁸¹¹ Frings (1992), 92 n. 181.

⁸¹² Frings (1992), 23-24; Bessone (2011), 99. Gilder (1997), 191 n. 56 observes an allusion to the Fury's criminal inventivity in *Thy.* 66-67.

⁸¹³ On the infection of the cosmos with *furor* and *nefas* along Senecan lines in the *Thebaid* see Franchet d'Espérey (1999), 226-51.

⁸¹⁴ Frings (1992), 58; also Ganiban (2007), 122.

⁸¹⁵ A point also stressed in Frings' discussion. For the parallels discussed in this paragraph, see also Augoustakis (2016) *ad loc.*

Statius' epic had taken its time in setting up its major themes and getting the plot going and had frequently threatened to collapse or turn in on itself in typically Theban fashion. And even the seventh book, which seemed to finally set the war in motion, ends with a dissipation of energy. But then Statius has the ground break open in typically Senecan fashion and unleashes the energies of *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae*, his predecessor's most radical tragedies. Statius once again shows how Senecan tragedy does not just challenge epic – a point to which we will return shortly – but that it can also be used to move an epic poem forward.

Between Heaven and Hell

With Pluto's command to Tisiphone to wage war against the heavens, Statius' epic of *nefas* is firmly under way. What is at stake in the following books is nothing less than the dominion over and the nature of the epic cosmos. In order to emphasize this, the sequence of events in books eight to ten is framed by two cosmic incursions: one of the Underworld, by Amphiaras, and one of the heavens, by Capaneus.⁸¹⁶ Even though the other events take place in the third cosmic realm, earth,⁸¹⁷ the stakes there are just as high. Statius' heroes are moving up and down along two vertical axes: Hell-earth-Heaven and beast-man-god.⁸¹⁸ Of course, as we have seen in the chapter on Seneca's *Hercules*, both of these axes are typically Herculean. It has often been argued that many of Statius' heroes try to take on a Herculean role, some of them succeeding, some failing.⁸¹⁹ As Hardie puts it, 'Tydeus is one of a number of Statian heroes, including Menoeceus and Capaneus, with immortal yearnings: men who feel disgust and impatience with the fragility of their mortal vessel.'⁸²⁰ In what follows I will argue that these explorations of the vertical axis continue a trend set in Seneca's *Hercules Furens* and serve as a reflection on Senecan tragedy. Simultaneously, they do of course form part of Statius' more general narrative of generic confrontation between tragedy and epic.

⁸¹⁶ On the parallelism between these two 'vertical' cosmic incursions see Feeney (1991), 258; Delarue (2000), 278.

⁸¹⁷ Feeney (1991) *ibidem*.

⁸¹⁸ Feeney (1991), 258-61; Hardie (1993), 69.

⁸¹⁹ Vessey (1973) (in several discussions on Theban heroes); Hardie (1993), 69; Ripoll (1998), 132-60. In both Hardie's and Ripoll's work this discussion is embedded in a more general analysis of Hercules in Flavian epic.

⁸²⁰ Hardie (1993), 69; and see also Soerink (2011) on Tydeus' unwillingness to accept his mortality.

Amphiaraus' death causes a major crisis in the Argive camp. The morale of the army and its leaders evaporates and they retreat, until Argives and Thebans agree upon a truce (*Theb.* 8.126-61). During this truce the Argives lament their prophet, and Statius compares the despair hitting the army to that befalling the Argonauts following Tiphys' death (*Theb.* 8.212-14).⁸²¹ The Thebans, on the other hand, celebrate Amphiaraus' demise in Bacchic revelry (*Theb.* 8.218-25). These celebrations form a reconfirmation of Theban identity. The Theban prophet Tiresias is compared favorably to Amphiaraus (*Theb.* 8.226-27), and the Thebans even – quite literally – return to their origins (*Theb.* 8.227-28: *nunc facta reuoluunt / maiorum ueteresque canunt ab origine Thebas*) as they remember Europa, Cadmus, Amphion and Harmonia (*Theb.* 8.229-39).⁸²² The Theban celebrations culminate in a special appearance of Oedipus himself, emerging for the first time (*Theb.* 8.240: *tunc primum*) from his dark lair to revel in the beginnings of war (*Theb.* 8.240-54). Characteristically, Thebes celebrates what should be a move forward in the wars by going back to beginnings.

The Argives, in the meantime, have to find a way to move forward and manage to find one as Thiodamas succeeds Amphiaraus (*Theb.* 8.271-341).⁸²³ Shortly afterwards, battle recommences, and just as the Greeks had found a priestly successor for Amphiaraus in Thiodamas, they find a successor for Amphiaraus on the battlefield in Tydeus. Following the initial battle descriptions, Statius zooms in on two heroes: Tydeus, protected by Minerva, on the Argive side, and Haemon, protected by Hercules, on the Theban side. As both heroes face each other, Hercules becomes more reluctant about supporting Haemon. He tells Minerva that he is not very eager to oppose her in battle, the very goddess who had aided him on his path to deification (*Theb.* 8.514: *tu patrem caelumque mihi*), and that he will therefore withdraw from Haemon's side (*Theb.* 8.497-518). Through his mention of Minerva's crucial role in assuring his immortality in this speech, Hercules prepares the reader for the conclusion of the eighth book, when Minerva is ready to offer Tydeus immortality (*Theb.* 8.758-59).⁸²⁴

Hercules' speech is also relevant to Tydeus' situation in more complex ways: as the second member of the Seven approaches his demise, Statius' engagement with

⁸²¹ See most recently Lovatt (2015) and Augoustakis (2016) *ad loc.* on the Argonautic intertexts in *Thebaid* 8.

⁸²² See e.g. Augoustakis (2016) *ad loc.* on the allusions to Ovid's tales of Theban origins in these passages.

⁸²³ On these scenes of succession see Hardie (1993), 111-13. See Augoustakis (2016) *ad Theb.* 8.271-93 for further references.

⁸²⁴ Cf. Augoustakis (2016) *ad Theb.* 8.514.

Senecan tragedy once again intensifies. At the beginning of his speech, Hercules wonders what has caused him to almost come to blows with Minerva and suggests that Juno herself may be responsible (*Theb.* 8.502-04):

*fida soror, quatenam hunc belli caligine nobis
congressum fortuna tulit? num regia Iuno
hoc molita nefas?*

Hercules' vocabulary here is poetically charged. The word *molita* evokes the genre of epic, (*Aen.* 1.33: *tantae molis erat*), *nefas* Senecan tragedy and the tragic undercurrents of epic. Hercules suspects that Juno is once again up to engineering a narrative of *nefas*, and it is for this very reason that he withdraws from the battlefield. Although Juno is not involved, Hercules is right to suspect that a plot of *nefas* has been set in motion – even a plot of *nefas* working against deification. In this sense, the story of deification tainted by *nefas* that is to follow closely mirrors Seneca's *Hercules Furens*, which was governed by Juno. In the rest of Hercules' speech, we find further references to this play. Hercules' crossing of a cosmic boundary in Seneca's tragedy is recalled when he mentions that Minerva would have accompanied him on his trip to the *inuia* ... / *Tartara*, *ni superos Acheron excluderet* (*Theb.* 8.512-13). *inuus* is an adjective frequently used to describe all things infernal in Seneca's *Hercules Furens*.⁸²⁵ For good measure, the 'stark antithesis between *superos* and *Acheron* recalls Juno's *flecto si nequeo superos, Acheronta mouebo* at Virg. *A.* 7.312'.⁸²⁶ In an impressive example of combinatorial allusion, Statius manages to evoke both Seneca's tragedy of cosmic boundary-crossing and the tragic undercurrent of the *Aeneid* to which *Hercules Furens* responds.

All of this prepares us for Tydeus' travels along the Herculean beast-man-god-axis at the end of the eighth book of the *Thebaid*. Amphiaraus' unusual *katabasis* and Tydeus' failed apotheosis provide a compelling frame for the eighth book.⁸²⁷ Not coincidentally, both passages culminate in the most explosively Senecan moments of the book: Dis' call for an *ingens* ... / ... *nefas* (*Theb.* 8.67-68) in the mode of *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae* is matched by Tydeus' Thyestean cannibalism.⁸²⁸ The allusion to *Thyestes*

⁸²⁵ See Augoustakis (2016) *ad Theb.* 8.512-13 on the use of *inuus* in Seneca and Vergil.

⁸²⁶ Augoustakis (2016) *ad Theb.* 8.512-13.

⁸²⁷ Augoustakis (2016), 387.

⁸²⁸ Tydeus' cannibalism was of course wished for by Dis: *sit qui rabidarum more ferarum / mandat atrox hostile caput* (*Theb.* 8.71-72) – cf. Ganiban (2007), 123.

is marked by Tydeus' own words, as the mortally wounded hero asks his comrades to bring him the head of his killer, the Theban hero Melanippus (*Theb.* 8.742-44):

*i, precor, Atrei si quid tibi sanguinis umquam,
Hippomedon, vade, o primis puer inclute bellis
Arcas, et Argolicae Capaneu iam maxime turmae.*

Tydeus' mention of Hippomedon's Mycenaean kinsman Atreus forms a clear allusion to Seneca's tragedy.⁸²⁹ Statius even surpasses Seneca by having Tydeus both order and consume the impious meal (*Theb.* 8.760), in a horrible fusion of the criminal mastermind Atreus and the hapless victim Thyestes.⁸³⁰ And even Thyestes at his most clearheaded⁸³¹ is present, as his words *agnosco fratrem* (*Thy.* 1006) are echoed in Tydeus' recognition of himself in Melanippus (*Theb.* 8.753: *sese ... agnouit in illo*).⁸³²

As Antony Augoustakis observes, Tydeus' cannibalism constitutes a tragic contamination of Statius' epic.⁸³³ The quintessentially epic and Herculean trajectory of apotheosis that Minerva had planned for her hero descends into tragic *nefas*. In addition to all this, Tydeus' cannibalism is the clearest sign yet that Senecan tragedy poses a serious threat to Statius' epic cosmos. Tydeus may be mad as he receives the head of Melanippus from Capaneus (*Theb.* 8.751-52: *amens / laetitiaque iraque*), but it is Tisiphone who provides the final push towards cannibalism (*Theb.* 8.757-58: *infelix contentus erat: plus exigit ultrix / Tisiphone*).⁸³⁴ While Minerva is off securing deification for Tydeus, the Fury Tisiphone claims the hero for herself, causing Minerva to flee the sight of the dying hero (*Theb.* 8.764: *fugit auersata iacentem*).⁸³⁵ Minerva's flight is followed shortly by the flight of Mars himself from the battlefield (*Theb.* 9.4-7). Both of these flights, instigated by Tisiphone, prepare the reader for the flight of all the gods at Jupiter's instructions at the start of the eleventh book, right before the fraternal duel.⁸³⁶ The flight of Minerva and Mars at the sight of Tydeus' cannibalism parallels the

⁸²⁹ Augoustakis (2015), 387.

⁸³⁰ Augoustakis (2015), 387-89.

⁸³¹ Cf. Tarrant (1985) *ad loc.*

⁸³² Augoustakis (2015), 389.

⁸³³ Augoustakis (2015), 386-89. See also Estèves (2005).

⁸³⁴ The extent to which Tydeus' emotions – and his madness in particular – are his own, or rather the responsibility of the infernal forces steering the action of the poem has been the subject of much scholarly debate (comparable to the debate surrounding Hercules' madness in *Hercules Furens*). For an overview of the literature, see Augoustakis (2016) *ad Theb.* 8.751-66.

⁸³⁵ Gilder (1997), 166-67.

⁸³⁶ See e.g. Feeney (1991), 356 and Ganiban (2007), 125.

flight of the gods in Seneca's *Thyestes*, a tragedy similarly supervised by hellish forces. As Tydeus undergoes his transformation from Hercules to Atreus/*Thyestes*, Statius knowingly transforms the epic cosmos with him, along Senecan lines.

We move on now to Statius' other two Herculean heroes: Menoeceus and Capaneus. At the end of the tenth book, only a few hundred lines before Eteocles and Polynices will meet each other in combat, Statius raises the Senecan stakes again in anticipation of his poem's crowning *nefas*. This is most clearly the case when Statius introduces Capaneus' assault on the walls of Thebes and the heavens, the final act of the war preceding the fratricidal duel.⁸³⁷ The fact that Statius has reached 'the limits of epic'⁸³⁸ is emphasized in his address to the Muses preceding Capaneus' assault. The poet signals that Capaneus' exploits will move beyond martial epic (*Theb.* 10.827: *hactenus arma, tubae, ferrumque et uulnera*)⁸³⁹ and asks for *maior ... amentia* (*Theb.* 10.830). Capaneus' madness is only one step removed from the madness that will drive Eteocles and Polynices to their crime, and Capaneus' exploits are the final event that can still – but only barely – be narrated with help from the Muses.⁸⁴⁰

But Capaneus is not the only one reaching for the limits of epic. Many critics have discussed the ways in which Statius sets up contrasts and parallels between Capaneus and Menoeceus, who dies during Capaneus' assault on the walls of Thebes.⁸⁴¹ A particular trait that they share is that they are driven by a desire to insert themselves into the heavens (*Theb.* 10.665 for Menoeceus; *Theb.* 10.828 and 898 for Capaneus).⁸⁴² Menoeceus, long considered a prime example of *pietas* in the *Thebaid*, has been transformed into a far more ambiguous character in more recent criticism, whose motifs are selfish and whose sacrifice is useless.⁸⁴³ I would like to argue here that certain aspects of Menoeceus' complex character can be explained from Statius' engagement with Seneca's *Hercules Furens*.

⁸³⁷ On Statius' crescendo from war to fratricidal duel through Capaneus see Bessone (2011), 96–98 with references.

⁸³⁸ Chaudhuri (2014) uses these words in the title for his chapter on Capaneus, in which he discusses the various ways in which the figure of Capaneus tests these limits.

⁸³⁹ Cf. Williams (1972) *ad loc.*; Lovatt (2001), 113; McNelis (2007), 142.

⁸⁴⁰ Bessone (2011), 96–98.

⁸⁴¹ See e.g. Vessey (1973), 117–31; Ripoll (1998), 232; Ganiban (2007), 136–48.

⁸⁴² Ganiban (2007), 147–48.

⁸⁴³ For major discussions of Menoeceus in Statius' *Thebaid* see e.g. Vessey (1973), 117–31; Fantham (1995); Ripoll (1998), 154–55 and 361–66; Heinrich (1999); Ganiban (2007), 136–48.

Menoceus' general similarity to Hercules has been well-established.⁸⁴⁴ Indeed, Statius himself explicitly compares Menoeceus' funeral to that of Hercules on Oeta (*Theb.* 12.64-67):

hostiles super ipse, ut uictor, acervos
pacifera lauro crinem uittisque decorus 65
accubat: haud aliter quam cum poscentibus astris
laetus in accensa iacuit Tirynthius Oeta.

Statius' wording here evokes that of the pseudo-Senecan *Hercules Oetaeus*, when Philoctetes reports how he witnessed Hercules on his funeral pyre and wondered (*HO.* 1683-84): *quis sic triumphans laetus in curru stetit / uictor?*⁸⁴⁵ An explicit allusion to Hercules is also present in Statius' description of the personification of Virtus. As she transforms herself into Tiresias' daughter Manto to persuade Menoeceus to sacrifice himself, Statius compares her to Hercules in the service of Omphale (*Theb.* 10.646-49). This Herculean travesty is also mentioned in *Hercules Furens* (*HF.* 465-67), one of the passages to which Statius is responding here.⁸⁴⁶ But apart from this – to my knowledge – the parallels between *Hercules Furens* and Menoeceus' suicide have gone largely unobserved.⁸⁴⁷

Menoceus' story starts when Tiresias is consulted by Theban citizens uncertain of what to do as the Argive host assails the city. The seer informs them that Mars demands the death of the youngest descendant of the serpent (*Theb.* 10.580-615). It should be noted that Statius introduces the scene with an allusion to the *Aeneid*. Statius describes the Thebans as divided amongst themselves on what to do (*Theb.* 10.580-81): *Nec non ancipitis pugnat sententia uulgi / discordesque serit motus*. These lines may be compared to Vergil's *exoritur trepidos inter discordia ciuis* (*Aen.* 12.583) and *rumoresque serit uarios* (*Aen.* 12.228). The latter line refers to Juturna in the guise of Camertus urging the Latin troops to break the truce providing the context for the duel between Aeneas and Turnus; the former to the panicked citizens of Laurentum awaiting the approach of Aeneas following the breaking of this truce, like Statius' Thebans debating what to do. Both scenes in Vergil form part of the more

⁸⁴⁴ Vessey (1973), 129; Ripoll (1998), 154-55.

⁸⁴⁵ On the passage and the allusion see Ripoll (1998), 154-55 with notes.

⁸⁴⁶ Cf. Williams (1972) *ad Theb.* 10.647 and Billerbeck (1999) *ad loc.*

⁸⁴⁷ Billerbeck (1999) *ad HF.* 1183 *per te meorum facinorum laudem precor* observes a parallel construction in *Theb.* 10.694-95: *per ego oro tuosque, / nate, meosque annos*.

general tension between openness and closure in the final book of the *Aeneid*. The duel should have provided closure, but is interrupted by Juturna's intervention, and the Latin citizens fear the end as Aeneas assaults the city.

These allusions reveal that Statius makes the fate of Menoeceus part of the closural dynamics of his own epic. Menoeceus' death is supposed to bring the war to an end and is called *extrema litamina diuum* (*Theb.* 10.610) by Tiresias. Of course, many critics have rightly denied Menoeceus' sacrifice this closural role, as the war does go on afterwards and Thebes continues to suffer. Rather, his sacrifice forms part of a much longer sequence of tension between closure and openness that serves as a metapoetic commentary on the problems involved in writing an epic about Thebes. As often, this closural narrative is closely connected to Statius' engagement with Senecan tragedy. Menoeceus' death at his own hand forms a typically Theban repetition of the foundational death of the Sown Men.⁸⁴⁸ But Statius once again finds ways to push his narrative beyond Theban self-destruction.

When Virtus approaches Menoeceus to persuade him to sacrifice himself, she urges him to abandon mere warfare for a more noble enterprise (*Theb.* 10.664-65): *linque humiles pugnas, non haec tibi debita uirtus: / astra uocant, caeloque animam, plus concipe, mittes.*⁸⁴⁹ A few lines later she commands him (*Theb.* 10.670): *rape mente deos, rape nobile fatum*. This shift from noble earthly enterprises, that no longer satisfy the hero, to ones concerning the heavens, finds a clear parallel in Seneca's *Hercules Furens*. Having mentioned all of Hercules' previous works, including his successful capture of Cerberus, Juno fears he will go beyond them in a quest for apotheosis. She states (*HF.* 63-65): *Leuia sed nimium queror; / caelo timendum est, regna ne summa occupet / qui uicit ima*, and concludes by stating that Hercules *quaerit ad superos uiam* (*HF.* 74). This quest for more recurs in Hercules' own words, spoken in madness (*HF.* 955-59):

<i>Perdomita tellus, tumida cesserunt freta,</i>	955
<i>infernā nostros regna sentire impetus:</i>	
<i>immune caelum est, dignus Alcide labor.</i>	
<i>in alta mundi spatia sublimis ferar,</i>	
<i>petatur aether: astra promittit pater.</i>	

⁸⁴⁸ Heinrich (1999).

⁸⁴⁹ We may also observe an allusion here to Iulus and Apollo (another example of heroism with limited impact?) in *Aen.* 9.638-58.

Menoceus' desire to outdo his martial efforts is further emphasized when Creon, confronting his son, asks him *quae bello grauiora paras?* (*Theb.* 10.691)⁸⁵⁰ and asks him to return to war again and again rather than sacrifice himself (*Theb.* 10.713-18).

The defining quality of Hercules in *Hercules Furens* is of course his madness, and Menoeceus can be seen as somewhat similar to Hercules in this respect as well. Several scholars have suggested that Menoeceus is possessed by Virtus, and that Statius' language describing his mental state contains hints of madness.⁸⁵¹ Moreover, Virtus is similar to the Furies from *Aeneid* 7 and 12 that had driven Turnus to his doom. Just like the Dira, Virtus usually resides next to Jupiter's throne (*Theb.* 10.632-33; *Aen.* 12.849-50); and just as Allecto possesses Turnus with *amor ferri*, so Virtus possesses Menoeceus with *amor leti* (*Theb.* 10.677).⁸⁵² I would like to add to these observations that Menoeceus shares the specific combination of possession and the desire for suicide with Seneca's Hercules. The difference of course is that Hercules' desire for suicide follows his possession, rather than being caused by it. But Amphitryon's words suggest that, in Hercules' desire for death, madness remains (*HF.* 1218-21): *Nondum tumultu pectus attonito carens / mutauit iras, quodque habet proprium furor, / in se ipse saeuit.*

The presence of Amphitryon brings us to another parallel between Hercules and Menoeceus: that of the father overwhelmed by grief because of his son's possession and suicidal tendencies. Amphitryon spends most of the fourth and fifth act of Seneca's tragedy trying to talk sense into his son, and similarly Creon tries to talk his son out of his plans for self-sacrifice (*Theb.* 10.690-718). There are more detailed parallels as well. When confronting his son, Creon asks Menoeceus what his frenzied and averted gaze signifies (*Theb.* 10.691-93): *dic, nate, precanti, / cur tibi torua acies? cur hic truculentus in ore / pallor, et ad patrios non stant tua lumina uultus?* Similarly, following Hercules' maddened observation that the heavens are in disarray, Amphitryon asks his son (*HF.* 953-54): *quo, nate, uultus huc et huc acres refers / acieque falsum turbida caelum uidet?* In the case of both fathers, this question follows a more general question regarding the nature of the sudden change in their son's character (*Theb.* 10.690-91; *HF.* 952). Following Hercules' declaration that he will assault the heavens

⁸⁵⁰ Cf. Lovatt (2005), 134 n. 61.

⁸⁵¹ Schetter (1960), 12-13 and Hershkovitz (1998a), 292 n. 91, pointing specifically to *quae sacra insania menti?* (*Theb.* 10.804 – Menoeceus' mother accusing him after his death) and *iuenis multo possessus numine pectus* (*Theb.* 10.676). On the madness of both Tiresias and Menoeceus see Lovatt (2001), 116-17.

⁸⁵² Fantham (1995); Ganiban (2007), 142-43. Also Delarue (2000), 356 n. 91. See also Feeney (1991), 383 on Virtus' models.

with the help of the Giants, Amphitryon asks him to restrain his insane impulse (*HF.* 973-75): *Infandos procul / auerte sensus; pectoris sani parum / magni tamen compesce dementem impetum*. Similarly, Creon asks his son to reconsider (*Theb.* 10.703-05): *ne frena animo permitte calenti, / da spatium tenuemque moram, male cuncta ministrat / impetus; hoc oro munus concede parenti*.

Finally, Menoeceus' character is quite similar to that of Seneca's Hercules. Just as Menoeceus asks for peace in exchange for his self-sacrifice (*Theb.* 10.762-73), so Hercules requests universal peace in exchange for his sacrifice of Lycus (*HF.* 920-39). More significantly, Menoeceus shares with Hercules his sense of entitlement. Ganiban rightly points out Menoeceus' arrogance in his demand for 'not just a place among the stars but a particularly special one' following his demise (*Theb.* 10.781-82): *spiritus olim / ante Iouem et summis apicem sibi poscit in astris*.⁸⁵³ 'Menoeceus now makes demands on Jupiter'.⁸⁵⁴ We may compare Seneca's mad Hercules, who threatens to assault the heavens if his celestial father will deny him apotheosis (*HF.* 958-73, especially lines 959-60: *petatur aether: astra promittit pater. / quid, si negaret?*).⁸⁵⁵

Why does Statius establish these parallels between his own Menoeceus and Seneca's Hercules? First of all, Statius' reworking of Seneca's Hercules serves to further complicate his portrait of Menoeceus. Just as Seneca's Hercules is an ambiguous character, so is Statius' Menoeceus. In addition to this, the tension between repetitious self-destruction and apotheosis present in Menoeceus' story continues Statius' negotiation of the two contrasting movements inherent in Senecan tragedy that fuel his epic. Statius once again rises to the challenge to move beyond Senecan stalemates. He does this not only by using Seneca's *Hercules* to avoid Theban repetitiveness, but also manages to transcend the paradoxes of Seneca's *Hercules Furens*. Seneca's tragedy ends in an uneasy balance between the desire for suicide and the prospect of deification. Menoeceus, however, takes his own life and is subsequently deified. In short, he manages to have his Herculean cake and eat it too.

⁸⁵³ Ganiban (2007), 142.

⁸⁵⁴ Ganiban (2007) *ibidem*.

⁸⁵⁵ Taisne (1994), 58 and Ripoll (1998), 366 n. 271 note a parallel with *Hercules Oetaeus* 1942-43 here: *Iam uirtus mihi / in astra et ipsos fecit ad superos iter*.

The apotheosis of Capaneus

This blurring of boundaries between apparently clearly distinguished realms is characteristic of the figure of Capaneus. When confronting the snake of Mars, Capaneus states that he will kill the snake even if it turns out to have the limbs of a Giant (*Theb.* 5.569-70: *non si consertum super haec mihi membra Giganta / subueheres*).⁸⁵⁶ Startlingly, Capaneus momentarily assumes a Jovian role here.⁸⁵⁷ This mixing up of the differences between Capaneus and Jupiter reappears shortly before Capaneus is decisively blasted by Jupiter. As Jupiter's storm, in anticipation of the giant lightning bolt, gathers, Capaneus exclaims (*Theb.* 10.925-26): *'his ... in Thebas, his iam decet ignibus uti, / hinc renouare faces lassamque accendere quercum*'.⁸⁵⁸ Earlier on Statius had compared the storm rising in response to Capaneus' assault to the Gigantomachy (*Theb.* 10.913-17):

*ipsa dato nondum caelestis regia signo
sponte⁸⁵⁹ tonat, coeunt ipsae sine flamine nubes
accurruntque imbres: Stygias rupisse catenas* 915
Iapetum aut uictam supera ad conuexa leuari
Inarimen Aetnamue putes.

Helen Lovatt argues that the simile 'works in two ways': more generally, it compares the gods' fear at Capaneus' assault to their fear at the real Gigantomachy; 'on a more immediate level, the parallel is between the disturbance in the heavens and the disturbance in the earth caused by the earthquake of the escaping Titans and the dislocation of mountains by giants. Jupiter's storms have the same effect on the cosmos as the efforts of his enemies.'⁸⁶⁰ In short, 'Statius problematises the polarities inherent in the Gigantomachic myth.'⁸⁶¹

In the chapter on *Hercules Furens*, we have seen that these polarities were already problematic in Seneca's tragedy. In his madness, Hercules tries to assault the

⁸⁵⁶ On the phrasing, see Soerink (2014b) *ad loc.*

⁸⁵⁷ Klinnert (1970), 67; Lovatt (2005), 133-34.

⁸⁵⁸ Lovatt (2005), 135.

⁸⁵⁹ On the emergence of the storm 'without Jupiter's conscious assent' see Lovatt (2005), 136.

⁸⁶⁰ Lovatt (2005), 135-36.

⁸⁶¹ Soerink (2014b) *ad Theb.* 5.565-74, concluding a discussion of Klinnert's and Lovatt's analysis of Capaneus as Giant, a discussion which also considers Capaneus' role as Hercules.

heavens one moment, only to defend it from Giants in the next. Just as Statius compares Capaneus' assault to that of the Aloidae (*Theb.* 10.849-52) after having mentioned the hero's disdain for earthly battles (*Theb.* 10.837), so Hercules' mountain-piling boasts (*HF.* 970-73) follow his statement that the heavens are the only cosmic realm left to conquer (*HF.* 955-57). But there is another Senecan motif, I would argue, that we are meant to recall specifically in Capaneus' final moments: the requests of four Senecan protagonists (Hercules, Medea, Hippolytus, Thyestes) to Jupiter to blast them with his thunderbolt (*HF.* 1202-05; *Med.* 531-37; *Phae.* 671-83; *Thy.* 1077-96), thereby asking him to confirm divine justice and order.⁸⁶²

At the height of his assault on Thebes and the heavens, Capaneus challenges Jupiter to hit him with all his might (*Theb.* 10.904-06):

*nunc age, nunc totis in me conitere flammis,
Iuppiter! An pauidas tonitru turbare puellas
fortior et soceri turrex exscindere Cadmi?*

905

The words of Capaneus echo those of Seneca's protagonists. Hercules begins his address to his father with the words *Nunc parte ab omni, genitor, iratus tona* (*HF.* 1202). Although *nunc* is the only word that both addresses have in common, there are plenty of similarities to be found. Of course, both addresses feature an imperative and a vocative. This may not be very remarkable in itself, but the parallel is strengthened by Capaneus' request to strike *totis flammis*, just as Hercules asks his father to thunder *parte ab omni*: both characters use the combination of adjective and noun in the ablative, and in both cases the adjective expresses a totality befitting Jupiter.⁸⁶³ Likewise, Thyestes asks Jupiter *omni parte ... intona* (*Thy.* 1080) and *nubibus totum horridis / conuolue mundum* (*Thy.* 1078-79) and Medea *toto ... caelo tona* (*Med.* 531).

The major difference between the situations in Seneca and that in Statius is that in Seneca's tragedies, Jupiter never answers the call for the thunderbolt. As we have seen in the Senecan chapters, mortals are left to sort out their own affairs following their unanswered cries for divine intervention. Statius is of course very much aware of this silence of the gods in Senecan tragedy. Responding to Senecan tragedy in an epic poem, he has the possibility to provide us with the divine perspective missing in

⁸⁶² For discussion of these passages and their interconnectedness see the commentators *ad locc.* Parallels between these passage in Seneca discussed in the following paragraph are derived from the commentaries on Senecan tragedy.

⁸⁶³ See Wills (1994) on more covert allusive techniques.

Seneca (with the exception of Juno's monologue in *Hercules Furens*).⁸⁶⁴ Although we can never be quite sure if the gods even hear the protagonist's prayer in Seneca's plays, we do know that Capaneus is heard (*Theb.* 10.898): *mediis Capaneus auditus in astris*. And although we of course know that the assault will be followed by Capaneus' demise, the gods themselves are decidedly less sure. Capaneus' assault leads to fear and strife among the gods, and Bacchus asks where Jupiter's thunderbolt is now (*Theb.* 10.888-89): *'nunc ubi saeua manus, meaque heu cunabula flammae? / fulmen, io ubi fulmen?'* Bacchus' question recalls the desperation of Seneca's protagonists – Hippolytus in particular⁸⁶⁵ – which is now transferred to one of the gods. Ganiban well discusses the wavering nature of the scene, arguing that 'Statius' narrative here oscillates between the fear of the heavenly gods and the serenity of Jupiter' and that it takes Jupiter a long time before he finally acts.⁸⁶⁶

Capaneus' assault on the heavens forms a test of the epic cosmos: not just in the form of a confrontation between an "Epicurean" view of the gods and a more "traditional" outlook, or an evaluation of Vergil's, Ovid's and Lucan's epic experiments with the gods, as Chaudhuri has shown in his chapter on Capaneus, but also between the Senecan tragic universe and that of the epic universe it had challenged. Statius carries Senecan tragedy into new territory, once again moving beyond Senecan paradoxes in the figure of Menoeceus and exploring typically Herculean problems in the figures of both Menoeceus and Capaneus. Finally, Statius confronts the tragic mortal perspective with the divine epic framework. Statius' epic rises to the occasion: the gods are not driven away by Capaneus, and 'this epic is not, after all, to be an adventure in a post-divine world'.⁸⁶⁷ Seneca's challenge is kept in check one last time.

⁸⁶⁴ Compare Chaudhuri (2014), 290 on *Theb.* 10.899-906 (Capaneus questioning the gods' ability to act): 'Capaneus had already answered these rhetorical questions for himself in the agon – either the gods are not interested enough in human affairs to respond to his provocations or they simply do not exist. For such egregious blasphemy to go unpunished would constitute serious evidence in favour of Capaneus' attitude to the gods. What Capaneus doesn't see, of course, is the view of heaven to which the reader has been granted privileged access.'

⁸⁶⁵ *Phae.* 671-74: *Magne regnator deum, / tam lentus audis scelera? tam lentus uides? / et quando saeua fulmen emittes manu, / si nunc serenum est?* Statius' *saeua manus* echoes Seneca's *saeua manu*.

⁸⁶⁶ Ganiban (2007), 147, pointing to *Theb.* 10.888-89, 902-06, 911, 917-20 as instances of divine uncertainty. See also Schubert (1984), 144-45. On Jupiter's superiority see also Vessey (1973), 222-23 and McNelis (2007), 144

⁸⁶⁷ Chaudhuri (2014), 291.

The duel and the flight of the gods

The eleventh book opens with a triumphant Jupiter. Jupiter restores order following Capaneus' assault (*Theb.* 11.5-6): *componit dextra uictor concussa plagarum / Iuppiter et uultu caelumque diemque reducit*. The language in line 6 is Vergilian, and particularly calls to mind Vergil's Jupiter, addressing Venus *uultu, quo caelum tempestatesque serenat* (*Aen.* 1.255).⁸⁶⁸ McNelis stresses the suggestion of 'Jupiter's authority' in these Statian lines, pointing out that the god's restoration of order here 'inverts the start of the storm in *Aeneid* 1', when *eripiunt subito nubes caelumque diemque* (*Aen.* 1.88).⁸⁶⁹ Jupiter's intervention results in the rout of the Argive army, who fear that they are now waging war against Jupiter himself (*Theb.* 11.23-26):

*nec tantum hostiles turmae aut ferrum mortale timetur:
omnibus ante oculos irae Iouis, omnibus ardent
arma metu galeaeque tonant, uisusque pauentes* 25
ipse sequi et profugis opponere Iuppiter ignes.

As Paola Venini's parallels make clear, this is an almost Silian moment in Statius' epic. The fear of the Argive host is similar to the fear lingering in the hearts of the Carthaginians following Jupiter's defense of the Capitol.⁸⁷⁰

But Jupiter's triumph is short-lived, and he will remove himself from the scene for good in less than a hundred lines (*Theb.* 11.119-35).⁸⁷¹ The flight of the gods is brought about by Tisiphone's decision to summon her sister Megaera from the Underworld to incite Eteocles and Polynices to meet each other in combat. Tisiphone informs her sister that she had been able to carry out Pluto's commands until now, but that her powers are now waning and that she needs Megaera's assistance and her fresh hellish energy to bring about the ultimate *nefas* (*Theb.* 11.57-112).⁸⁷² As has often

⁸⁶⁸ Venini (1970) *ad loc.*

⁸⁶⁹ McNelis (2007), 144 with n. 72 and reference to Venini (1970) *ad loc.*

⁸⁷⁰ Sil. 13.19-20: *terror adhuc inerat superum ac redolentia in armis / fulmina et ante oculos irati pugna Tonantis*. Venini (1970) *ad loc.* Venini also mentions a more puzzling parallel from a simile in which Hannibal's performance in the battle of Zama is compared to a Jovian storm, which instills such fear in the hearts of men that *praesens adstare uiritim / creditur intento percussis Iuppiter igne* (Sil. 17.477-78). For a discussion of the parallels between Silius and Statius and the chronological and interpretative problems involved, see recently e.g. Lovatt (2010) and Van der Keur (2015), xxxvii-xl on the parallels between Hannibal's assault on the Capitol and Capaneus' assault on the walls of Thebes. Van der Keur tends towards imitation of Statius by Silius.

⁸⁷¹ For the contrast see McNelis (2007), 143-44.

⁸⁷² On the degree of Tisiphone's subservience to Dis see Ganiban (2007), 149 with n. 122.

been pointed out, Tisiphone's monologue forms the third instalment in a crescendo of infernal energy gradually taking over the *Thebaid*, the other two being Oedipus' curse in the first book and Dis' angry speech in the eighth book.⁸⁷³ Tisiphone's monologue not only forms the climax of this crescendo, but it also sets in motion Statius' final and most ambitious response to Senecan tragedy, pushing his epic beyond *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae* one more time and finally exhausting the energy that Seneca's plays had provided.

To overcome her 'enervation and stagnation', Tisiphone not only has to summon her sister,⁸⁷⁴ she also has to summon the full force of Seneca's most extreme tragedy *Thyestes* one last time and go beyond it. The *furor* and *nefas* fuelling the *Thebaid* are always in danger of running out,⁸⁷⁵ and not even the *maior... amentia* (*Theb.* 10.830) of Capaneus' Herculean efforts could topple Jupiter. But what is to follow goes even beyond Capaneus, as the words opening Jupiter's announcement of his withdrawal make clear (*Theb.* 11.122-26):⁸⁷⁶

*uidimus armiferos, quo fas erat usque, furores,
caelicolae, licitasque acies, etsi impia bella
unus init aususque mea procumbere dextra.
nunc par infandum miserisque incognita terris* 125
pugna subest: auferte oculos!

One of the ways in which Tisiphone sets in motion this unprecedented *nefas* is by turning her speech to Megaera into a 'tragic prologue'⁸⁷⁷ outdoing that of *Thyestes*. This becomes particularly clear in the following lines (*Theb.* 11.97-100):

*non solitas acies nec Martia bella paramus,
sed fratrum (licet alma Fides Pietasque repugnent,
uincuntur), fratrum stringendi comminus enses.
grande opus!* 100

⁸⁷³ See e.g. Ganiban (2007), 41-43; Bessone (2011), 98-100.

⁸⁷⁴ On Tisiphone's enervation and the summoning of Megaera see Hershkovitz (1998a), 267-68.

⁸⁷⁵ Hershkovitz (1998a), 247-71.

⁸⁷⁶ On Capaneus' impious assault as 'erlaubt' see Klinnert (1970), 75-76. Bessone (2011), 96-98 – discussing the parallels between *Theb.* 10.827-31 and 11.76-100 – argues that Capaneus' acts are the last to be narrated with the assistance of the Muses. The battle between brothers goes beyond these acts and belongs to the Furies.

⁸⁷⁷ Bessone (2011), 98.

Line 99 contains a strong echo of the prologue to *Thyestes*, when the Fury urges on fraternal strife with the words *alterna uice / stringatur ensis* (*Thy.* 25-26).⁸⁷⁸ Tisiphone's dismissal of *Pietas* (*Theb.* 11.98) when calling on Megaera echoes Atreus' dismissal of *Pietas* as he asks to be filled with Megaera's frenzy (*Thy.* 249-54).⁸⁷⁹ Also, Tisiphone's call on her sister to help her create a greater *nefas* outdoes Atreus' call on Procne to assist him (compare *Theb.* 11.96 and *Thy.* 276-77 in particular).⁸⁸⁰ Statius fuses the allusions to *Thyestes* with an allusion to *Phoenissae*. Venini points out that the desire for unprecedented criminality is generally a Senecan motif, but among the countless occurrences of this motif she rightly highlights Oedipus' desire for his sons' all-surpassing criminality (*Phoen.* 338-39): *scelere defungi haut leui, / haut usitato tanta nobilitas potest*.⁸⁸¹ This crime, only a prediction or a wish in *Phoenissae*, will now finally be realized in the *Thebaid*.

But if Tisiphone's speech announces the crime anticipated in *Phoenissae*, it is followed by the Thyestean climax of the poem. Jupiter responds to the Furies' Thyestean infection of the upper world (*Theb.* 11.119-20: *illas ut summo uidit pater altus Olympo / incestare diem*)⁸⁸² by withdrawing himself and the other gods from the scene (*Theb.* 11.125-30):

<i>nunc par infandum miserisque incognita terris</i>	125
<i>pugna subest: auferte oculos! absentibus ausint</i>	
<i>ista deis lateantque Iouem; sat funera mensae</i>	
<i>Tantaleae et sontes uidisse Lycaonis aras</i>	
<i>et festina polo ducentes astra Mycenae.</i>	
<i>nunc etiam turbanda dies ...</i>	130

In withdrawing his gaze, Jupiter recalls earlier instances of mortals offending the heavens: Tantalus slaughtering Pelops, Lycaon killing his son (or a hostage) and finally, Atreus killing Thyestes' sons. All of these vicious kings also cooked the victims and tried to feed them to the gods (Tantalus and Lycaon) or, in the case of Atreus, drove the gods away when trying to feed them to his brother.

⁸⁷⁸ Frings (1992), 18-19.

⁸⁷⁹ Frings (1992), 25 and Bessone (2011), 99.

⁸⁸⁰ Frings (1992), 28 and 62.

⁸⁸¹ Venini (1970) *ad loc.*

⁸⁸² On this Thyestean infection see Franchet d'Espérey (1999), 228-31.

Jupiter's words form the culmination of the long sequence of allusions to Seneca's *Thyestes* that we have traced throughout the poem, a climax to the parallels that Statius has established between Mycenae and Thebes.⁸⁸³ Simultaneously, it forms the climax of Statius' constant questioning of the position of the traditional epic gods in his poem. As Ganiban has argued (continuing a popular argument in recent Statian studies) Jupiter's abdication of responsibility does in effect acknowledge the triumph of his rival and brother and is an admission of his ineffectiveness in controlling the cosmos.⁸⁸⁴ As I have discussed throughout these two chapters on the *Thebaid*, Statius' exploration and eventual dismissal of the epic gods is closely connected to his ongoing dialogue with Seneca. In this eleventh book, after much delay, the consequences of this dialogue with Seneca finally become clear, the first of them being the expulsion of the gods from Statius' epic.

Feeney, commenting on Statius' treatment of the divine machinery in his poem as part of the epic tradition, observes: 'In epic, the necessary humanity of divine characterization is always the fault-line on which the gods' claims to moral value are perched, ready for collapse. Statius follows Ovid in bringing so much pressure to bear at this point that the gods' claims do indeed become wreckage, but he goes beyond Ovid, and ends up in Lucan's camp, by eventually removing the gods from the scene altogether.'⁸⁸⁵ Indeed, it has often been observed that the words of Jupiter's declaration of withdrawal echo Lucan's indignant reproach of the supreme god allowing Pharsalus to happen (*BC*. 7.451-54):⁸⁸⁶

astra Thyestae

*intulit et subitis damnauit noctibus Argos:
tot similes fratrum gladios patrumque gerenti
Thessaliae dabit ille diem?*

In addition to this, we should remember that Statius began his ever-increasing undermining of Jupiter's authority with a divine council that reworked the problematic

⁸⁸³ Cf. Parkes (2005), 365.

⁸⁸⁴ Ganiban (2007), 176-85.

⁸⁸⁵ Feeney (1991), 358.

⁸⁸⁶ See particularly Venini (1970), 50-52 on the connections between Statius' flight of the gods and Lucan's *Bellum Ciuile*. Bessone (2011), 54-56 argues that Statius is trying to strike a careful balance between Vergil and Lucan, acknowledging – with Vergil – the problematic nature of the divine machinery on the one hand but not subscribing to Lucan's atheism.

Ovidian *concilium deorum* of *Metamorphoses* 1, called to put an end to the criminality of the god-challenging Lycaon. In this way, Statius had placed himself in a tradition of mythological poetry that questioned Jupiter's authority in an Iron Age-setting, a theme further explored and carried to new extremes in Seneca's *Thyestes*. With the flight of the *Thebaid*'s gods we have reached the endpoint of Statius' response to this theme, and at this final moment Ovid's Lycaon and Seneca's Tantalus and Atreus are recalled one last time as the supreme god that they had challenged vanishes from the epic.

What follows Jupiter's flight is a highly concentrated version of Statius' engagement with Seneca's "frontier plays" *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae* that I have traced throughout the past two chapters. This sequence begins when Tisiphone finds Polynices at the gate of the Argive camp, unsure whether he must escape the shame of the losses of his allies through flight or death (*Theb.* 11.136-39). But when Tisiphone strikes him three times with her whip, this uncertainty is transformed in a desire for death at each others' hands (*Theb.* 11.150-54), and Polynices tells Adrastus of his plan to leave the camp and fight, taking the blame for the Argives' deaths that have occurred up to this point (*Theb.* 11.155-92).

Polynices casts his resolve in typically Theban terms (*Theb.* 11.170-73):

non si atra parens miseraeque sorores 170
in media arma cadant, non si ipse ad bella ruenti
obstet et exstinctos galeae pater ingerat orbes,
deficiam.

As Venini observes, the image of Jocasta rushing *in media arma* is reminiscent of Seneca's picture of Jocasta in his *Phoenissae* (*Phoen.* 407: *stabo inter arma* and 457 *media se opponit parens*).⁸⁸⁷ Polynices foresees the traditional Theban scenario of a Jocastan intervention like the one that had occurred in Seneca and had almost occurred in *Thebaid* 7, but he will have none of it now. Fascinating too is his mention of Oedipus, possibly standing in the way of war. This is a reversal of the father's role in Seneca's *Phoenissae*, and indeed Statius' reception of this play, in which Oedipus is opposed to Jocasta. Indeed, the phrase *galeae ... ingerat orbes* recalls *fratrem huic, fratrem ingerit illi, / aut utrique patrem* (*Theb.* 7.467-68), lines from the seventh book in which Tisiphone – in a fusion of *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae* – encourages war between brothers by thrusting the father in their midst. We have already seen that

⁸⁸⁷ Venini (1970) *ad loc.*

Jocasta's intervention in the seventh book was doomed to fail because of her status as the "mother of crime". Similarly, Oedipus thrusting his eyes at his sons would just as likely incite them to war as keep them from it. Polynices' familiarity with the traditional Theban barriers, inspired by the Furies, suggests that these barriers can indeed be easily overcome.

The first barrier to be removed is of course Adrastus. The old king threatens to talk Polynices out of facing his brother in mortal combat (*Theb.* 11.196-97), but Megaera urges Polynices on (*Theb.* 11.197-203). In the meantime, Eteocles is offering thanks to Jupiter for smiting Capaneus with his thunderbolt (*Theb.* 11.205-06). However, Statius emphasizes that these prayers are in vain (*Theb.* 11.206: *nequiquam*) and that Tisiphone changes the direction of the prayers, turning them from Heaven to Hell (*Theb.* 11.208-09: ... *mala ... Tisiphone ... / ... inferno praeuertit uota Tonanti*).⁸⁸⁸ Fittingly then, Eteocles' prayer to Jupiter is followed by evil omens portending his death in battle soon to follow (*Theb.* 11.226-30).⁸⁸⁹ Following these omens, a messenger arrives, informing Eteocles of Polynices' approach (*Theb.* 11.239-49). Eteocles' attendants try to talk him out of confronting his brother (*Theb.* 11.257-62) – Creon, still embittered because of Menoeceus' death, is the only one encouraging it (*Theb.* 11.262-97). Eteocles suspects that there is a desire for the throne hidden underneath the surface of Creon's words but decides to go through with the duel anyway (*Theb.* 11.298-314).

This final moment of Eteoclean suspicion is derived from the Theban tradition, as Venini observes: it echoes the suspicions of Sophocles' and Seneca's Oedipuses that Creon is plotting against them with Tiresias.⁸⁹⁰ Indeed, Statius particularly touches on the final moment of Creon's and Oedipus's conversation about power in Seneca's tragedy. When Oedipus has had enough of Creon's protestations, he orders his servants to lock his uncle up, while he himself will return to the palace (*Oed.* 707-08): *Seruare sontem saxeo inclusum specu. / ipse ad penates regios referam gradum*. Statius' Eteocles is about to kill Creon – *nec mihi difficilis praesens uindicta* (*Theb.* 11.305), and see also *Theb.* 11.309: *ensem, quem iam dabat ira, repressit* – but has to go to war first (*Theb.* 11.305-06): *sed arma, / arma prius, famuli! coeant in proelia fratres*. Eteocles promises that he will punish Creon after his victorious return (*Theb.* 11.308): *uictori mihi cuncta lues*. Just as Oedipus leaves the stage following the arrest

⁸⁸⁸ Cf. Feeney (1991), 352. See also McNelis (2007), 150.

⁸⁸⁹ Cf. Venini (1970) *ad locc.*, with Lucanian and Silian parallels.

⁸⁹⁰ Venini (1970) *ad Theb.* 11.298. See also Hulls (2014) on Greek intertexts in *Thebaid* 11 and 12.

– presumably a prelude to a more definitive punishment – Eteocles departs when on the verge of silencing Creon once and for all. The only thing standing in Eteocles’ way is his epic destiny of fraternal warfare (*Theb.* 11.305–06). Of course, *armare in proelia fratres* is precisely what Allecto was best at (*Aen.* 7.335)⁸⁹¹ and what is about to be horribly realized by Statius’ Furies. Eteocles goes to his destiny behaving only too much like his father, just as his father had predicted (*Theb.* 1.87: *mea pignora nosces*).

It is at this moment that Jocasta intervenes one last time, in a repetition of her intervention in the seventh book: Statius has taken Jocasta’s supervision of the parley between the brothers in Euripides and Seneca and split it between Polynices (*Thebaid* 7) and Eteocles (*Thebaid* 11).⁸⁹² Moreover, Statius has gone beyond the intervention in book 7 by engineering a double intervention in this book: Jocasta tries to placate Eteocles, Antigone Polynices.⁸⁹³ The stubborn Eteocles is allotted to Jocasta, a much more authoritative character within the Theban royal family, whereas the more malleable Polynices is allotted to his sister Antigone.⁸⁹⁴ Another form of Statian *Steigerung* in these scenes can be found in the nature of Jocasta’s appeal, which is far more physical, as Neil Bernstein observes: Jocasta frequently refers to her maternal body, and literally challenges Eteocles to trample his mother’s womb (*Theb.* 11.339–41).⁸⁹⁵

But Statius’ split-up of the second intervention between Jocasta and Antigone is not just a *Steigerung* of his own intervention scene in *Thebaid* 7 but takes place in direct response to Seneca’s Jocasta scene. Just like the intervention in book 7, the intervention in book 11 is heavily indebted to Seneca’s scene, down to many detailed verbal parallels.⁸⁹⁶ Statius has split Jocasta’s two modes of argumentation – commands and supplication – between Jocasta and Antigone.⁸⁹⁷ Another way in which Statius repeats patterns from the seventh book is by again raising the possibility that the terrible *nefas* awaiting his readers – this time not the war, but the actual duel between brothers – might be called off.⁸⁹⁸ And once again, he is doing so in response to the unfinished nature of Seneca’s *Phoenissae*, as McNelis has observed: ‘Particularly

⁸⁹¹ Cf. Venini (1970) *ad loc.*

⁸⁹² Vessey (1973), 270–77.

⁸⁹³ See Frings (1992), 122–24 on Statius’ *Steigerung* here.

⁸⁹⁴ Frings (1992), 124.

⁸⁹⁵ Bernstein (2008), 90–91.

⁸⁹⁶ See Legras (1905), 126–28 and Venini (1970) *ad locc.*

⁸⁹⁷ Legras (1905), 127.

⁸⁹⁸ Vessey (1973), 274.

in light of the fact that the extant version of Seneca's *Phoenissae* does not relate the conclusive battle between the brothers, Polynices' hesitation raises the possibility that the war will be put off yet again.⁸⁹⁹

Of course, as in book 7 we should not forget that the intervention of Jocasta, the mother of Theban crime and someone presented as frenzied and Fury-like herself (*Theb.* 11.318-20),⁹⁰⁰ is morally ambiguous.⁹⁰¹ Indeed, even Antigone herself has been “accused” of channeling the characteristic Theban madness.⁹⁰² Nevertheless, Statius once again tentatively leaves open the possibility that Jocasta’s and Antigone’s intervention might succeed. Just as the poem’s Thyestean efforts to let Theban criminality have its way are intensified, so are its Phoenissan attempts at delay. Statius reinforces this structural parallel between the seventh and the eleventh book in more specific details as well. For example, he emphasizes tears as a parallel emotional response from the Argive soldiers (*Theb.* 7.527-29) and Polynices (*Theb.* 11.382-87) to Jocasta’s interventions, breaking their resolve to go on with the war.⁹⁰³

But yet again, the Furies manage to overcome Jocasta's and Antigone's resistance, thrusting Eteocles out of the gate (*Theb.* 11.387-89) and urging both brothers on (*Theb.* 11.403-04). Simultaneously, Dis asserts his control over the upper world. He thunders from below, putting the gods of war to flight (*Theb.* 11.410-12): *ter nigris avidus regnator ab oris / intonuit terque ima soli concussit, et ipsi / armorum fugere dei*. In addition to this, Dis allows the Theban shades to leave the Underworld to witness the brothers' crime (*Theb.* 11.420-23):

ipse quoque Ogygios monstra ad gentilia manes 420
Tartareus rector porta iubet ire reclusa.
montibus insidunt patriis tristisque corona
infecere diem et uinci sua crimina gaudent.

Both events serve to emphasize the fact that Jupiter's authority has been

⁸⁹⁹ McNelis (2007), 146.

⁹⁰⁰ In these lines Jocasta is compared to Agaue, a Stasian debt to Sen. *Oed.* 1004-07 and *Phoen.* 363-67: cf. Venini (1970) *ad loc.*

⁹⁰¹ See e.g. Henderson (1994); Hershkowitz (1998a), 38, 280-82 and 291-92; and Ganiban (2007), 159-65.

⁹⁰² Hershkowitz (1998a), 290-92; Ganiban (2007), 166-67; McAuley (2016), 339-41.

⁹⁰³ Franchet d'Espérey (1999), 302-03. For further parallels see Venini (1970) *ad locc.*

decisively toppled in favor of the Underworld.⁹⁰⁴ The point with which Statius concludes his treatment of the second event – *uinci sua crimina gaudent* – is very Senecan, reminding readers of characters in his tragedies who surpass their parents and grandparents in criminality.⁹⁰⁵ Moreover, the words *infecere diem* form a continuation of Statius' use of the Senecan motif of infernal pollution.⁹⁰⁶ In short the entire scene forms a quintessentially Senecan moment. Or perhaps, more specifically, yet another Senecan prologue to the approaching climactic *nefas*.

This infernal scene is followed by two final attempts to avert the duel between both brothers, first by Adrastus (*Theb.* 11.424-46) – playing his Latinus-role of miserable *socer* one last time⁹⁰⁷ – and then by Pietas (*Theb.* 11.457-96). Pietas decides to undertake one last attempt to stop the duel, even though she knows it will be in vain (*Theb.* 11.471).⁹⁰⁸ Disguised as a soldier she encourages bystanders to intervene (*Theb.* 11.477-81) but is repelled by Tisiphone (*Theb.* 11.482-96).

Statius' Pietas is modeled on Ovid's Astraea, who fled the earth at the sight of the criminality of the Iron Age (*Met.* 1.149-50).⁹⁰⁹ Like Ovid's Astraea, Statius' Pietas is offended by the criminality of man – but also by that of the gods. She is introduced as *terris coetuque offensa deorum* (*Theb.* 11.457) and *saeuum ... Iouem Parcasque nocentes / uociferans* (*Theb.* 11.462-63).⁹¹⁰ The opposition between Pietas and Fury at the moment of Pietas' expulsion is based on the opposition between Pietas and the Furies in Senecan tragedy, particularly that in *Thyestes* when Atreus banishes Pietas from his palace (*Thy.* 249-52):⁹¹¹

*Excede, Pietas, si modo in nostra domo
umquam fuisti. dira Furiarum cohors
discorsque Erinys ueniat et geminas faces*

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⁹⁰⁴ On the dominion of Dis and the forces of Hell in these scenes see Schetter (1960), 29 and 115; Feeney (1991), 352 and 356; Dominik (1994), 40; Ganiban (2007), 180-85; McNelis (2007), 150.

⁹⁰⁵ Observed by Schetter (1960), 26. See also Venini (1970) *ad Theb.* 11.423 and Bernstein (2004), 77.

⁹⁰⁶ Franchet d'Espérey (1999), 230-31.

⁹⁰⁷ On Statius' engagement with the figure of Latinus in the *Aeneid* in this scene see Ganiban (2007), 167-70. See also Lovatt (2005), 301-05 on Adrastus' futile attempts to stop the Furies.

⁹⁰⁸ On the futility of Pietas' intervention see Ganiban (2007), 172.

⁹⁰⁹ Franchet d'Espérey (1999), 365 with n. 125. On Statius and the Iron Age see also Soerink (2014b), 57-67.

⁹¹⁰ On Statius' emulation of his predecessors in this respect see Franchet d'Espérey (1999), 365-66.

⁹¹¹ Cf. Venini (1970) *ad loc.*; Frings (1992), 25-26; and in addition to the references to the work of Franchet d'Espérey see also Ripoll (1998), 306-07 (also on the more general tradition).

Megaera quatiens[.]

In addition to this it should be observed that *Pietas*' motivation for intervening is phrased in terms that recall *Jocasta's* and *Antigone's* intervention (*Theb.* 11.460-62): *fraternaue bella, / ceu soror infelix pugnatum aut anxia mater, / deflebat*.⁹¹² One last time then, at this climactic moment in Statius' poem,⁹¹³ the poet fuses Seneca's two climactic tragedies.

Once *Pietas* is expelled, the *nefas* of fratricide can finally take place. It is at this point that the *Furies* have become superfluous and the brothers' own frenzy suffices, as has often been observed (*Theb.* 11.537-38): *nec iam opus est Furiis; tantum mirantur et astant / laudantes, hominumque dolent plus posse furores*. The infernal energy that had fuelled Statius' poem has achieved its purpose and, consequently, can be dismissed.⁹¹⁴ The brothers' mutual self-annihilation⁹¹⁵ forms a fittingly Theban climax to Statius' poem, as Ganiban has argued. Polynices presents his crime as the fulfillment of his father's wishes at the beginning of the poem (*Theb.* 11.503-06); he is described as *caecus* (*Theb.* 11.517) in imitation of his father; and in keeping with the sexual nature of Theban criminality and violence, Polynices stabs his brother in the groin (*Theb.* 11.540-43).⁹¹⁶ When Eteocles is struck by Polynices, he too in his inability to distinguish between death and life (*Theb.* 11.558: *graves ante oculos atque ora natantia leto*) resembles his father.⁹¹⁷ But even in his treatment of the duel Statius combines this Theban thread of his poem with its Thyestean thread. When Polynices has mortally wounded his brother, he urges the bystanders to bring sceptre and crown before Eteocles dies, so that he will see his brother triumphant (*Theb.* 11.559-60): *huc aliquis propere sceptrum atque insigne comarum, / dum uidet*. This echoes the desire of Seneca's *Medea* (*Med.* 992-94) and *Atreus* (*Thy.* 895: *quod sat est, uideat pater*) that

⁹¹² See Vessey (1973), 276-77.

⁹¹³ Ganiban (2007), 174-75.

⁹¹⁴ For discussion of the passage see e.g. Feeney (1991), 353; Hardie (1993), 44 and 80; Henderson (1994), 27; Hershkowitz (1998a), 268; Franchet d'Espérey (1999), 241-42. Ganiban (2007), 200 stresses the *Furies*' continuing importance.

⁹¹⁵ On doubles in the *Thebaid* and their tendency to dissolve into each other see Korneeva (2011). On the dissolution of boundaries between the two brothers in the duel see Ganiban (2007), 188-90 with reference to Henderson (1991), 53-54 in n. 44. The confusion between the two combatants also takes place on the intertextual level in Statius' allusions to the duel in Euripides' *Phoinissai* and to the duel between Aeneas and Turnus in *Aeneid* 12 (Ganiban (2007), 190-95).

⁹¹⁶ Ganiban (2007), 185-88.

⁹¹⁷ Ganiban (2007), 188 n. 42.

their victim witness the tragedy's climactic crime.⁹¹⁸ Having seemingly accomplished the ultimate Theban crime of fratricide, Polynices takes on the attributes of an Atreus. But his victory is short-lived: Eteocles has deceived Polynices and being not yet quite dead he in turn delivers a fatal blow to his brother (*Theb.* 11.562-73).

Statius on Senecan closure

With the death of Eteocles and Polynices, Statius' poem of *nefas* has reached its narrative *telos*. Statius' Senecan narrative too seems to have run its course. Of course, the two are strongly connected: the fratricidal duel between brothers is the precise point where tragic *nefas* (fratricide) is fused with something quintessentially epic: the climactic duel between two heroes.⁹¹⁹ However, the death of the brothers is of course not quite the end, and Stadian scholarship has devoted much attention to the precise nature of the poem's ending. Often, these discussions of the poem's ending involve an assessment of the figure of Theseus and the role of Clementia in the final book, resulting in a positive, negative or somewhere-in-between interpretation of the poem as a whole in light of its ending.⁹²⁰ It is not my aim in this final section of my dissertation to reevaluate this discussion on the poem's ending once again. Rather, I would like to focus here on Statius' response to the final problem presented by the Senecan tragic corpus: that of Senecan closure. Statius' response to Senecan tragedy as a challenge to epic may be more or less over by the time the duel is over. But as we have seen throughout the past two chapters, Statius combines this reflection on Seneca's challenge to epic with a sustained response to the problems and paradoxes inherent in Senecan tragedy itself. Just as with the great Latin epic poems, one of the central tensions governing Seneca's tragic corpus is that between openness and closure, and it is to these tensions that Statius responds in the final parts of his epic.⁹²¹

Bessone has argued that Statius' engagement with tragedy in his *Thebaid* can be divided into two unequal parts. The first part runs from the first book up to and including most of the eleventh book and is concerned with the *nefas* that is the war

⁹¹⁸ Bernstein (2004), 73.

⁹¹⁹ Cf. Bessone (2011), 75-79 with references.

⁹²⁰ For an overview of the discussion see Ganiban (2007), 5 with notes; for the most comprehensive recent discussion and evaluation of previous positions in the debate see Bessone (2011) *passim*. On problems of closure in the *Thebaid* see also Reitz (2012) with further references.

⁹²¹ The following paragraphs, on the conclusion of Statius' Senecan plot, necessarily look back to the introduction to Statius' engagement with tragedy in general and Seneca in particular.

of the Seven Against Thebes. The primary tragic models in terms of Theban plot for this part of the poem are Aeschylus' *Septem*, Euripides' *Phoinissai* and Seneca's *Phoenissae*. The duel itself is followed by the poet's dismissal and *damnatio memoriae* of the brothers' shades and – simultaneously – his entire epic of *nefas* (*Theb.* 11.574–79) up until that point.⁹²² Following this dismissal, Statius moves his poem into a quite different direction. The second part of the epic, comprised of the twelfth book and the end of the eleventh, responds primarily to Euripides' *Supplices*. Both parts differ markedly in tone: the dark story of *nefas* that preoccupies the first part gives way to a more nuanced analysis of the nature of kingship through a comparison between the figures of Theseus and Creon, the cities of Athens and Thebes.⁹²³

Both in terms of plot and in terms of theme, then, by the time the duel is over Senecan tragedy has played its part. As Jean-Michel Hulls observes, '[t]hose texts closest to Statius' poetry in the chronological sense tend to shout loudest when we read that poetry',⁹²⁴ but it is also true that Greek tragedy is a major influence on the last few books of Statius' epic – the eleventh and twelfth one in particular.⁹²⁵ Nevertheless, Statius' engagement with Senecan tragedy is not completely over yet. This first becomes evident immediately following Statius' farewell to the shades of Eteocles and Polynices, as the *genitor sceleris* (*Theb.* 11.580), Oedipus, emerges out of his characteristic darkness (*Theb.* 11.580–81: *profundis / erupit tenebris*),⁹²⁶ carrying his *mortem imperfectam* (*Theb.* 11.582) out into the open. Through his emphasis on Oedipus' imperfect death here, Statius returns full-circle to his Senecan portrayal of Oedipus at the beginning of his epic.⁹²⁷ It is with Oedipus that I will conclude.⁹²⁸

Oedipus is supported by Antigone (*Theb.* 11.586), a scene familiar to Statius' readers from both Sophocles' *Oedipus Coloneus* and Seneca's *Phoenissae*.⁹²⁹ As the scene begins, Oedipus expresses a desire to be guided to his sons (*Theb.* 11.594–95), which has its source in Euripides' *Phoinissai* (*Phoin.* 1697–1701).⁹³⁰ Statius' treatment

⁹²² For discussion of this passage and the art of forgetting in Statius' *Thebaid* see Bessone (2011), 75–101 and Walter (2014), 112–239.

⁹²³ See Bessone (2011), 19–22 for an overview.

⁹²⁴ Hulls (2014), 194.

⁹²⁵ Heslin (2008) and Hulls (2014).

⁹²⁶ Recalling *Theb.* 1.49–51 and Euripides' designation of Oedipus' abode (*Phoin.* 336 and 1541), as Venini (1970) observes *ad loc.*

⁹²⁷ Cf Venini (1970) *ad loc.*

⁹²⁸ For an alternative Senecan ending, focusing on Theseus and Seneca's *Phaedra*, see Sacerdoti (2008).

⁹²⁹ Venini (1970) *ad loc.*

⁹³⁰ Venini (1970) *ad loc.*

of the relationship between Oedipus and Antigone, on the other hand, has much in common with that in Seneca's *Phoenissae*. Antigone hesitates to guide her father to her brothers' corpses (*Theb.* 11.595-96): *cunctatur nescia uirgo / quid paret*. After Oedipus has wept for his sons, he tries to find a sword to kill himself – but Antigone has carefully hidden away any weapons her father might use (*Theb.* 11.627-30): *talia dequestus paulatim insumpserat iras / mortis, et occulte telum, ne nata uetaret, / quaerebat: sed cauta manu subtraxerat enses / Antigone*. Although the motif of Oedipus' attempts at suicide can also be found in Euripides (*Phoin.* 327-36), surely Statius' most important source here is Seneca's *Phoenissae*, in which most of the first half of the play revolves around Oedipus' desire for death and Antigone's attempts to keep him alive.⁹³¹ Just when his sons have committed the greatest Theban crime possible, long-anticipated but never realized in Senecan tragedy, and Seneca's Theban tragedies have been guided to their logical conclusion, the ever-repetitive Oedipus threatens to start all over again.

However, Statius frustrates these Phoenissan expectations by suddenly changing the scene to the moment of Jocasta's suicide. The words *Olim autem ...* (*Theb.* 11.634) emphasize this sudden shift to a moment back in time ('Some time earlier', in Shackleton Bailey's translation). Through this sudden scene shift, Jocasta and Oedipus are once again juxtaposed in Statius' epic, but only very briefly: Statius narrates how, prior to the duel, Jocasta had committed suicide (*Theb.* 11.634-47). Statius' Jocasta commits suicide with a sword, just as Euripides' Jocasta in *Phoinissai* and Seneca's Jocasta in *Oedipus*: Seneca is the author Statius follows most closely in this scene.⁹³² With Jocasta's death, Statius' response to the contrast between Oedipus and Jocasta in Seneca's *Phoenissae* reaches its conclusion with the death of the mother who could not stop the war between brothers. Incidentally, the scene continues – or concludes – Statius' portrayal of Thebes as an anti-Rome in the mould of Carthage through allusions to Dido's suicide.⁹³³

The father remains. Not just Oedipus, but also that other father: Creon, to whom the fatal throne of Thebes passes upon Polynices' and Eteocles' death (*Theb.* 11.648-57):

⁹³¹ On the parallels with both plays for this theme, see Venini (1970) *ad loc.*

⁹³² On Statius' use of his predecessors in this scene, see Venini (1970) *ad locc.* and Smolenaars (2008), 225-33.

⁹³³ For the parallels see Smolenaars (2008), 233. See also Dietrich (2015), 314-21 for a different take on Jocasta's suicide.

Et iam laeta ducum spes elusisse duorum
res Amphionias alio sceptrumque maligna
transtulerat Fortuna manu, Cadmique tenebat 650
iura Creon. miser heu bellorum terminus! illi
pugnant fratres. hunc et Mavortia clarant
semina, et impensus patriae paulo ante Menoeceus
conciliat populis. scandit fatale tyrannis
flebilis Aoniae solium: pro blanda potestas
et sceptri malesuadus amor! numquamne priorum 655
haerebunt documenta nouis? iuuat ecce nefasto
stare loco regimenque manu tractare cruentum.

The typically Theban threat of repetition without salvation is predominant in these lines, as well as in the confrontation between Oedipus and Creon (*Theb.* 11.665-756) that follows it. Statius' condemnation of Creon's all too Theban kingship is all the more poignant in light of his earlier admonition to kings *not* to follow in the criminal footsteps of Eteocles and Polynices (*Theb.* 11.579).⁹³⁴ Moreover, in another Theban repetition, Creon will shortly be cursed by Oedipus (*Theb.* 11.701-05), and only Theseus will be able to provide some sort of antidote to Theban curses and kingship.⁹³⁵

However, in the confrontation between Oedipus and Creon we already find some preliminary attempts to bring closure to what remains of the Theban plot following the duel – and particularly to the Theban plot as Statius had inherited it from Seneca. I have already discussed how the confrontation between Eteocles and Creon earlier in Statius' eleventh book echoes that between Oedipus and Creon in Seneca's *Oedipus* and in other authors. Statius returns to this tradition when Creon approaches Oedipus.⁹³⁶ Statius describes how Creon reluctantly approaches Oedipus at first (*Theb.* 11.666-67): *Oedipodem extimuit paulum, seseque minorem / confessus tacite, promptamque coercuit iram*). Apparently, Creon is still impressed by Oedipus' angry attempts to punish him in Senecan and Sophoclean tragedy. But then he goes on to address him *audentius* (*Theb.* 11.668), with the following words (*Theb.* 11.669-72):

procul ... abi, uictoribus omen

⁹³⁴ Bessone (2011), 150-51. On the literary tradition of the *fatale tyrannis* / *flebilis Aoniae solium* see Venini (1970) *ad loc.*

⁹³⁵ Bessone (2011), 56-57.

⁹³⁶ Venini (1970) *ad loc.*

inuism, et Furiis auerte ac moenia lustra 670
discessu Thebana tuo. spes longa peracta est:
uade, iacent nati. quae iam tibi uota supersunt?

Creon's lines introduce a quintessentially Theban theme: the discussion on the fate and final resting place of Oedipus, that has its roots in Greek tragedy primarily.⁹³⁷ Statius also adds a Senecan layer to the scene. Creon usurps a task that Oedipus had fulfilled personally in Seneca's *Oedipus*: banishing himself in order to cleanse the city (*Oed.* 1047-61).⁹³⁸ It is no surprise then, that Oedipus should try to reclaim this role in his frenzied reply to Creon (*Theb.* 11.695-97): *fugio excedoque nefandis / sedibus; an refert quo funera longa measque / transportem tenebras?*⁹³⁹ Antigone begs Creon not to banish her father (*Theb.* 11.708-39). As Peter Heslin observes, Creon and Antigone reach a compromise: Oedipus is banished from the city, but only by returning him to the firmly Theban Mount Cithaeron (*Theb.* 11.752): *habeant te lustra tuusque Cithaeron*.⁹⁴⁰ Oedipus is back where he belongs, at the *meus Cithaeron* of *Phoenissae* (*Phoen.* 13).⁹⁴¹ In characteristically open-ended Theban fashion, Statius brings closure to Oedipus' story by returning him to where he began.⁹⁴²

⁹³⁷ For discussion of Statius' reworking of Sophocles and Euripides in this scene, see Heslin (2008), 112-14.

⁹³⁸ Venini (1970) *ad Theb.* 11.670 notes the common emphasis on Oedipus' pollution.

⁹³⁹ See Hulls (2014), 201-05 for a discussion of role-reversal between Oedipus and Creon at the end of the eleventh book in response to the Sophoclean tradition on Oedipus' exile.

⁹⁴⁰ Heslin (2008), 113.

⁹⁴¹ Heslin (2008), 113 with n. 5 with reference to Frank (1995) *ad loc.*, who observes that the Senecan phrase is derived from Sophocles' *OT.* 1452.

⁹⁴² Compare Hardie (1997b), 152 on the open-ended nature of this exile, characteristic of Oedipus.

CONCLUSION

The rest is silence. Following the events in the twelfth book, Statius concludes the narrative of the *Thebaid* by proclaiming that he stops speaking and that even a resurgence of *furor* would be insufficient to tell of the mourning of the Argive women (*Theb.* 12.796-809). With this final gesture towards perhaps *the* driving force of both epic and tragedy, to the *furor* that ties both genres together, Statius brings to an end a generic experiment that had begun more than a century ago in Vergil's *Aeneid*.

Of course, even the *Thebaid* is not quite the end. Statius would renew epic as he began his *Achilleid*, which featured an intertextual response to Seneca's tragedy *Troades*. But this enterprise was terminated by 'the biological fact' of Statius' death.⁹⁴³ Parallel to Statius, and perhaps continuing on after him, runs Silius Italicus' epic project, which incorporates Senecan tragedy in a quite different, less direct way.⁹⁴⁴

But all things considered, something does end with Statius' *Thebaid* – or at least, Statius' allusive narrative suggests this to his readers. We have seen that the history of the genres of epic and tragedy in early Imperial poetry can be read as a continuous story, to which each poet adds one or more chapters. After Ennius' prologue, the story properly begins with Vergil's *Aeneid*, who narrates a quintessentially epic story of city founding, warfare and *nostos*, but complicates this story with quintessentially tragic elements: cities succumbing to internal strife; mighty queens and warriors succumbing to infernal madness, dragging their cities along with them. The epic narrative is triumphant in the end, but the fact remains that Vergil has incorporated a problematic element into the genre. As should be familiar to readers of Latin epic, it is precisely this problematic element that provides the source for the continuous renewal of the epic genre, as Vergil's successors continue to ponder the allusive and generic questions he had posed.⁹⁴⁵ The story is continued by Ovid, who takes a more indirect approach, but in this way manages to further complicate Vergil's problems, suggesting that tragedy may be more difficult for the epicist to keep in check than Vergil had made it seem.

It would take a proper tragedian to reveal the true consequences of Vergil's experiment. During the course of Seneca's tragic oeuvre, the forces of tragedy gradually burst out of their bounds, assaulting the epic skies and inverting the epic plot: history is reversed and the gods are expelled. Seneca takes the tragic anti-cities and anti-heroes and reveals that the story had been about them all along. Starting with the slow and careful, almost Ovidian deconstructions taking place in *Oedipus* and *Hercules Furens*,

⁹⁴³ For the phrasing compare Hardie/Barchiesi (2010), 63.

⁹⁴⁴ I hope to discuss Silius' response to Seneca in a future project with Michiel van der Keur.

⁹⁴⁵ Compare more generally – of course – Hardie (1993).

Seneca concludes his tragic career with the devastating double-punch of *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae*, two plays that should be read as Seneca's final word on the matter. But – as the never-ending cycle of Tantalid crime in *Thyestes* and the civil war that emerges from Oedipus' seemingly inert and ever-regressive state make clear – even these plays seem to find new sources of energy.

Notwithstanding the importance of Lucan and Valerius, it is Statius who formulates the most comprehensive epic response to Seneca's challenge in his *Thebaid*. Statius recognizes that Seneca's tragic oeuvre has in its turn become a kind of master text – comparable in size to a small epic – that forms part of the epic tradition and can in its turn be subjected to the same uncompromising scrutiny that it had itself applied to Vergil and Ovid. With a self-awareness characteristic of the Flavian age, Statius stages the incorporation of Senecan tragedy into an epic cosmos that has suffered the blows of Seneca's very experiment. The gods are tired, the Furies dominant, and the heroes are hellbent for self-destruction or aim to assault the heavens. Being a true epic successor, Statius reveals the problems and paradoxes inherent in Seneca's oeuvre, the competing forces of teleological regression and criminal expansion, and uses them to drive his epic forward to its inevitable conclusion: the self-destruction of the protagonists and the expulsion of the gods. It is at this point that – minor Senecan allusions and Theban regressive dynamics aside – the Senecan forces begin to retreat while Statius' epic still continues, now focusing on other intertexts.⁹⁴⁶ In the *Thebaid's* final moments, both Latin epic as we knew it and the Senecan tragic experiment are something that the poet tries to move beyond.⁹⁴⁷ It is to Statius' credit as an epic poet that he confronts Seneca's challenge head-on and shows that the epic genre can still continue after Seneca. But it is a testament to Seneca's skill as a reader of epic poetry that Statius has had to dispense with almost all of Vergil's epic machinery before he finally *could* move on beyond Seneca.

⁹⁴⁶ The basic outline of this intertextual narrative is – as the reader will remember – derived from Bessone (2011).

⁹⁴⁷ Compare Augoustakis (2015).

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NEDERLANDSE SAMENVATTING

DE UITDAGING VAN SENECA

Genre en intertekstualiteit in de tragedies van Seneca en
Statius' *Thebais*

In dit proefschrift onderzoek ik de relatie tussen de genres epos en tragedie in de Latijnse poëzie van de vroege keizertijd (27 v.d.j.-96 n.d.j.). Ik betoog dat epos en tragedie in de Latijnse literatuur altijd nauw met elkaar verbonden zijn geweest. De dichters van epen en tragedies waren zich daar sterk van bewust en gebruikten deze verbondenheid van epos en tragedie om iets te zeggen over hun eigen poëzie en die van hun voorgangers. Meer specifiek onderzoek ik hoe de tragediedichter Seneca (midden eerste eeuw) reageert op de spanning tussen epos en tragedie in de epen van zijn twee belangrijkste voorgangers: de *Aeneis* van Vergilius en de *Metamorphosen* van Ovidius (geschreven rond het begin van onze jaartelling). Vervolgens onderzoek ik hoe de epische dichter Statius (eind eerste eeuw) in zijn epos de *Thebais* reageert op deze dialoog tussen epos en tragedie in het werk van Seneca. Ik betoog dat het werk van Seneca de richting waarin het Latijnse epos zich ontwikkelde beslissend beïnvloed heeft, omdat het bepaalde problemen en spanningen die aanwezig zijn in het Latijnse epos onderzoekt en op de spits drijft. Statius was zich hiervan bewust. Hij incorporeerde Seneca's tragedies in zijn epos en reageerde op zijn beurt op de problemen en spanningen die aanwezig zijn in Seneca's tragedies, terwijl hij de uitdaging die Seneca's tragedies aan een episch dichter stellen serieus nam.

Inleiding

In de inleiding zet ik mijn wetenschappelijke methode uiteen en geef ik een kort overzicht van de verhouding tussen epos en tragedie in de *Aeneis* en *Metamorphosen*. Ook maak ik duidelijk welke positie ik inneem in de discussie over de relatieve datering van Seneca's tragedies en leg ik uit hoe deze positie zich verhoudt tot de manier waarop ik Seneca's tragedies interpreteer.

Deze dissertatie bevindt zich op het snijvlak van twee belangrijke thema's in het onderzoek naar de Latijnse literatuur van de afgelopen decennia: intertekstualiteit en genre. In de wetenschappelijke literatuur over intertekstualiteit in Latijnse poëzie heeft lange tijd een debat gewoed over de vraag of de betekenis die we toekennen aan parallellen en overeenkomsten tussen het werk van de ene dichter en de andere bedoeld is door de dichter of bepaald wordt door de lezer van het gedicht. Ik sluit mij in dit debat aan bij de positie dat we de bedoeling van de auteur niet kunnen kennen, maar dat het praktisch is om – als we het hebben over onze interpretatie van een gedicht – wel te spreken over een auteur die een bepaalde bedoeling heeft. In het wetenschappelijke debat over genre sluit ik mij aan bij de positie dat de genres van de Latijnse poëzie door

dichters voortdurend geproblematiseerd en bediscussieerd werden, bijvoorbeeld door het clichébeeld van epos als “alleen maar oorlog en alleen maar mannen” neer te zetten en het vervolgens onderuit te halen. Deze essentialistische voorstellingen van genres vormen onderdeel van de intertekstuele dialoog over genre die Latijnse dichters met elkaar voeren door middel van verwijzingen naar hun voorgangers.

Vervolgens richt ik mij op de interactie tussen epos en tragedie in de Latijnse poëzie vóór Seneca. Al vanaf het begin van de Latijnse literatuur zijn epos en tragedie verwante genres. We kunnen dit al enigszins terugzien in het werk van Ennius, van wie we alleen fragmenten over hebben. Echt duidelijk wordt de verwantschap tussen epos en tragedie in de *Aeneis* van Vergilius. De *Aeneis* wordt beheerst door een spanning tussen de epische missie van de Trojaanse held Aeneas enerzijds – zijn reis naar Italië die moet culmineren in de stichting van Rome en de regering van keizer Augustus – en de steden en personen die deze missie in de weg staan: vooral de stad Carthago en haar koningin Dido en de Italische stad Laurentum en haar koningin Amata. Op het goddelijk niveau ondersteunt de oppergod Jupiter de missie van Aeneas en werkt zijn vrouw Juno deze missie tegen, door te proberen Aeneas in Carthago te houden en door de Italische bevolking onder leiding van Amata op te zwepen tegen Aeneas, met behulp van een Furie uit de Onderwereld. Hemel en Hel staan tegenover elkaar. Bovendien verwijst Vergilius in de passages waarin de krachten die gericht zijn tegen Aeneas’ missie centraal staan regelmatig naar Griekse tragedies over helden en steden die gedoemd zijn ten onder te gaan. Juno en de andere tegenkrachten winnen dus niet van Aeneas en Jupiter, maar vormen wel een serieuze uitdaging voor Aeneas’ missie. Problematisch genoeg zijn deze tegenkrachten, bijvoorbeeld Dido, ook vaak vergelijkbaar met Aeneas en zijn missie en bedient Jupiter zich soms van minder prettige middelen om de missie van Aeneas te realiseren.

Ovidius ontwikkelt spanning tussen epos en tragedie verder. In zijn *Metamorphosen*, waarin veel verschillende mythologische verhalen verteld worden, zijn twee verhalenreeksen van groot belang: de mythen over de tragische Griekse stad Thebe en de mythen over tragische vrouwen als Medea en Procne, die hun eigen kinderen doden om wraak te nemen op hun verraderlijke echtgenoot. In zijn Thebaanse mythen zet Ovidius het stichtingsverhaal van de *Aeneis* op zijn kop: hij vertelt over een stad die ten onder gaat en verwijst daarbij tegelijkertijd naar de missie van Aeneas én naar Carthago en Laurentum. Op de achtergrond speelt de tragische mythe van de Thebaanse koning Oedipus die zijn eigen vader vermoordde en met zijn eigen moeder trouwde een rol: ook zijn geschiedenis gaat niet vooruit maar achteruit. In zijn

verhalen over tragische vrouwen, vooral dat van Procne, ontwikkelt Ovidius het thema van gevaarlijke vrouwen als Dido en Amata verder, met het verschil dat bijvoorbeeld Procne er ook daadwerkelijk in slaagt om zich op haar man te wreken (namelijk door hem hun zoon Itys voor te schotelen als feestmaal) zonder dat de goden hier iets aan doen. Al met al gaat Ovidius verder dan Vergilius, maar de veelheid aan verhalen in de *Metamorphosen* maakt dat het moeilijk is om hem echt vast te pinnen: de extreme verhalen van Thebe en Procne worden steeds weer afgewisseld met andere verhalen.

Seneca zet in zijn acht tragedies de lijn van Ovidius verder door en voert de spanning tussen beide genres nog verder op. Ik laat dit zien aan de hand van een interpretatie van vier van Seneca's tragedies: *Hercules Furens*, *Oedipus*, *Thyestes* en *Phoenissae*. We weten niet zeker in welke volgorde Seneca deze tragedies heeft geschreven, maar het is op basis van verschillende aanwijzingen waarschijnlijk dat hij *Thyestes* en *Phoenissae* aan het eind van zijn leven geschreven heeft. In dit gedeelte van mijn inleiding bespreek ik het debat over de datering van Seneca's tragedies en betoog ik dat het de moeite waard is om Seneca's tragische oeuvre in samenhang te lezen, dus te letten op de verwijzingen van de ene tragedie naar de andere. Hierbij valt op dat er twee "richtingen" te vinden zijn in Seneca's tragedies: één gericht op regressie en zelfvernietiging en één gericht op het continueren en vergroten van tragische misdaden, totdat ze uiteindelijk de hele kosmos overnemen. De spanning tussen deze twee richtingen is telkens in Seneca's tragedies terug te vinden. Het loont hierbij de moeite om *Thyestes* en *Phoenissae* als latere en extremere tragedies te lezen dan *Hercules Furens* en *Oedipus*.

Hercules Furens

In de *Hercules Furens* komt de held Hercules terug van zijn laatste werk: het meenemen van de hellehond Cerberus uit de Onderwereld. De godin Juno vreest Hercules' naderende vergoddelijking en maakt hem daarom krankzinnig. In een vlaag van waanzin doodt Hercules zijn familie. Als hij bijkomt uit deze waanzin wil hij zelfmoord plegen, maar hij wordt hier door zijn "menselijke vader" Amphitryon – zijn biologische vader is Jupiter zelf – van weerhouden en vindt een toevluchtsoord in het Athene van zijn vriend Theseus.

Hercules is een zeer veelzijdige held in de Griekse en Latijnse literatuur: hij brengt beschaving, maar is ook gewelddadig; hij vervult missies van episch formaat en is op weg naar vergoddelijking, maar pleegt in zijn waanzin ook een tragische misdaad.

Deze veelzijdigheid van Hercules komt Seneca goed van pas: hij gebruikt de figuur van Hercules om de spanning tussen epos en tragedie in het werk van Ovidius en Vergilius te onderzoeken. Zo gebruikt hij in de proloog van het toneelstuk, waarin Juno aan het woord is, vocabulaire dat nu eens aan epos, dan eens aan tragedie doet denken, om te laten zien hoe nauw verweven deze genres zijn. Dat is voor een tragedie over Hercules extra relevant: Seneca verwijst veel naar Juno's epische woede in het zevende boek van de *Aeneis*, waarin ze de Furie Allecto uit de Onderwereld haalt om Italië in verzet te brengen tegen Aeneas' missie. Deze scène uit de *Aeneis* is echter weer gebaseerd op de tragedie van Seneca's Griekse voorganger Euripides over de waanzin van Herakles.

Seneca blijft in de *Hercules Furens* verwijzing naar verschillende aspecten van de literaire traditie combineren en roept op die manier vragen op over de epen van zijn voorgangers. Zo combineert hij in zijn beschrijving van Hercules' afdaling naar de Onderwereld om Cerberus te halen verwijzingen naar Aeneas' afdaling naar de Onderwereld (onderdeel van zijn epische missie) met verwijzingen naar Juno's afdalingen in de Onderwereld in de *Aeneis* en *Metamorphosen*, die juist bedoeld zijn om helse razernij op te wekken, die uitmondt in de tragische ondergang van helden en steden. Hercules' afdaling in de Onderwereld wordt hierdoor problematischer, en wanneer de door Juno gestuurde waanzin bezit van hem neemt, leidt dit tot de tragische dood van Hercules' vrouw en kinderen. Hercules was eerst gericht op een epische vergoddelijking, maar wil nu alleen maar sterven. Hij wordt hiervan weerhouden door Amphitryon. In de laatste scène blijft Hercules op tragische wijze worstelen met zijn misdaad: hij voert als het ware oorlog met zichzelf. Tegelijkertijd verlangt hij terug naar zijn epische identiteit en ziet hij verder leven als een nieuw episch werk.

Zeker in de laatste scène van de *Hercules Furens* treffen we niet alleen een spanning tussen epos en tragedie, maar ook een spanning tussen "openness" en "closure": gaat het verhaal van Hercules verder, of eindigt het met zijn dood? Traditioneel wordt "openness" geassocieerd met Juno en haar helse krachten die leiden tot tragische misdaden; "closure" wordt geassocieerd met Jupiter en zijn epische missie die tot een goed einde moet worden gebracht. Aan het eind van de *Hercules Furens* laat Seneca alle tegenstellingen intact en kan het epische genre in principe verder, maar is het wel een stuk tragischer geworden.

Oedipus

In de *Oedipus* staat de Thebaanse koning Oedipus centraal, die er gedurende het stuk achter komt dat hij zijn vader Laius heeft gedood en met zijn moeder Jocasta getrouwd is. Aan het begin van het stuk is Thebe getroffen door de pest, die volgens het orakel van Apollo in Delphi (bezocht door Creon, de broer van Jocasta) pas kan worden opgeheven als de misdadiger die zijn vader heeft gedood en met zijn moeder is getrouwd verbannen wordt. Belangrijke onderdelen van de tragedie zijn onder meer een necromantie, uitgevoerd door de blinde Thebaanse ziener Tiresias, waarin alle Thebaanse voorouders de revue passeren; Oedipus' zelfverblindings als hij achter de waarheid gekomen is; de zelfmoord van Jocasta; Oedipus' ballingschap.

In dit hoofdstuk sluit ik mij aan bij de opvatting dat Seneca's *Oedipus* moet worden gelezen als een reactie op de Thebaanse verhalen die Ovidius in de *Metamorphosen* vertelt. Seneca verwijst voortdurend naar deze verhalen en nodigt de lezer uit om zijn Oedipus met Ovidius' tragische Thebaanse helden te vergelijken. Hij maakt hierbij gebruik van het feit dat Ovidius in deze verhalen zeer indirect naar Oedipus verwijst. Seneca laat voortdurend zien hoe Ovidius' verhalen over tragische misverstanden, identiteitscrises en de stichting van een stad die gedoemd is ten onder te gaan alleen maar voorafschaduwingen zijn van de ultieme tragische Thebaanse figuur: Oedipus.

Ook werkt Seneca Ovidius' idee uit van het tragische Thebe als een omkering van de *Aeneis* en het idee dat Thebe een plaats is waar de geschiedenis niet vooruit maar achteruit gaat. De necromantie vormt bijvoorbeeld een parallel met Aeneas' afdaling in de Onderwereld, maar is – in tegenstelling tot wat Aeneas in de Onderwereld wordt voorgespiegeld – geen visioen van een glorieuze toekomst, maar juist van een eindeloze herhaling van gruwelijke misdaden. Deze necromantie bevat ook parallellen met de afdaling in de Onderwereld in *Hercules Furens*: Seneca nodigt zijn lezer uit zijn beide Onderwerelden met elkaar te vergelijken.

Ook Oedipus' verblindings heeft iets Thebaans-regressiefs: Oedipus voert deze straf op zichzelf uit door zijn ogen uit te krabben, en de straf is “naar binnen gericht”, net zoals Oedipus' misdadige “terugkeer naar de moeder”. Ook hier vinden we een spanning tussen “openness” en “closure”. Oedipus wil met zijn zelfbestrafing “closure” bereiken voor zijn misdaden, maar hij blijft natuurlijk gewoon in leven en in de laatste regels van de tragedie neemt hij de helse krachten die Thebe de pest hebben gebracht met zich mee. Oedipus' verhaal is dus nog niet afgelopen.

Thyestes en Phoenissae

In het laatste hoofdstuk analyseer ik Seneca's *Thyestes* en *Phoenissae*. Ik ga er hierbij vanuit dat deze twee tragedies Seneca's laatste tragedies zijn en ook als zodanig gelezen moeten worden: de grote thema's van Seneca's tragische oeuvre bereiken hier een climax.

In de *Thyestes* staat het conflict tussen de broer Atreus en Thyestes om de heerschappij over Mycene centraal. Atreus is koning, maar vreest dat zijn broer – net zoals vroeger – hem van zijn macht wil beroven. Met een list lokt hij Thyestes terug naar Mycene, doodt de kinderen van Thyestes, kookt ze en zet ze aan hun vader voor als feestmaal. In reactie op deze misdaad keert de zonnegod zijn wagen om. De tragedie wordt voorafgegaan door een proloog waarin een Furie de schim van Tantalus, de grootvader van Atreus en Thyestes, ertoe aanzet om het koninklijk paleis te infecteren met helse misdadigheid.

Thyestes is een tragedie in de overtreffende trap. De Furie wordt niet gestopt of ingedamd door Jupiter en opereert onafhankelijk van Juno. Ze overtreft hiermee zowel de *Aeneis* als de *Hercules Furens*. De misdaad van Atreus overtreft die van Ovidius' Procne in gruwelijkheid en vooral in de planmatigheid en doelgerichtheid die Atreus aan de dag legt. Seneca koppelt deze misdaad van Procne, net zoals Ovidius had gedaan, aan de misdadige IJzeren Tijd die Ovidius in de *Metamorphosen* beschrijft.

Seneca overtreft Vergilius en Ovidius vooral doordat de misdaad van Atreus en de Furie de hele kosmos overneemt: de Zonnegod vlucht, Jupiter straft Atreus niet en uiteindelijk is Atreus de enige god van dit wrede universum. In de *Thyestes* laat Seneca zien wat er gebeurt als de tragische elementen die altijd al in het Latijnse epos aanwezig waren volledig ontketend worden. Ze nemen de hele door Jupiter beheerste epische kosmos over.

De waarschijnlijk onvoltooide tragedie *Phoenissae* gaat over een andere broederstrijd, die tussen de zonen van Oedipus: Eteocles (koning van Thebe) en Polynices (in ballingschap) strijden om de heerschappij over Thebe. Deze tragedie begint met Oedipus in ballingschap op de berg Cithaeron (waar hij ook door zijn ouders was achtergelaten om te sterven), vergezeld door zijn dochter Antigone. Hij verlangt te sterven, maar Antigone weet hem hiervan te weerhouden (vergelijk Amphitryon en Hercules). Als er een bode komt om Oedipus te verzoeken de naderende burgeroorlog tussen zijn zonen te voorkomen, reageert hij juist enthousiast en spoort hij zijn zonen aan hem nog in misdadigheid te overtreffen. Vervolgens schakelt Seneca naar

Jocasta (die in deze tragedie nog leeft). Vanaf de muren van Thebe ziet zij het leger van Polynices naderen. Jocasta springt tussen de linies van Eteocles en Polynices en probeert op hen in te praten om de burgeroorlog te voorkomen. De tragedie breekt af voordat we weten hoe deze interventie afloopt.

In de *Phoenissae* strijden de twee richtingen waardoor Seneca's tragische oeuvre beheerst wordt met elkaar. Oedipus wil eigenlijk sterven – een mooi voorbeeld van Thebaanse zelfvernietiging – maar wordt uiteindelijk de aanjager van nog grotere misdaden, waardoor de opbouw van deze tragedie ook op de *Thyestes* lijkt. Daarnaast keert Seneca ook in deze tragedie op Thebaanse wijze de plot van de *Aeneis* om: net als Aeneas is Polynices een balling, maar in tegenstelling tot Aeneas keert hij terug naar zijn vaderland.

Een belangrijk thema in zowel de *Thyestes* als de *Phoenissae* is dat van de naderende burgeroorlog. De inwoners van Mycene vrezen een burgeroorlog tussen Atreus en Thyestes – die er niet komt – en de *Phoenissae* gaat over de opmaat naar een burgeroorlog. Deze burgeroorlog wordt echter, omdat het stuk afbreekt, niet gerealiseerd. Er is zelfs beweerd dat Seneca dit abrupte einde van het stuk bewust zo heeft aangebracht. Hoe dan ook blijft de dreiging van burgeroorlog aan het eind van Seneca's tragische oeuvre een realiteit. Het open einde van de *Phoenissae* zorgt er echter ook voor dat er ruimte is voor latere dichters om met Seneca's uitdaging aan de slag te gaan: hoe extreem en absoluut Seneca's tragedies ook lijken, uiteindelijk heeft hij toch niet het laatste woord.

Statius' Thebais – de eerste helft

Seneca stierf in het jaar 65. Drie jaar later kwam er een einde aan de regering van keizer Nero. Na een gruwelijke burgeroorlog kwam er een nieuwe dynastie aan de macht, die van de Flaviërs. Onder de Flavische keizers werden verschillende epen geschreven, waaronder de *Thebais* van Statius over de burgeroorlog tussen Eteocles en Polynices. In dit epos reageert Statius voortdurend op de vier tragedies van Seneca die in dit proefschrift besproken worden. Ik betoog dat Statius zich bewust is van het commentaar dat Seneca in zijn tragedies op het epische genre levert én dat hij zich bewust is van de spanning die op het tragische oeuvre van Seneca zelf staat. In de laatste twee hoofdstukken van dit proefschrift lees ik de *Thebais* dus als een intertekstueel verhaal, waarin Statius' reactie op Seneca zich voortdurend verder ontwikkelt en waarin Statius Seneca uiteindelijk de baas blijft.

De *Thebais* begint met Oedipus die de Furie Tisiphone aanspoort om de burgeroorlog tussen zijn zonen te ontketenen. Tisiphone voert deze opdracht maar al te graag uit. Statius reageert hiermee direct op Seneca: zijn Oedipus bouwt voort op die van Seneca; de Furie die uit de Onderwereld komt en de aarde van misdaad vervult is gebaseerd op de Furie van de *Thyestes*. Maar omdat Statius een mythologisch epos schrijft, moet Jupiter ook reageren. Hij beantwoordt – tamelijk laat – Oedipus’ vervloeking van zijn zonen en zegt dat hij Argos, waar Polynices hulp vandaan zal halen, zal opzetten tegen Thebe. Het doel hiervan is dat zowel Argos als Thebe te gronde gaan. Jupiter is terug van weggeweest, maar zijn plan heeft – zoals al vaak is beweerd – meer weg van een plan van Juno dan van een plan van Jupiter. Dit blijkt vooral wanneer Jupiter Mercurius stuurt om de schim van Laius uit de Onderwereld te halen en Eteocles tot oorlog aan te zetten – een actie die de lezer eerder met Juno en Furiën zou associëren.

Het duurt lange tijd voordat de oorlog Thebe bereikt, want Statius bouwt voortdurend vertragingen en uitweidingen in. In deze passages wordt vooral de Thebaanse thematiek sterk uitgewerkt: Statius portretteert bijvoorbeeld Polynices als een anti-Aeneas die – net als in de *Phoenissae* – terugkeert naar zijn oorsprong en laat Tiresias opnieuw een Thebaanse necromantie uitvoeren waarin nog eens alle Thebaanse voorvaders worden opgevoerd en Laius – net als in de *Oedipus* – zijn nageslacht vervloekt.

Statius’ Thebais – de tweede helft

In de tweede helft van de *Thebais* wordt pas echt duidelijk wat de consequenties zijn van het incorporeren van Seneca’s tragedies in een epos. In het zevende boek van de *Thebais* worden alle hindernissen voor de oorlog tussen Eteocles en Polynices weggenomen. De belangrijkste hindernis is Jocasta, die probeert om Eteocles en Polynices tot een vergelijk te brengen. Statius reageert hier op Jocasta’s interventie in de *Phoenissae* en – gebruik makend van het onvoltooide karakter van Seneca’s tragedie – speelt even met de mogelijkheid dat Jocasta’s interventie zal slagen. Net zoals in Seneca’s *Phoenissae* strijden Oedipus’ helse razernij en Jocasta’s pogingen het onheil af te wenden om voorrang. Maar dan gebruikt Statius Seneca tegen Seneca: de Furie Tisiphone, die de krachten van Seneca’s *Thyestes* vertegenwoordigt, pleegt een beslissende interventie en doet de balans doorslaan naar oorlog.

De eerste held die vervolgens sneuvelt aan de kant van de Argivers is de ziener Amphiaraus, die met zijn strijdswagen de Onderwereld inrijdt. Dis, de god van Onderwereld, is hierover zo zwaar ontstemd dat hij Tisiphone oproept om met gruwelijke misdaden wraak te nemen voor deze schending van de Onderwereld. Statius verwijst in deze scène tegelijkertijd naar de *Hercules Furens*, de *Thyestes* en het begin van zijn eigen *Thebais*.

In het achtste en tiende boek voert Statius verschillende helden op die zich goed laten lezen als voortzetting van de spanning tussen vergoddelijking en zelfvernietiging die Seneca had verkend in de *Hercules Furens*. Deze helden bewegen zich net als Hercules voortdurend tussen Hemel, aarde en Hel. De eerste is Tydeus, de beste vriend van Polynices die door zijn heldendaden aanspraak kan maken op vergoddelijking, net als Hercules. Hij verspeelt deze kans echter wanneer Tisiphone hem ertoe aanspoort om – in een gruwelijke herhaling van het einde van de *Thyestes* – aan het afgehakte hoofd van zijn tegenstander Melanippus te knagen. De goden Minerva en Mars vluchten, een herhaling van de vlucht van de Zonnegod in de *Thyestes*. Vervolgens beschrijft Statius in het tiende boek van de *Thebais* de dood van Creons zoon Menoeceus, bedoeld om de Thebanen van de ondergang te redden. Menoeceus pleegt – in weerwil van de smeebeden van zijn vader – zelfmoord en wordt vergoddelijkt. Statius reageert hier op de spanning tussen vergoddelijking en zelfmoord in de *Hercules Furens*. Een laatste Herculische hemelbestormer is de Argivische held Capaneus, die de muren van Thebe beklimt en Jupiter uitdaagt om hem te stoppen. De overige goden vrezen Capaneus, maar Jupiter slingert zijn bliksem. Deze scène is een reactie op alle keren dat in Seneca's tragedies tevergeefs om Jupiters wrekende bliksem werd gebeden. Jupiter herstelt nog één keer zijn epische autoriteit.

Maar uiteindelijk zijn Tisiphone en haar zuster Megaera, die zij in het elfde boek van de *Thebais* ook inschakelt, te sterk voor Jupiter. Tisiphone en Megaera sporen Eteocles en Polynices aan om direct met elkaar het gevecht aan te gaan. Statius reageert hier in geconcentreerde vorm op zowel de *Thyestes* als de *Phoenissae*: de Furiën nemen het initiatief; Jupiter en de andere goden trekken zich terug van het toneel; alle hindernissen, inclusief een nieuwe interventie van Jocasta, worden overwonnen en Eteocles en Polynices doden elkaar in een ultieme daad van Thebaanse zelfvernietiging.

Met de vlucht van de goden en de dood van Eteocles en Polynices heeft Statius de consequenties van Seneca's tragedies voor het epos tot het einde uitgewerkt. De epische kosmos bestuurd door Jupiter blijkt niet meer houdbaar. Maar – zoals regelmatig is opgemerkt – Statius weet zijn epos ook na dit gruwelijke moment voort te zetten en

het epos opnieuw uit te vinden. Dat is een andere discussie, maar interessant is wel dat Statius ook na deze climax nog op Senecaanse bezig blijft met de thema's "openness" en "closure" wanneer hij het lot van Oedipus onder de loep neemt, die uiteindelijk moet terugkeren naar de Cithaeron, waar het allemaal begonnen was.

Conclusie

In dit proefschrift heb ik de complexe relatie tussen epos en tragedie in de Latijnse poëzie onderzocht. In Vergilius' *Aeneis* problematiseerden de tragische interteksten het epos, Ovidius werkte in zijn *Metamorphosen* deze problemen op subtiële wijze uit. In zijn tragedies laat Seneca echter pas echt zien wat er op het spel staat: de epische missie van Aeneas wordt op zijn kop gezet en de epische goden worden verdreven. Na dit extreme tragische experiment probeert Statius opnieuw een epos te schrijven waarin hij de consequenties van Seneca's uitdaging onderzoekt. Hij weet uiteindelijk op een punt te geraken waar de invloed van Seneca min of meer is uitgewerkt terwijl het epos doorgaat, maar niet voordat hij heeft laten zien dat het genre epos in zijn oude vorm wegens Seneca's uitdaging niet meer houdbaar is.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Marco van der Schuur was born on 05.07.1985 in Amersfoort. After finishing secondary school (Corderius College, Amersfoort) he studied Classics at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, which included some months of research at the University of Cambridge. In 2010 he began working on his PhD project at the University of Groningen, which he combined with teaching university courses on Latin literature and language from 2012 to 2015. Having obtained a teaching degree in Classics in 2016, he has since then worked as a teacher of Latin and Greek, first in Vleuten (2015-2021, Amadeus Lyceum) and currently in Utrecht (2021-present, Utrechts Stedelijk Gymnasium), finishing this dissertation in the meantime.