

**DEALING WITH A MASSACRE**  
**Spectacle, Eroticism, and Unreliable Narration**  
**in the Lemnian Episode of Statius' *Thebaid***

by

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**A thesis submitted to the Department of Classics**  
**in conformity with the requirements for**  
**the degree of Master of Arts**

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**June, 2008**

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## ABSTRACT

I offer three readings of the Lemnian episode narrated by Hypsipyle in book five of the *Thebaid*, each based upon an interpretive tension created by textual, intertextual, and cultural factors and resolved by the death of Opheltes, the child nursed by Hypsipyle. In the first reading (chapter two), I suggest that Hypsipyle emphasizes the questionable nature of the evidence for the involvement of Venus and other divinities in the Lemnian massacre, which is on the surface quite obvious, as a subconscious strategy to deal with her fear of divine retribution against her and Opheltes. In the second reading (chapter three), I argue that much of the violence of the massacre is eroticized, primarily by allusions to Augustan elegy and Ovidian poetry, and that this eroticism challenges a straightforward, horrified reaction to the Lemnian episode. In the third reading (chapter four), which continues the argument of the second, I suggest that the reaction of Statius' audience to the Lemnian massacre was influenced by familiarity with the violent entertainment offered in the Roman arena, and that this encouraged the audience to identify with the perpetrators of the massacre rather than the victims. The problematization of the audience's reaction and of the divine involvement in the massacre is resolved by the death of Opheltes, which is portrayed as both undeniably supernatural in origin and emphatically tragic in nature. Thus, as the first half of the *Thebaid* draws to a close, Statius decisively affirms the power of the gods and the horrific tragedy of violence and prepares to embark upon the war in the *Thebaid's* second half, which will end ultimately with the double fratricide of the sons of Oedipus and Statius' prayer for future generations to forget this sin.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*A Iove principium (Silv. 1 praef.):* my sincerest thanks to Dr. Drew Griffith, whose powers of supervision are (more happily than the origin of the Lemnian massacre) superhuman. In the early weeks of research, he gave me incalculable encouragement by not arguing with my belief that a severed, murmuring head could indeed be hilarious.

Thanks also to all of Queen's Classics for offering me such a welcoming and stimulating environment over the past six years. Terry Smith has drawn more students into the department than anyone can count – and kept them there. Dr. Bernard Kavanagh taught me Latin, Dr. Michael Cummings taught me Virgil, and Dr. Ross Kilpatrick taught me Horace (if not humility). Dr. Barbara Reeves is the best.

The graduate students of 2007-2008 were extremely friendly and sat gamely through a sensationalistic early presentation of my arguments that began, unadvisedly, with a gore-filled clip from Robert Rodriguez's *Planet Terror*. The attendees of the University of Virginia's 2008 graduate colloquium heard an even earlier version of my arguments, and offered several helpful suggestions. Dr. William Dominik, soon to be my supervisor at the University of Otago, gave me encouragement and inspiration from halfway around the world. *O tempora!*

My examining committee, Drs. William Morrow, Drew Griffith, Anne Foley, Ross Kilpatrick, and Shelley King, had many helpful suggestions and challenging questions. I thank them sincerely.

My work was partly funded by scholarships from the Ontario Student Assistance Program and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

My parents, siblings, and grandparents shaped my view of the world. I have always found it difficult to see too much gloom in the *Thebaid*.

*Sorondo, tibi hoc, aut omnia dedico,  
O et presidium et dulce decus meum.*

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when Tydeus dies chewing on the brains of his killer (8.760f.).<sup>2</sup> The *aristeiai* and deaths of Amphiaraus, Parthenopaeus, Hippomedon, and Capaneus, which stretch across a third of the epic (books 7-10), are equally bloody, if less cannibalistic. And the Lemnian massacre in the fifth book (the focus of this study) contains some of the most disturbing violence in all of Roman epic, including infanticide, human sacrifice, a still-murmuring severed head, and murder staged as role-reversed sexual intercourse. But most of this violence is so far removed from the mundane<sup>3</sup> experience of (my) daily life that visualizing it can be quite difficult. And, even when I think I have succeeded, I find that I am only recalling or adapting a scene from a horror movie or an episode of some police drama on television (and, as we are often told, we have been “desensitized” to these images).

Notwithstanding the fact that the Romans lived in a world where a stray dog could bring a human hand to the breakfast table of a future emperor<sup>4</sup> – and this could even be interpreted as a happy omen<sup>5</sup> – the worst violence of the *Thebaid* must have stood outside the mundane experience of Statius’ urban audience: citizens of Rome in the late first century AD probably drank not much more human blood than you or I. And thus, when

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<sup>2</sup> This remarkable scene inspired Dante’s presentation of Count Ugolino and Archbishop Ruggieri in the 33<sup>rd</sup> canto of the *Inferno*, in which the poet enacts the so-called “anxiety of influence” (Bloom 1973) by having the feaster’s feast still conscious. See Martindale (1993) for the “Bloomian” relationship between Dante and Virgil, and Gildenhard and Zissos (2007: 20f.) for a similar relationship between Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* and Ovid’s Tereus and Procne episode, which we will discuss below (pp. 109-11).

<sup>3</sup> I use the word in the positive, or at least neutral, sense of “belonging to my world”.

<sup>4</sup> Vespasian (Suet. *Vesp.* 5.4). Incidentally, such a sight – Vespasian removed, of course – is apparently common in Ulan Bator, the capital of Mongolia, where (although I rely here on the always questionable information of the internet) some migrants from rural areas still practice open-air burials and “it is not uncommon to see a stray dog running along the street with a human hand in its teeth, followed by a mob of Western tourists with cameras” (Dinets n.d.).

<sup>5</sup> Rolfe (1914: 293, n. 14) explains that “The hand was typical of power, and *manus* is often used in the sense of *potestas*.”

the audience-members at a recital given by Statius<sup>6</sup> heard his description of the events on Lemnos, we may well ask what appeared to their “mind’s eyes”, their *oculi mentis*.<sup>7</sup> Scenes inspired by the bloody spectacles of the Roman arena are an obvious answer – although, surprisingly, one that has been almost ignored in Statian studies – and I will discuss this in the fourth chapter. Images informed by the pervasive connection between sex and violence are another possibility, which I will turn to in the third chapter. These are only partial answers, though, because Statius does not narrate the Lemnian episode in his own authorial voice but through the character Hypsipyle, who tells the story of Lemnos, as she experienced it, to an Argive army passing through the woods of Nemea on the way to Thebes. This fact has prompted various investigators, focussing on Hypsipyle’s diegetic<sup>8</sup> audience, to ask how her hypodiegetic narrative informs our extradiegetic reading of the Argives’ later exploits.<sup>9</sup> The question that I will ask in the second chapter focuses instead on Hypsipyle herself, and is more psychological in nature: what does *she* see in her own *oculi mentis*?<sup>10</sup> That is, rather than interpreting the Lemnian massacre as an “epic within an epic” intended to inform our reading of the *Thebaid* as a whole,<sup>11</sup> we may understand it as a traumatic episode in the life of an ancient Greek

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<sup>6</sup> Juvenal (7.82-86) describes one such recital (see below, pp. 57f., n. 30). Statius also gives descriptions of his various recitals (*Silv.* 5.2.160-63, 3.215-17, 5.38-43, cf. his participation in poetry festivals, *Silv.* 3.5.28-33; 4.2.65-67, 5.22-24; 5.3.225-27). Markus (2000: 163-68) discusses Statius’ epic recitals and the persona he assumed.

<sup>7</sup> Quint. *Inst.* 8.3.62. Bringing descriptions to life in this way was an important goal of Roman oratory (see below, pp. 105, n.80).

<sup>8</sup> That is, located within the main narrative of the *Thebaid*. This level may be distinguished from the “hypodiegetic”, situated in a narrative told by a character at the diegetic level (i.e., in a “story within a story”, such as the Lemnian narrative), and the “extradiegetic” level, located outside the main narrative at the level of the epic poet. See Rimmon-Kenan (1983: 91).

<sup>9</sup> See below, p. 57, n. 23.

<sup>10</sup> Studies focussing primarily on Hypsipyle are few. Brown (1994) deals with the entire Nemean episode (books 4-6), Nugent (1996) is quite useful for the Lemnian episode, and Götting (1969), whose thesis I have not yet been able to obtain, treats Hypsipyle in detail.

<sup>11</sup> I will briefly use this approach towards the end of the second and fourth chapters. Even here, though, I will treat the *Thebaid* as a tale told by a narrator with emotions and motivations understandable in a real-

woman (albeit a mythical one), and ask the question: as Hypsipyle replays the events on Lemnos over and over, in her mind and out loud, how does their old and ongoing horror influence her account, or change it from the “true” version of the myth that Statius’ ancient and modern audience knows?<sup>12</sup>

Thus, the three main chapters of this thesis will deal with questions of reliability. How reliable is Hypsipyle as a narrator?<sup>13</sup> And how reliable are we as an audience – that is, how does our reaction to the Lemnian episode compare to that of Statius’ ancient listeners, and how does theirs compare to that produced by a “straight” reading of tale?<sup>14</sup> These are questions that may be asked of any account, ancient or modern, but their importance is that much greater for narratives whose horrific subjects fall so far outside the realm of daily life that they cannot be experienced straightforwardly.

### **An ordinary life, an extraordinary lifetime**

Statius’ life, happily for him, seems to have been “not very eventful”.<sup>15</sup> As far as we know, he did not fight on the losing side of a civil war, as Horace did; he did not have property confiscated and miraculously restored to him, as Virgil may have; parts of his body were not nailed to the *rostra*, as Cicero’s were; he was not banished to the outskirts of the Empire, as Ovid was; and he did not commit suicide at the instigation of a cruel

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world, “human” way. For Statius’ interest in the psychology of his characters, see Vessey (1973 *passim*) and Nugent (1996).

<sup>12</sup> That is, the myth as a composite of its various tellings – more of which would have been available to the ancient audience than to us, such as the lost Lemnian dramas of Aeschylus (*TrGF* fr. 123*a-b*), Sophocles (*TrGF* fr. 384-89), and Aristophanes (*PCG* fr. 372-91) and the partially extant *Hypsipyle* of Euripides (Bond 1963). The distinction I make between Hypsipyle’s account and the “true” version is a narratological one between “text” and “story” (see below, p. 18, n. 23).

<sup>13</sup> Hypsipyle’s reliability is discussed by Brown (1994: 117-23), Nugent (1996), and Casali (2003).

<sup>14</sup> I.e., a reading in which a severed and mumbling head (*Theb.* 5.236f.), like the sight of blood- and brain-drenched mouth (*Theb.* 8.760-62), provokes a straightforward response of nausea, revulsion, and a desire to cleanse the eyes.

<sup>15</sup> Hardie (1916: 5).

emperor, as Lucan and Seneca did. Instead, we learn from his own words that he was born to a successful poet and teacher of literature in Naples around 50 AD, enjoyed moderate success at various poetry festivals and the company of a rather sophisticated circle of friends, lost a father (*Silv.* 5.3) and a son (*Silv.* 5.5) – which he took hard – and suffered from occasional acute insomnia (*Silv.* 5.4) – which he also took hard. He seems to have died around the same time as Domitian in 96 AD, before he would have had the opportunity – given to Pliny, Tacitus, Martial<sup>16</sup> – to disavow himself of the effusive praise for the emperor that has earned him the unfortunately and possibly undeserved reputation of (as I have heard it put) a “brown-noser”. Much of his work survives intact: the *Silvae*, five books of occasional poems written mostly in hexameter and published in the 90s; the *Thebaid*, an epic in twelve books on the civil war between Polynices and Eteocles for the throne of Thebes, written from approximately 79 to 91; and the *Achilleid*, an unfinished epic (one and a half books were written) on the life of Achilles.<sup>17</sup>

So much for Statius’ life. The *times* in which he lived, happily for the literary critic, were eventful enough. Aside from the Great Fire of 64, the civil war of 69 (during both of which events Statius was probably living in Naples), and Domitian’s “bloody and moody reign”,<sup>18</sup> three aspects of Statius’ place in history are of particular importance to our study: two literary, the third cultural, all three appreciated in varying degrees by scholars of the *Thebaid*.

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<sup>16</sup> Vessey (1973: 7).

<sup>17</sup> Dominik (1994a:181-83) provides a timeline of important events in Statius’ life, placing the beginning of the *Thebaid*’s composition in AD 79 and its completion in 91. Biographies of Statius, primarily based on the testimony of his *Silvae*, are provided by Lehanneur (1878: 43-63) and Coleman (1988: xv-xx).

<sup>18</sup> The source of this phrase is unfortunately lost to me.

## The gods in epic

Greco-Roman epic requires gods. Its primary focus, to be sure, is the heroic and martial deeds of great men<sup>19</sup> – *reges et proelia* (“kings and battles”, Verg. *Ecl.* 6.3), as Virgil puts it – but the gods always have a role to play. Homer said as much, over eight centuries before Statius, when he had Penelope ask the bard Phemius to sing her a song of “the deeds of men and gods, which the bards make famous” (ἔργ’ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε, τὰ τε κλείουσιν ἀοιδοί, *Od.* 1.338). Servius reiterated this definition, a few centuries after Statius, when he defined the *Aeneid* as epic (*heroicus*) “because it consists of divine and human characters” (*quod constat ex divinis humanisque personis, in Aen. praef.* Thilo-Hagen 1.4.5). Horace illustrates the point, in a list of possible epic themes, by alternating the names of Iliadic heroes and Olympian gods: *Martem... [15] Merionen... Palladis | Tydiden* (*Carm.* 1.6.13-16). And indeed, the epics of Homer, Ennius, Apollonius Rhodius, Virgil, Ovid, and Valerius Flaccus surround their human characters with a full pantheon of divinities.<sup>20</sup>

But Lucan wrote an epic without gods.<sup>21</sup> And authors before Lucan had begun to challenge the corporeality of the gods by giving to abstract personifications some of the anthropomorphism of the Olympians and, at the same time, treating the Olympians more

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<sup>19</sup> Women, and great women, do of course appear in epic literature. Nevertheless, and despite the importance of female characters in my study, I could not reasonably say that the *Thebaid* or any Greco-Roman epic is *about* women (Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* nearly challenges this assertion). This is to some extent a product of the androcentricity of the ancient world, but is more a function of the topics covered by epic – martial and “heroic” business was and remains, for good or ill, largely the province of men. Throughout this study I tend to use “he” rather than “he or she” or “they”, both to avoid clumsiness and (in view of my subject matter) to become comfortable with the fact that in epic, any action by a woman is an exceptional and potentially dangerous circumstance.

<sup>20</sup> Feeney (1991) delivers a book-long study of the gods in Greco-Roman epic, covering all of the extant epics from Apollonius Rhodius to Silius Italicus. In his first chapter (pp. 5-56) he discusses the challenges that the prerequisite divine apparatus presented to epic poets and their ancient critics.

<sup>21</sup> Specifically, depictions of their *actions* are absent. Feeney (1991: 270-73) advises caution in stating too bluntly, as he does, that Lucan “abandoned the divine machinery, jettisoned the ‘*Götterapparat*’” (p. 270).

like personifications, so that Statius' day represented the "twilight of the gods" and the "mid-morning of the personifications".<sup>22</sup> In the wake of these literary changes, it would not have been entirely obvious, when Statius' *Thebaid* first set the "divine traditional epic machinery... creaking into motion",<sup>23</sup> whether the gods needed to appear in his poem at all and, if they should appear, how they ought to be interpreted. Critical opinion is not unanimous on the second question. On one side, Vessey (1973: 86-89 and *passim*) and Feeney (1991: 364-76) follow Lewis (1936: 49-56) in seeing many of the Olympian gods and their actions in an allegorical light (Mars is thus War personified, Venus is Love).<sup>24</sup> On the other side, Dominik (1994a: 3 and *passim*) uses a literal reading to demonstrate the anthropomorphic corporeality of the *Thebaid*'s divinities.

The Lemnian episode provides a crucible for these two viewpoints: for Vessey (1973: 181), the appearance of Venus to Polyxo in a dream (*Theb.* 5.134-38) – one of the most important divine actions in the episode – is "obvious[ly]... nothing other than a personification of her own frustrated lusts", while Dominik (1994a: 54) sees the Lemnian episode as "arguably... the most gruesome example of Olympian intervention in the poem". Feeney (1991: 375f.), although agreeing in general with Vessey, interprets the Lemnian episode as the one instance in the *Thebaid* of a traditional divine apparatus, set in contrast to the convergence of gods and personifications in the rest of the poem.<sup>25</sup> As I will argue in the second chapter, both interpretations of the Lemnian episode may be

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<sup>22</sup> Lewis (1936: 52). Feeney (1991: 241-49) discusses the use of personifications in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Lewis' solar movements as they apply to the *Thebaid* (pp. 364-91). The decline of the Olympians was a process more gradual and less disastrous than might be suggested by the cataclysmic "Götterdämmerung" which Lewis' "twilight of the gods" translates.

<sup>23</sup> The uncharitably clever phrase of an anonymous reader for *TAPhA*, writing surprisingly recently (1991), and quoted by Dominik (1994a: 132).

<sup>24</sup> Vessey (1973: 86-89 and *passim*) and Feeney (1991: 364-76). Both acknowledge their debt to Lewis (1936: 49-56).

<sup>25</sup> Schetter (1960: 27) also notes the traditionally "instrumental" (*entscheidend*) role that Venus assumes on Lemnos.

accommodated. Hypsipyle narrates her tale in such a way as to cast serious doubts over the physical involvement of Venus and her retinue on Lemnos, while at the same time never explicitly denying the traditional, divinely-motivated version of the Lemnian myth.

### **Elegy in epic**

As much as epic (seemingly) demands the presence of gods, so too does it demand grandness, both in style and topic, as opposed to the smaller scope of “lesser” poetic genres.<sup>26</sup> But – and although elegiac themes were never really absent from epic,<sup>27</sup> nor epic themes from elegy<sup>28</sup> – Ovid presented a serious challenge to the supremacy of *reges et proelia* in Roman epic by adapting the style of his own elegiac writing to the *Metamorphoses*.<sup>29</sup> The world of martial epic, so carefully separated from that of elegy by Callimachus (*Aet.* fr. 1 Pfeiffer) and his successors, became intertwined with the slender Callimachean style and erotic preoccupations of elegy, despite Ovid’s own admission that “greatness and love do not get along well nor linger long together in the same place” (*non*

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<sup>26</sup> I say “lesser” because the Augustan poets tended to reproduce the proud *recusatio* – that is, the *refusal* to write epic – of Callimachus’ *Aetia* (fr. 1 Pfeiffer) in a more modest form, claiming that they would (rather) write epic, if only their Muse were willing, or worthy of the task (e.g., Verg. *Ecl.* 6.3-5, Hor. *Carm.* 1.6, Prop. 2.1.17-46, 3.3.1-24, Ov. *Am.* 1.1.1-4). The Augustan *recusationes* sometimes declined writing an epic celebration of a contemporary statesman – Varus (Verg. *Ecl.* 6.6f.), Pollio (*Ecl.* 8.6-10, but see Mankin 1988 for the debate over the identity of Virgil’s addressee here), Agrippa (Hor. *Carm.* 1.6), or Augustus (*Carm.* 2.12.9-12) – and Statius adapted this conceit to his *epic* writing, declining in the *Thebaid*’s prologue to write of Domitian’s military triumphs (*Theb.* 1.16-33).

<sup>27</sup> E.g., the romance of Jason and Medea in the third book of Apollonius’ *Argonautica*, or that of Aeneas and Dido in *Aeneid* 4. For the pervasive influence of Apollonius’ Medea on Virgil’s Dido, see Nelis (2001: 125-85).

<sup>28</sup> Horace showed particular skill in unfolding, by way of *praeteritio*, the epic themes that he professed himself unfit to write (e.g., *Carm.* 1.6.5-16, 7.1-11). The metaphor of the *militia amoris* also adopted the language of martial epic in espousing the cause of erotic elegy (see below, p. 62, n. 48, for scholarship on this metaphor).

<sup>29</sup> For extensive influence of elegy (and Neoteric epyllion) on the style of the *Metamorphoses*, see Knox (1986).

*bene conveniunt nec in una sede morantur | maiestas et amor, Met. 2.846f.*). Statius inherited this uncomfortable cohabitation.<sup>30</sup>

Unfortunately, scholarship has tended to follow Statius in following Virgil as the primary influence on the *Thebaid* – “live, I pray, [my *Thebaid*], nor essay the divine *Aeneid*, but follow from afar and always adore her footsteps” (*vive, precor; nec tu divinam Aeneida tempta, | sed longe sequere et vestigia semper adora, Theb. 12.816*) – and thus the influences of Callimachus, Ovid, and erotic elegy have traditionally been underappreciated. A new study by McNelis (2007) has rectified this problem for the Callimachean aspects of the *Thebaid*.<sup>31</sup> Brown (1994) performs a similar service for the Nemean episode (books 4-6), in a thesis that remains unfortunately unpublished. Ovid’s influences on the *Thebaid* still lack a comprehensive treatment, although articles have been published on Ovidian personae (Keith 2002) and landscapes (Newlands 2004) in Statius’ epic. Elegy has also received little attention.<sup>32</sup> Brown (1994: 94-123) and Nugent (1996: 56-60) elaborate upon the eroticism in the Lemnian episode that was briefly noted by Schetter (1960: 55) and Vessey (1973: 179), but none of these treatments consider in any detail the influence of actual elegy – that is, the poems of the Augustan elegists and the elegiac elements of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*<sup>33</sup> – as opposed to mere eroticism.

Furthermore, they do not discuss how the eroticism of the Lemnian episode might affect

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<sup>30</sup> Lewis (1936: 56) showed an early understanding of this inheritance, and of Statius’ success in adopting this legacy, when he observed that “Much of the charm of Statius depends on his deliberate departure from heroic tension, his quest of graceful and romantic variation; he is a pioneer in that art of interweaving to which later literature owes so many wilful beauties.”

<sup>31</sup> That happy year also saw the publication of a new comprehensive study of the *Thebaid*’s Virgilian aspects (Ganiban 2007).

<sup>32</sup> Bessone (2002) apparently reads the character of Argia with reference to the elegiac character of the *relicta* (a woman abandoned by a war-bound lover) and highlights the tension between erotic-elegiac and martial-epic spheres in the *Thebaid*. Unfortunately, I have not yet been able to obtain her study.

<sup>33</sup> The elegiac elements of Aeneas and Dido’s romance in the *Aeneid*, and of the Lemnian episodes of Apollonius Rhodius and Valerius Flaccus, are also important to Statius’ Lemnian episode. Although a comprehensive examination of this topic would be rewarding, it falls outside the range of my study.

the way an audience experienced the violent massacre. As we will see in the third chapter, Statius' use of elements from elegy, particularly the metaphor of the *militia amoris*, is very important in shaping his audience's reaction to the Lemnian massacre, and the eroticism of Lemnos is not simply a disturbing companion to disturbing violence but rather something that interacts with and influences the tone of the violence in a complex way.

### **Spectacle in epic**

Violence, a hallmark of epic from Homer onwards,<sup>34</sup> reached a gruesome apogee of gleeful excess in post-Augustan literature. But this attitude was so antithetical to the taste of early scholars of these works that the violence received almost no critical attention, if it did not in fact discourage study of the post-Augustans as a whole.<sup>35</sup> Increasing interest in Neronian and Flavian authors has coincided with more sympathetic treatments of this aspect of their work and a greater attention to an important cultural influence on literary violence: the violent spectacles of the Roman arena. Roman authors had reacted to these spectacles even in the Augustan period – Ovid, in particular, makes an explicit reference in the *Metamorphoses* to an animal hunt in the arena<sup>36</sup> – but their influence seems to have increased following the construction of the Neronian and Flavian amphitheatres.<sup>37</sup> The Flavian amphitheatre must have been an especially strong cultural force at the time of the *Thebaid's* composition: inaugurated in AD 80, approximately

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<sup>34</sup> Ovid defines (Virgilian) epic as “arms and violent wars” (*arma... violentaque bella*, *Am.* 1.1.1).

<sup>35</sup> Vessey (1973: 146) writes that “If Homer nods to twentieth-century man, it is probably in his narratives of battle. The first six books of the *Aeneid* are now far more popular than the last, and for a similar reason. In Lucan, too, a reader may well dislike the lurid penchant for ‘*variae mortes*’. Silius is at his most tedious in the battle-scenes of the *Punica*.” “Twentieth-century” indeed, to find the bloodshed of ancient epic not repugnant, but merely dull!

<sup>36</sup> *Met.* 11.25-27 (see below, p. 95). See also *Ars am.* 1.89-228 and *Hor. Sat.* 2.6.43f.

<sup>37</sup> See Coleman (2000: 228f.) on these amphitheatres and the small one built by Statilius Taurus in 29 BC.

when Statius began composing his epic, it was the first amphitheatre in Rome since the Great Fire of 64, a wonder in the city and throughout the known world, and – with the publication of Martial’s *Liber Spectaculorum* during Domitian’s reign<sup>38</sup> – a literary as well as physical monument.<sup>39</sup> It seems likely that the arena would have been on the minds of Statius and his audience as he gave recitations through the 80s and published his epic in 91. Despite this, scholars have looked primarily to the Neronian period (Senecan tragedy and Lucan) for the effects of the arena on literature.<sup>40</sup> Statian scholars have discussed the contemporary relevance of the *Thebaid* in some detail, but these discussions tend to centre on the political atmosphere under Domitian, not the cultural atmosphere surrounding his amphitheatre.<sup>41</sup> As I will argue in the fourth chapter, the influence of the arena on Statius’ *Thebaid* is not small and, like the influence of elegy, complicates our interpretation of the Lemnian episode’s violence.

## Methodology

It remains for me to name my methods. Dominik (1994a: 13) writes truly when he says “All who consider themselves to be serious students of literature today must be familiar with literary theory and critical methodology,” but like him and many other classical scholars, I apply these theories only where necessary and as unobtrusively as possible. At various points throughout this thesis, I approximate the methods or adopt the

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<sup>38</sup> Coleman (2006: *lvii-lix*) discusses the substantial difficulties in dating this work and determining the occasion for its composition.

<sup>39</sup> The first three epigrams of the *Liber Spectaculorum* give an idea of the importance of the Flavian amphitheatre. Although Martial is by no means an unbiased source, it seems the he was citing common sentiment when, for instance, he placed it among the Wonders of the World in the first epigram (Coleman 2006: 1).

<sup>40</sup> See Shelton (2000: 90ff.) and Monaghan (2003) on Seneca, and Most (1992: 400ff.) on Lucan. There are also discussions of Petronius’ *Cena Trimalchionis* (Saylor 1987: 593-602) and Valerius Flaccus’ *Argonautica* (Zissos 2003).

<sup>41</sup> Important discussions include Ahl (1986) and Dominik (1989 and 1994a).

vocabulary of narratology, psychoanalytical criticism, gender criticism, historicism, reception theory, intertextuality, reader-response criticism,<sup>42</sup> and probably several other theories of which I am unaware. The second chapter is a more traditional, close reading of the Lemnian episode, while the third and fourth chapters employ (deploy?) more theoretical material. But, on the understanding that modern critical theories are a toolbox to aid the scholar,<sup>43</sup> I do not hold to any particular theory with consistency or tenacity: a scholar who chooses only a hammer from his theoretical toolbox (thereby rendering

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<sup>42</sup> Jong and Sullivan (1994: 281-88) provide a bibliography for most of these theories in contemporary classical criticism. With respect to intertextuality and reader-response criticism, two articles on Virgil's *Eclogues* are illuminating (Hubbard 1995 and Perkell 1996). Both discuss allusions as the opening of "space" or "gaps" in a text, which must be filled by a reader's knowledge of the object of the allusion (both discussions build upon the work of Iser 1978: 163-231 and, for Hubbard, the subsequent critique by Fish 1989: 68-86). Hubbard (1995: 13), although he is discussing primarily political allusions in the *Eclogues*, describes three levels of "allusive hermeneutics" that may be profitably applied to even non-political studies on the *Thebaid*: a "naive reading", which is either unaware of an allusion or sees it as "merely ornamental" (for an example, see below, p. 21, on Statius' allusion to Virgil's *consanguineus Leti Sopor*, *Aen.* 6.278); an "allusive reading" that interprets an allusion as "polemical or antithetical" to its subtext (see below, pp. 30-33, on the allusion to the epiphany of Venus to Aeneas, *Aen.* 2.589-623); and an "ironic reading", which imports the irony of the subtext into the alluding work, thereby reshaping the interpretation of that work (discarding the necessity of the subtext to be "ironic", we may see Statius' allusion to the Virgilian Sinon at Hypsipyle's first introduction, *Theb.* 4.781 [774] and *Aen.* 2.101f., as reshaping our interpretation of her entire tale; see below, p. 14f.). Perkell (1996: 128f.), building on the work of Conte (esp. 1979), adopts and modifies ancient critical terminology to create a twofold system: in *imitatio*, an author establishes through allusion a similarity to a prior text, "thereby creating a degree of authority for his new text"; in *aemulatio*, an author deviates from the prior text to make an implicit claim to "independence from or superiority to the model text." Both typologies are useful in asserting that Statius' manifold allusions are rarely "ornamental" or "imitative", but are instead designed to enrich his work through reference to previous works. Both, however, would afford too much power to the "reader" in a study of Statius. For, at least in Statius' lifetime, he gave frequent and successful recitals of his *Thebaid* (see above, p. 3, n. 6) where, presumably, he would have been able partially to direct audience response through his performance, and perhaps even discuss his work with audience-members after the reading. Thus, the intertextuality of his work (and indeed any aspect of his work that called for a critical response from his audience) would have been subject to a tighter authorial control, and we ought not to confuse the *Thebaid* with a modern novel by expecting it to "position itself to resonate effectively with the greatest possible variety of potential audiences" (Hubbard 1995: 11) or asserting that "More than one kind of reading might well account for the text of [the *Thebaid*] and therefore serve as a 'coherent reconstruction' of the text" (Perkell 1996: 128). Instead, an accurate reading of the *Thebaid* would seek to identify the intent of Statius' performance and examine not its interaction with an "almost uncontrollable multiplicity of readership" (Hubbard 1995: 11) but its effect on a specific audience at a specific time. How such a reading – which is not really possible, nearly two millennia after Statius' original recitals – can be best approximated is a more difficult problem. It may be obvious, incidentally, that I am sceptical of Fish's "doctrine" (so called by Martindale 1993: 16, n. 22) that "the reader's response is not *to* the meaning; it *is* the meaning" (1980: 3, italics original), which is as misleading as an Academy Award winner thanking his fans: certainly he "couldn't have done it without them", but the Oscar ought nevertheless to go to *him*, not his audience.

<sup>43</sup> Or perhaps out of a certain deficiency in attention span.

every text a nail), or – worse still – leaves the hammer to do the job by itself, will not build a very useful argument.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> In addition to this ambivalent relationship with critical theory, I am burdened by several other quirks, mostly terminological, which I discuss in footnotes as they arise in the course of my thesis.

**CHAPTER TWO:  
HYPSIPYLE AND THE GODS ON LEMNOS  
(Super)human Slaughter**

We all want to forget something, so we tell stories.  
It's easier that way.  
—Akira Kurosawa, *Rashomon*<sup>1</sup>

**Introduction: unreliable narrators**

Following a general realization that Statius' *Thebaid* is not a servile imitation of the *Aeneid*, composed with little regard for subtlety or internal coherence, scholars have begun to find considerable complexity in the work.<sup>2</sup> Many of these investigations have dealt with Hypsipyle's tale of the Lemnian massacre, perhaps the most difficult and complex section of the entire *Thebaid*. Aside from studies on its relationship to the rest of the Statius' epic and to earlier Greco-Roman literature,<sup>3</sup> there has also been interest in the reliability of Hypsipyle as a narrator. This interest has focussed largely on her connection with Virgil's Aeneas and with the Hypsipyle of Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*, both of whose reliability is questionable.<sup>4</sup> But Statius' Hypsipyle also has a connection with Sinon, the lying Greek in Aeneas' tale of the fall of Troy who persuades the Trojans to

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<sup>1</sup> Various editions of *Rashomon* give different English translations of this line ("Everyone wants to forget nasty things, so they invent stories. It's easier." "Man just wants to forget the bad stuff and believe in the made-up good stuff. It's easier that way"). I do not know which is most faithful to the original Japanese but, like the film's characters (or, as we will see, Hypsipyle and Statius), I offer what best suits my purposes.

<sup>2</sup> This "Stasian renaissance" began roughly in 1950's Germany, but achieved widespread currency (in the English-speaking world) with the seminal work of Vessey (1973). Modern scholarship (and here I consider only book-length studies) has discussed complexity in Statius' treatment of his characters' psychology (Vessey 1973), of his contemporary political environment (Dominik 1994a), and of his literary predecessors (Ganiban 2007, McNelis 2007).

<sup>3</sup> E.g., Vessey (1970 and 1973: 169-95), Dominik (1994a: 54-63 and 1997), Gruzelier (1994), Gibson (2004), Ganiban (2007: 71-95).

<sup>4</sup> Aeneas: Nugent (1996) and Casali (2003), who discusses Aeneas' reliability. Apollonius' Hypsipyle: Brown (1994: 116f.), and see below, p. 61.

bring the wooden horse into the city (*Aen.* 2.57-198).<sup>5</sup> When Hypsipyle first meets the Argives in Nemea (4.746-85 [739-78]<sup>6</sup>), she alludes to (but does not reveal) her identity and then breaks off suddenly, saying *sed quid ego haec, fessosque optatis demoror undis?* (“but why do I [say] these words and delay you weary men from the water you desire?”, 4.781 [774]). Although this is a very natural portrayal of a woman whose obsession with her past momentarily distracts her from the demands of the present (i.e., the pressing thirst of the Argive army), the phrasing of her break-off<sup>7</sup> closely imitates a much more calculated one by Sinon, who begins to unfold a tale of personal woe but stops short at a crucial point and invites the Argives to kill him, saying *sed quid ego haec autem nequiquam ingrata revolvo? | quidve moror?* (“but why do I vainly unfold these unwelcome words? Or why do I delay?”, *Aen.* 2.101f.).<sup>8</sup> Sinon’s careful rhetoric succeeds in captivating his audience, who “burn” (*ardemus*, 105) to know his story. Hypsipyle captivates her own audience, in whom an *amor* (“desire”, 5.42) arises to hear her tale – but this is only after she has led them to water and, in her second exordium

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<sup>5</sup> Nugent (1996: 49, n. 11) notes this relationship (rightly seeing it as subsidiary to the relationship with Virgil’s Aeneas) but does not comment upon it.

<sup>6</sup> The editions of Hill (1983) and Shackleton Bailey (2003) include seven hexameters after 4.715 that are not included in earlier editions. This creates a discrepancy in line numbers for the end of book 4. I follow the modern system, but provide the older one in square brackets.

<sup>7</sup> The so-called “break-off formula” (*Abbruchsformel*) is found throughout Greco-Roman literature and especially in Pindar (cf. Race 1989), where the poet – like Sinon and Hypsipyle – stops short of telling all of a story partly to tantalize his audience with the implied *praeteritio*: Griffith (1993: 615f.), noting that often “silence is more powerful than any words” (μείζων ἢ σιγὴ παντὸς λόγου γίνεται, Σ *Il.* 17.695a2 ), describes Pindaric break-offs as “a sort of authorial striptease, serving as much to reveal as to hide” (see below, pp. 59-62, for eroticism in Hypsipyle’s portrayal). As with Sinon and Hypsipyle, the apparent spontaneity of Pindaric break-offs conceals a very sophisticated composition.

<sup>8</sup> The specific phrase *sed quid ego haec* recurs only once elsewhere in Roman poetry before Statius (*Ov. Her.* 9.145; the phrase also occurs at *Sil.* 6.110, who probably wrote after Statius). Statius also uses the phrase at *Theb.* 8.65 and a similar one (*sed quid ego?*) at 1.461. His omission of a verb of speaking at 4.781 [774] is not unusual for his style, but it may also serve to underscore the allusion in his phrase: it is not uncommon to emphasize the familiarity of a well-known saying by quoting only part of it (hence, e.g., “the grass is always greener...”).

(5.28-39), transformed herself (metaphorically<sup>9</sup>) from Sinon at Troy to Aeneas at the court of Dido.<sup>10</sup>

Besides the allusion to the obviously unreliable narrator Sinon, the large number and conflicting natures of the other characters to whom Hypsipyle is connected suggest that her story, if not unreliable, may at least be less than straightforward. At times before, during, and after her account of the Lemnian massacre, she echoes the characters not only of Sinon, Aeneas, and the Hypsipyle of Apollonius, but also the protagonist of Euripides' *Hypsipyle*, Simonides' Danaë, and the Virgilian characters Dido, Venus, Andromache, and even Neoptolemus.<sup>11</sup> The sheer number of these allusions makes our interpretation of Hypsipyle's story problematic. So too does the number of intermediaries through which her story is told. The most extreme example of this, involving five narrators, is also a very crucial point in Hypsipyle's account:<sup>12</sup> Venus urges the Lemnian women to kill their husbands and promises them new marriages, but she does so in a dream reported by Polyxo (5.134-40), whose words in turn are related to the Argive heroes by Hypsipyle, in

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<sup>9</sup> I tend to discuss Statian similes as if they were physical transformations of characters in the narrative, both for convenience of expression and because many similes contribute so decisively to the meaning of the poem that they assume nearly the power of actual events in the narrative. Furthermore, if Roman orators (forensic or poetic) sought to bring their words to life in the minds their listeners (Quint. *Inst.* 8.3.62 and 6.2.29-32), then all that they describe – whether narrative events or similes – ought to have obtained nearly equal “reality” in their audience's imagination (see below, p. 110, n. 93, for similes in Ovidian epic as a “mental metamorphosis”). Kytzler (1962) and Luque Lozano (1986) discuss similes in the *Thebaid*, and Vessey (1973) pays attention to the links that various similes create between characters and events in the epic, e.g., between Polynices and Eteocles in their desire for the throne (pp. 140f.) or between Tydeus' bloodthirstiness in battle and in his dying moments (p. 225).

<sup>10</sup> There are several verbal similarities between Hypsipyle's exordium (*Theb.* 5.28-39) and that of Aeneas in his description of the fall of Troy (2.3-13). See Legras (1905: 64), Brown (1994: 114f.), Ganiban (2007: 72-75), and Nugent (1996: 47-52).

<sup>11</sup> Legras (1905: 61-70) and Vessey (1970) provide general overviews of the literary influences on Statius' Hypsipyle and her tale. Euripides' Hypsipyle: Brown (1994: 103f). Danaë: Brown (1994: 104-06). Dido: Gruzeliier (1994), Brown (1994: 100f.), and Ganiban (2007: 86-91). Venus: Vessey (1973:169). Andromache: Brown (1994: 111f.). Neoptolemus: see below, p. 104, n. 78.

<sup>12</sup> Similarly elaborate chains of narrators accompany two other important descriptions of Venus' role on Lemnos (5.61-69 and 271-84).

a scene described by Statius,<sup>13</sup> who is working under the inspiration of Phoebus Apollo (4.649-51).<sup>14</sup> Even if we assume for the moment that Phoebus, Statius, and Hypsipyle are reliable narrators,<sup>15</sup> Venus is almost certainly lying – although the Lemnian women do obtain the promised *faces alias* (“other marriages”, 5.138) when the Argonauts arrive, these short-lived relationships could hardly be called *meliora foedera* (“better unions”, 138) – and, furthermore, Polyxo gives us reason to suspect that the epiphany of Venus she reports was in fact simply a dream.<sup>16</sup>

This final point epitomizes a disputed element of the Lemnian episode (and indeed of the entire *Thebaid*<sup>17</sup>): how are we to understand the role of the gods in mortal affairs? Is Venus’ nocturnal epiphany an aspect of her “demonic influence” over Polyxo,<sup>18</sup> of her “decisively guiding role” as a traditionally epic goddess in the affairs of Lemnos?<sup>19</sup> Or does Venus appear to Polyxo rather as a “personification of her own frustrated lusts”?<sup>20</sup> In examining the role of the gods in the Lemnian episode, we will

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<sup>13</sup> Although there is of course a distinction between Statius, the historical figure, and “Statius”, the persona that Statius-the-person assumed in order to narrate the *Thebaid*, I tend to call both entities “Statius”. This is primarily for the sake of convenience, since I see little chance of confusion between the two usages. But it is also worth noting that in the original performances of the *Thebaid* there would have been a weaker distinction than one might think between Statius-the-person and Statius-the-persona. Since he recited his work before an audience (Juv. 7.82-86, below, pp. 57f., n. 30), whatever persona Statius attempted to assume would have been strongly influenced by his own person: he could play a part like an actor but, unlike a modern author, he still had to look his audience in the eye.

<sup>14</sup> Bacchus may also be involved, as he vows to delay the Argive expedition by guile (*nectam fraude moras*, “I shall weave delay by guile”, 4.677), which suggests that he may somehow be influencing the appearance, and possibly the actions, of Hypsipyle.

<sup>15</sup> An assumption that will turn out to be false for Statius and Hypsipyle (see below, pp. 39-47).

<sup>16</sup> See below, p. 29.

<sup>17</sup> See above, p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> Dominik (1994a: 57). Dominik argues (pp. 57-59) that Venus drives Polyxo mad as a first step in her scheme to punish the Lemnian women for their lack of religious piety.

<sup>19</sup> Feeney (1991: 375), cf. Brown (1994: 119f.). Feeney argues (pp. 375f.) that in presenting Venus as a traditionally powerful and involved deity on Lemnos (i.e., not a mere allegory or personification of an emotion or concept), Statius is not merely following the traditional version of the Lemnian myth (as argued by Schetter 1960: 27), but rather deliberately presenting a traditional narrative to stand in contrast to his more innovative treatment of the gods in the rest of the *Thebaid*.

<sup>20</sup> Vessey (1973: 181). Vessey is working within a critical framework, articulated by Lewis (1936: 49-56), that sees the *Thebaid* as an early milestone in the progression, from antiquity to the Middle Ages, from

discover that the nature of Venus' epiphany to Polyxo is so difficult to determine because both Hypsipyle and Staius are unreliable narrators. That is, Hypsipyle has complete control over the presentation of Polyxo and the dream that she relates, Staius in turn has complete control over Hypsipyle, and, as we will discover, both these narrators are motivated to problematize the nature of the divine influence on Lemnos.

The motivation for both is psychological.<sup>21</sup> The *method* by which they problematize the presence of the gods at Lemnos stems from a constraint lying upon any narrator of a myth or well-known story. Both Hypsipyle and Staius are speaking to an audience (Argive or Roman) familiar with the events they are about to describe.<sup>22</sup> In narratological terms, the "story" of the Lemnian massacre is not theirs to invent or significantly modify – in particular, they are unable to deny the divine influence that strongly shapes the course of the Lemnian massacre. They have control only over the way in which they describe the events – the "text" that they derive from the "story" of Lemnos.<sup>23</sup> For Hypsipyle in particular, this presents a problem. Because she is both an

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fully realized divinities to allegories: the traditional Olympian gods are becoming more like personified abstractions, while the personified abstractions (*Virtus, Pietas, Natura, Clementia*, etc.) are assuming more fully realized characters (see above, pp. 6f.). Feeney (1991: 364-91) provides a detailed discussion.

<sup>21</sup> See below, pp. 39-47.

<sup>22</sup> Staius, and presumably much of his audience, was familiar with the Lemnian episode in *Argonautica* of Apollonius Rhodius (1.609-914) and of Staius' near-contemporary, Valerius Flaccus (2.77-432). See Vessey (1970: 44-48) and Dominik (1997) for comparisons of the three versions. Hypsipyle's audience also seems to be familiar with her story: like Virgil's Aeneas in the presence of Dido, Hypsipyle is able simply by naming herself to capture her audience's attention (Nugent 1996: 47f.).

<sup>23</sup> Narratology is perhaps the most frequently and successfully applied literary theory in contemporary classical criticism (for a bibliography of modern studies, see Jong and Sullivan 1994: 282f.). Rimmon-Kenan (1983) provides a basic introduction to the theory and, in particular, to the distinction between "story" and "text" (pp. 6-8). Her statement that a "story" is "transferable from medium to medium, from language to language, and within the same language" (p. 8) is a particularly good description of Greco-Roman myths. Notwithstanding my use of the terms "story" and "text" here, throughout my thesis I will in general use terms such as story, text, narrative, account, and tale more or less interchangeably. Any loss of precision this may entail is, I think, more than balanced by an increase in readability. But in fact, the use of these synonyms may not result in a loss of precision at all, as suggested by the amusingly (but accurately) all-encompassing definition of "text" in Watson (2003: 166), which ranges from "[p]rinted words" to "[a]nything written, spoken, filmed, painted, or expressed, recorded, or rendered in some way" to "[a]nything that appears to exist."

eyewitness to the events on Lemnos and a storyteller practiced in her account of these events,<sup>24</sup> the narrative she presents is subject to competing demands. As an *eyewitness*, she is limited to describing, from a first-person point of view, only those parts of the story (including any evidence for divine involvement) which she herself observed or learned of second-hand. As a *practiced storyteller* – really an epic poet<sup>25</sup> – she is constrained to present her narrative within the generic conventions of epic, which prescribe among other things an omniscient point of view and a divine apparatus. Thus, when deriving her “text” from the “story” of Lemnos, she must choose which elements will be informed by which of these two narrative styles (i.e., first-person eyewitness or third-person bard).<sup>26</sup> We will see that most instances of divine influence on Lemnos are presented in the epic style, and indeed fall within the set of epic conventions whereby (say) a sunrise is ascribed to the agency of Aurora not to make any important philosophical or theological statement about

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<sup>24</sup> Her frequent retelling of the Lemnian massacre is attested by Lycurgus (5.658-60), Eurydice (6.149-52), Staius (5.48), and Hypsipyle herself (5.615f.). These repetitions have given her narrative particular rhetorical finesse. Observe, e.g., the tantalizing prelude to her tale (5.29-39, in imitation of *Aen.* 2.3-13; cf. Ganiban 2007: 73f.), intentionally cut short (*quid longa malis exordia necto? | et vos arma vocant magnique in corde paratus*, “why am I weaving a long preamble to my sad tale? And your arms and the great enterprise in your hearts are calling you”, 5.36f.) to achieve the desired effect (*cunctis tunc noscere casus | ortus amor*, “then there arose in all of the Argives a desire to know her story”, 5.41f.). She also makes use of apostrophes to divine figures (5.70 and 155f.; cf. Georgacopoulou 2005) and, when beginning to describe the slaughter of the Lemnian men, wonders rhetorically which particular murders she should describe within the larger massacre (5.206f.). Gibson (2004: 157-66) gives an excellent discussion of Hypsipyle’s portrayal as an epic narrator.

<sup>25</sup> As Vessey (1986: 2993) sees it, Adrastus’ second request to hear Hypsipyle’s story (5.43-47) is “an invitation to compose a poem” (cf. Ganiban 2007: 74, n. 13, on the poetic implications of Adrastus’ imperative, *pande*, 5.46). Hypsipyle’s reply to Adrastus’ first request (5.29-36), in turn, is phrased like the opening of an epic (Gibson 2004: 158). In particular, she uses the verb *nectere* (“to weave”, 5.36), which is a common metaphor for poetic composition (see below, p. 50, n. 130) – note that the name for a professional Greek poet, ῥαψωδός, denotes at “song-weaver” (from ῥάπτω and ᾠδή). Brown’s formulation (1996: 102) perspicuously casts Hypsipyle’s story as the after-dinner entertainment at a feast: “After the Argives have been refreshed with water, Adrastus asks Hypsipyle for the refreshment of her story.”

<sup>26</sup> Failure to recognize that Hypsipyle oscillates between these two styles can lead to misinterpretations of the text. Thus, Gibson (2004: 158f.) is able to dismiss the uncertainty over Venus’ involvement at Lemnos that Hypsipyle implies early on (using the verbs *fertur* and *vulgarent*, 5.61-69) by referring to a “more decisive” description of Venus’ actions (5.157f.). In fact, both passages are very strong, but contradictory, characterizations of Venus’ presence on Lemnos, the first recalled by an eyewitness, the second recited by an epic poet. It is the tension between these two narrative styles that is important.

the world or actions of the gods, but primarily to access the heightened tone offered by a divine apparatus.<sup>27</sup> When these instances of divine influence on Lemnos are thus understood, the remaining, eyewitness evidence turns out to be emphatically second-hand or unreliable. So, by presenting the gods on Lemnos as either part of the stylistic requirements of epic poetry or as less than reliable eyewitness information, Hypsipyle is able – while acceding to the definite presence of the gods in the “*story*” of the Lemnian massacre<sup>28</sup> – to problematize their presence in her “*text*”.

### **The divine apparatus**

Let us begin by examining the instances where the gods are presented within the framework of an epic divine apparatus. There are many times when Hypsipyle describes the actions of gods or personified abstractions (e.g. *Furor* or *Discordia*) without giving us any reason to believe that she actually observed them. In describing the marital strife preceding the Lemnian men’s departure, Hypsipyle says (5.71-74):

*mutus Hymen versaeque faces et frigida iusti  
cura tori. nullae redeunt in gaudia noctes,  
nullus in amplexu sopor est, Odia aspera ubique  
et Furor et medio recubat Discordia lecto*

Hymen fell mute, his torches were reversed and care for the lawful couch grew chill. No nights brought joys with their return, there was no slumber in an embrace, harsh Hatred was everywhere and Madness and Strife lay in the midst of the marriage bed.

This description is not meant to be taken literally, but rather as part of an epic convention whereby abstract concepts are personified and given divine status. Thus Jupiter’s famous

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<sup>27</sup> Lucan, for whom Statius possessed great respect (cf. his poem in the poet’s memory, *Silv.* 2.7, with commentary by Vessey 1973: 46-49), had demonstrated that in writing epic nearly all of this divine apparatus could be disposed of.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Dominik (1997: 31-34) on the involvement of Venus in various versions of the Lemnian massacre.

prophecy in the *Aeneid* of the reign of Augustus, during which *Furor* is imprisoned within the gates of War (*Aen.* 1.294-96), or Silius Italicus' description of Hannibal riding into battle, accompanied by *Metus Terrorque Furorque* ("Fear and Terror and Madness", *Pun.* 4.325). *Discordia* is also personified in Augustan and Flavian poetry (Verg. *Aen.* 6.280, 8.702, Valerius Flaccus 7.468, and Sil. *Pun.* 13.586) and, in particular, is present in the account of the Lemnian massacre that Valerius Flaccus gives (2.204). Statius himself frequently personifies *Furor* and *Discordia* (*Odia* are personified only here), generally in the retinue of an Olympian god, along with other personified abstracts.<sup>29</sup> Hypsipyle therefore did not actually see *Odia*, *Furor*, or *Discordia*,<sup>30</sup> but is instead describing the marital strife in Lemnos using well-established epic language.

A similar case may be found in Hypsipyle's description of Sleep (5.197-200):

*cum consanguinei mixtus caligine Leti  
 rore madens Stygio morituram amplectitur urbem  
 Somnus et implacido fundit gravia otia cornu  
 secernitque viros*

Mixed with the darkness of Death, his blood-brother, and dripping with Stygian dew, Sleep embraces the city soon to die and pours dire repose from his inexorable horn, separating out the men.<sup>31</sup>

Every aspect of this description follows conventions found in earlier epic or elsewhere in Statius' own work. Sleep is called the brother of Death by other epic poets: Homer (*Il.* 14.231 and 16.672),<sup>32</sup> Hesiod (*Theog.* 756), Valerius Flaccus (8.74), and Virgil (*Aen.*

<sup>29</sup> E.g., *Theb.* 2.288, 3.424, 4.661, 7.50-52, and 10.558.

<sup>30</sup> Indeed, even if we wished to imagine that these abstractions could be seen by humans, Hypsipyle would not have been in a position to observe them, since she was a virgin (5.81f.), without access to the *thalami secretus honos* ("secret honour of the bedchamber", 5.113). *Odia*, *Furor*, and *Discordia* only make sense, therefore, as abstract concepts personified by Hypsipyle to describe the situation on Lemnos with suitable epic grandeur.

<sup>31</sup> Sc. from the women, who remain awake.

<sup>32</sup> It is interesting to note that Hera finds *Hypnos* staying on Lemnos, called πόλις θείοιο Θόαντος ("the city of godlike Thoas", *Il.* 14.230). Homeric commentators have found no good reason for *Hypnos* to have been on Lemnos other than that the island was a convenient place for Hera to have visited (cf. Janko 1992:

6.278), whose phrase *consanguineus Leti Sopor* (“Slumber, the blood-brother of Death”) Statius doubtless had in mind. Elsewhere in the *Thebaid*, when Sleep drives the chariot of Cynthia, Statius describes his reins as *madidae* (“dripping”, 12.307). The horn of Sleep is mentioned by Valerius Flaccus (8.72), Silius Italicus (10.352), and Statius himself (*Theb.* 2.144 and 6.27). Even the adjectives *implacidus* and *gravis* must be judged in the light of earlier literature, since they stand in opposition to the normal character of Sleep – *iucundus* (“pleasant”, Prop. 1.3.45), *lenis* (“gentle”, Ov. *Fast.* 4.653), *placidissimus deorum* (“the mildest of the gods”, Ov. *Met.* 11.623; cf. Stat. *Silv.* 5.4.1), *pax animi* (“peace for the spirit”, Ov. *Met.* 11.624), and so on.<sup>33</sup> Thus, like *Odia*, *Furor*, and *Discordia*, Sleep is not a real entity observed by Hypsipyle, but rather a literary convention that Hypsipyle exploits to give her tale a suitably epic scope.<sup>34</sup>

Hypsipyle’s descriptions of the actions of Jupiter (5.362-64 and 394f.), Pallas and Mars Gradivus (5.356f.), and Venus and her collaborators (5.158, 192-94, 201-03, 302f., and 445-48) all adhere to the same literary convention.<sup>35</sup> Hypsipyle exploits another convention in apostrophising the *Amores* (5.70) and Enyo and infernal Ceres (5.155f.). Statius makes frequent use of apostrophes to human and divine characters in the *Thebaid*,<sup>36</sup> giving several particularly notable examples in describing the events surrounding Hypsipyle’s tale (the death of Opheltes: 5.501 and 534-40). The apostrophes

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188). Nevertheless, the Homeric association of *Hypnos* with Lemnos may have helped motivate Statius to involve *Somnus* in the Lemnian episode.

<sup>33</sup> Even when not fully personified, as in Verg. *Aen.* 2.268f., sleep (*quies*, “repose”, in this passage) may be *gratissima* (“most pleasant”) – although for Aeneas here, like the Lemnian men, it is not so pleasant, since the savaged corpse of Hector appears to him in a dream (270-79).

<sup>34</sup> Note that, unlike *Odia*, *Furor*, or *Discordia*, Sleep and Death were at least amenable of visual representation, most famously on the Euphronios crater, which depicts the two brothers at the death of Sarpedon (Boardman 1989: pl. 22). The other three personifications have no visual representations of which I am aware.

<sup>35</sup> Gibson (2004: 174, n. 37) lists most of these passages as instances when Hypsipyle displays the omniscience characteristic of an epic narrator.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Georgacopoulou (2005).

in Hypsipyle's account are calculated to stir up emotions – pity in the case of the *Amores* fleeing from Lemnos,<sup>37</sup> horror in the description of Enyo and infernal Ceres – and also to adhere to literary conventions. The apostrophe to the *Amores* (5.70) fits in well with Statius' own practice,<sup>38</sup> while the adjective *tener* (“tender”) is the same one used by Ovid in many descriptions of *Amor* or the *Amores*.<sup>39</sup> The address to Enyo and infernal Ceres (*tu Martia testis Enyo | atque inferna Ceres*, “you were a witness, Martian Enyo, and infernal Ceres”, 5.155f.), on the other hand, brings to mind the repeated second person singular pronouns that are a regular feature of Roman invocations to the gods.<sup>40</sup> Hypsipyle thus lapses into the language of religious ceremonies as she describes one, just as Statius does elsewhere in the *Thebaid*, during Tiresias' necromancy, where he says *tibi, rector Averni, | quamquam infossus humo superat tamen agger in auras | pineus* (“for you, ruler of Avernus, a mound of pines rises high into the air, though it is dug into the soil”, 4.457-59).

### **Eyewitness testimony**

Thus, many of Hypsipyle's references to divine beings are part of the rhetorical apparatus of epic poetry. As for the instances when Hypsipyle speaks of the gods not as an epic poet, but rather as an eyewitness giving a first-hand account of the Lemnian massacre, they may be divided into three not always mutually-exclusive categories:

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<sup>37</sup> Homer's apostrophising of Patroclus before his death serves a similar function (*Il.* 16.20, 584, 744, 754; and esp. 693, 787, 812, and 843).

<sup>38</sup> Of the four other instances in Statius where the *Amores* are mentioned, two are apostrophes (*Silv.* 3.3.131f. and *Theb.* 4.293), one is a direct address from Venus (*Silv.* 1.2.120), and the final instance (*Silv.* 1.2.54) uses the same adjective, *tener*, found in the apostrophe by Hypsipyle.

<sup>39</sup> E.g., *Am.* 2.18.4, 19; 3.1.69, 15.1; and *Ars am.* 1.7.

<sup>40</sup> E.g., Oedipus to Tisiphone, 1.56-87, Adrastus to *Nox*, 1.498-510, Parthenopaeus to Diana, 6.633-37.

explicit or implicit speculation, reported speech, and autopsy (i.e. events actually observed by Hypsipyle).<sup>41</sup>

There are two instances of explicit speculation in Hypsipyle's account, both marked by the same word, *reor* ("I reckon"). Hypsipyle describes the long evening on Lemnos before the massacre, saying (5.177-80):

*tardius umentis noctem deiecit Olympo  
Iuppiter et versum mihi, reor, aethera cura  
sustinuit, dum fata vetant, nec longius umquam  
cessavere novae perfecto sole tenebrae*

More slowly did Jupiter send down night from dewy Olympus and with gentle care, I reckon, hold off the turning sky, until the Fates forbade it, nor have the new shadows ever delayed so long once the sun was finished.

Later, Hypsipyle describes the Lemnian women confessing the massacre to the Argonauts and says *nec superum sine mente, reor, placuere fatentes* ("nor was it without the will of the gods above, I reckon, that their confessions were acceptable", 5.452). In both cases, Hypsipyle uses the word *reor* to acknowledge that she has no way of knowing for certain the mind of Jupiter or the *superi*. Forms of this verb are frequent in the *Thebaid* and – not unexpectedly in a work so full of tragedy and tragic irony – often denote conjectures or assumptions that turn out to be wrong.<sup>42</sup> There are, however, several instances in which characters use *reor*, as Hypsipyle does, merely to mean "I think what I'm saying is likely, but of course I can't be certain."<sup>43</sup> This sense of the verb is rather common in epic, specifically when a character is surmising the thoughts, feelings, or actions of the gods.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Note that "eyewitness" does not imply an unpoetic style, but rather a different approach to narration: first-person rather than third-person, restricted rather than omniscient, personal rather than impersonal. Hypsipyle as an eyewitness is not a matter-of-fact reporter like Julius Caesar in his commentaries, but is instead closer to the messengers of Greek and Roman tragedy – and to Aeneas at the fall of Troy, whose account is modelled on messenger speeches (Austin 1964: 29).

<sup>42</sup> *Theb.* 3.7, 156; 5.280, 348, 682, 687; 7.196; 9.323; 10.702; 11.206, 556, and 691.

<sup>43</sup> *Theb.* 7.11, 264; 10.331; 12.248, and 568.

<sup>44</sup> E.g., Verg., *Aen.* 4.45, 5.56, 7.273, Valerius Flaccus 2.617, 4.741, and Luc. 10.197.

Hypsipyle thus acknowledges in these two passages that, as an eyewitness to the Lemnian massacre, she is not omniscient. With this in mind, let us examine an example of implicit speculation that is of paramount importance to Hypsipyle's presentation of the gods' role at Lemnos. After describing the prosperity of Lemnos before the massacre, she asserts (5.57-60):

*dis visum turbare domos, nec pectora culpa  
nostra vacant: nullos Veneri sacravimus ignes,  
nulla deae sedes; movet et caelestia quondam  
corda dolor lentoque inrepunt agmine Poenae*

It pleased the gods to throw our homes into turmoil, nor were our hearts free from fault: we consecrated no fires to Venus, the goddess had no temple. Even heavenly hearts are stirred in time with indignation and in slow array the *Poenae* creep on.

Despite the lack of conjunctions like *nam* to mark Hypsipyle's logic, the reasoning is clear: although the gods saw fit to destroy Lemnos, the Lemnians themselves were partly to blame because, in failing to worship Venus, they inflamed her anger and roused the *Poenae*.<sup>45</sup> If, however, we do not discount these assertions as the kind of epic licence we have discussed above, we must nevertheless acknowledge that, at this point in Hypsipyle's account, she has given us no reason to believe that she knows the mind or actions of Venus. Why then, when she was so careful to mark out the limits of her

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<sup>45</sup> Dominik (1997: 34, n. 9) rightly identifies the Lemnians' failure to worship Venus as their *culpa*, in contrast to Vessey (1970: 45), who mistakenly explains the *culpa* as the women "listening to and accepting the evil advice of Polyxo". I think that Dominik (1997: 34) goes too far, however, in saying that massacre on Lemnos "is something for which the women are to be pitied rather than condemned." Although he correctly notes that emphasis is laid more on the supernatural causation of the massacre – that is, the punishment carried out by Venus for the "crime" of inadequate worship – than on the crime itself, Romans seem to have been readier than the modern (and Western) world to accept with little pity the imposition of harsh punishments for minor crimes (see below, pp. 88f., on punishment in the Roman arena). Note also that what seems to be an expression of pity by Hypsipyle early on, *o miserae, quibus hic furor additus!* ("wretches, on whom this madness was placed!", 5.33), may not express any pity at all. Earlier in the *Thebaid* Statius calls humans *miseri* (3.552) for their love of augury, but the tone of this passage is more disdainful than pitying: indeed, mankind is a *pravum et flebile vulgus* ("a perverted and pathetic mob", 563). Furthermore, Hypsipyle is so careful to distance herself from the murders on Lemnos that it is doubtful she would risk the implication of complicity that any expression of pity might suggest.

knowledge in two relatively unimportant speculations about divine will (5.177-80 and 452), does she fail to do so here, when she is making assertions about the root cause of the entire Lemnian massacre? She fails to use the formulaic *reor* here because she follows her assertion with a proof of sorts, which constitutes the second type of eyewitness information we will discuss, reported speech.

Immediately after asserting that Venus motivated the Lemnian massacre as punishment for the neglect of her worship on Lemnos, Hypsipyle gives evidence for this claim (5.61-69):

*illa Paphon veterem centumque altaria linquens,  
nec vultu nec crine prior, solvisse iugalem  
ceston et Idalias procul ablegasse volucres  
fertur. erant certe media quae noctis in umbra  
divam alios ignes maioraque tela gerentem                      65  
Tartareas inter thalamis volitasse sorores  
vulgarent, utque implicitis arcana domorum  
anguibus et saeva formidine nupta replisset  
limina nec fidi populum miserata mariti.*

Leaving behind old Paphos and her hundred altars, neither her face nor hair the same as before, she [Venus] is said to have loosened her girdle of marriage and banished her Idalian doves far away. Certainly, there were those who spread it about that the goddess, in the shadow of midnight, bearing different fires and greater weapons, fluttered about their bedchambers in the company of the Tartarean sisters, and that she filled the secret places of their houses with twining snakes and their nuptial thresholds with fierce terror, nor pitied her faithful husband's people.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> This description owes something to Valerius Flaccus' account of the Lemnian massacre. Specifically, Venus' changed aspect and infernal accompaniment recalls her two forms in Valerius: "nor does she [Venus] have only a pleasant aspect... the same goddess... [may be] very like the Stygian maids" (*neque enim alma videri | tantum ea... [104] eadem... [106] virginibus Stygiis... simillima*, 2.102-06). The mention of Venus' "faithful husband" (i.e. Vulcan) recalls Valerius' explanation that the Lemnians, who were the most beloved people of Vulcan (2.94-98), stopped their worship of Venus in sympathy with her husband's cuckoldry (98-100). We may interpret these similarities as the inevitable consequence of shared subject matter; or as Statius' assertion that the divine elements of his Lemnian narrative are "old-fashioned" – unlike the rest of his epic but like all of Valerius' – and must therefore be modelled on the more traditional poet (an argument made by Feeney 1991: 375f.); or, I suggest, as a reinforcement of the second-hand nature of the evidence for the gods on Lemnos – not only does Hypsipyle learn of Venus' actions through hearsay, but that hearsay stems in part from another poet's writing!

Although this would seem to confirm dramatically Venus' motivation of the Lemnian massacre, two details are troubling.<sup>47</sup> First, Hypsipyle stresses that Venus "is said (*fertur*) to have loosened her girdle of love and banished her Idalian doves" from Lemnos. Forms of *ferre* occur quite frequently in Statius denoting reported speech or a well-known story,<sup>48</sup> but usually in the middle of a line and phrase and never so emphatically positioned as it is here, placed in enjambment at the beginning of a line and the end of a long sentence. This trick of placement, common in Latin epic,<sup>49</sup> lends great force to the verb in enjambment – indeed, the only other place where Statius puts such emphasis on *ferre* is in the *Achilleid*, where Odysseus tells Achilles, *fertur in Hectorea, si talia credimus, Ida | electus formae certamina solvere pastor* ("a shepherd on Hector's Ida is said to have been chosen to settle a beauty contest, if we believe such things", 2.50f.). Odysseus' tone is one of incredulity, as is the tone conveyed by Hypsipyle's *fertur*: "Venus loosened her girdle of marriage and banished her Idalian doves far away – or so the story goes."<sup>50</sup> Hypsipyle proceeds to describe the actions of Venus and the Furies in destroying marital love (64-69), using the adverb *certe*, which Statius often uses when

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<sup>47</sup> A third troubling point concerns not what Hypsipyle says, but what she doesn't: she makes no mention of the foul odour with which Venus afflicted the Lemnian women (Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.9.17). In the absence of this clearly supernatural detail, Hypsipyle can present (as we shall see) only hearsay as proof of Venus' role in the massacre.

<sup>48</sup> E.g., *Sily.* 2.3.30; 4.3.150, 6.70; *Theb.* 1.626; 4.258, 282; 6.95, 304; 7.306, 319; 8.242; 11.107, 202; and *Achil.* 2.50.

<sup>49</sup> Of the myriad examples in Statius and other authors, a particularly good one may be found in Hypsipyle's description of the human sacrifice of Polyxo's son (5.159-63), where the verbs *obtulit*, *perfringunt*, and *coniurant* are all strongly emphasized by their placement.

<sup>50</sup> Hypsipyle is here reporting the myth as she expects the Argive heroes to know it (i.e., *fertur* = "so the story goes"), but she may also be alluding to the stories that were told on Lemnos (*fertur* = "so the Lemnian women said"), which she proceeds to describe (5.64-74). Stinton (1990: 242f.) points out that Virgil often introduces incidents or legends with phrases like *fertur*, *ut fama est*, and *ut perhibent*, not as a mark of scepticism, but rather to appeal to the authority of tradition and underline the wondrous nature of a tale (but cf. Horsfall 1990: 59f.). Nevertheless, Hypsipyle's status as an eyewitness to the Lemnian massacre, along with the emphasis laid upon *fertur* (and the following *perhibent*), makes us realize that the incident she marks with *fertur* is not only a traditional and wondrous story, but also something that Hypsipyle *did not actually witness*.

supporting an assertion or giving evidence to corroborate a doubtful story.<sup>51</sup> The evidence Hypsipyle provides, however, constitutes the second troubling detail of this passage, for it is also second-hand information, and emphatically so – *vulgarent* is placed prominently, like *fertur*, at the beginning of a line and the end of a clause, while the action of the sentence is contained within a relative clause of characteristic, which has the effect almost of drawing attention away from Venus and the Furies onto the women who are reporting their actions. It is also significant that Hypsipyle does not say that *all* (or even most) of the women reported seeing Venus, as one might expect to be the case when the goddess had so poisoned conjugal affairs that the Lemnian men felt compelled to go off to war in a very inhospitable Thrace (78-80).<sup>52</sup> All in all, the information given in 5.61-69 strongly suggests that Venus set in motion the events leading to the Lemnian massacre, but the *way* in which that information is presented prompts the reader to be sceptical, or at least to realize that Hypsipyle herself is stressing the second-hand nature of her report.

Hypsipyle uses reported speech at another crucial point in her account, Polyxo's exhortation to the Lemnian women. After rousing all of the women from their homes and gathering them in the citadel of Pallas (5.90-103), Polyxo tells them that she has come at the urging (104) and with the support (109) of the gods to "approve a great matter" (*rem summam... sancire*, 104-06). After a disturbing and less than coherent speech,<sup>53</sup> she

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<sup>51</sup> *Silv.* 1.2.176; 2.6.84; 3.5.14, 5.51, 63; 4.3.4; 5.3.241; *Theb.* 7.292; 12.300, and 812.

<sup>52</sup> It should be noted that, as in the transition between the neglect of Venus' worship and her resulting vengeance (5.61), Hypsipyle does not here make an explicit connection between the loss of marital love and the decision of the men to go off to war. In both cases she instead leaves her audience to choose whether they will draw the connections themselves.

<sup>53</sup> See below, pp. 65-68.

reasserts that the gods are urging and will support the women's (as yet unspecified) actions (132-34), and then reveals her plan by recalling a dream (5.134-40):

*...nec imago quietis*  
*vana meae: nudo stabat Venus ense videri* 135  
*clara mihi somnosque super. 'quid perditis aevum?'*  
*inquit, 'age aversis thalamos purgate maritis.*  
*ipsa faces alias melioraque foedera iungam.'*  
*dixit, et hoc ferrum stratis, hoc, credite, ferrum*  
*imposuit.* 140

Nor idle was the vision during my repose: with a naked sword Venus stood over my sleep, plain for me to see. 'Why are you wasting your lives?' she said, 'Come, rid your bedchambers of estranged husbands. I myself will make other marriages and better unions.' She spoke, and placed this sword – this sword, believe it – on the covers.

Here, then, is the proximate cause of the Lemnian massacre and the strongest assertion of Venus' involvement in the affair – but it is all a dream,<sup>54</sup> and a dream, moreover, that can be reasonably interpreted as a manifestation of Polyxo's own frustrations.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, the primary problem on Lemnos before the massacre is loneliness and frustrated sexual desires (5.70-74 and 81-84), Polyxo's exhortation to the Lemnian women focuses on exactly these feelings (106-08 and 112-16), and the feelings are exploited in turn by "Venus" in Polyxo's dream (136-38).<sup>56</sup> It is notable that this dream comes to a woman

<sup>54</sup> Shackleton Bailey (2003) translates *somnosque super* (5.136) as "plainer than slumber" and explains "slumber" as "a dream" (p. 280, n. 8), following the interpretation of Hill (1983) and Weber (1833; Weber explains, *veriore et efficaciore specie quam somni solent ostendere*, "with a truer and more powerful appearance than sleep usually offers"). This accords well with the regular Virgilian phrase *in somnis*, "in a dream", and would seem to give more weight to Polyxo's assertion that her dream was an authentic visitation from Venus. Nevertheless, *somnosque super* is more naturally read (following Mozley 1928) as "over my sleep", i.e., "over me as I slept" – perhaps a translation of the common Homeric phrase  $\sigma\tau\eta\ \delta'$   $\acute{\alpha}\rho'$   $\acute{\upsilon}\pi\acute{\epsilon}\rho$   $\kappa\epsilon\phi\alpha\lambda\eta\varsigma$  ("and stood over his head", *Il.* 2.20, 59; 23.68; 24.682; *Od.* 4.803; 6.21; 20.32; and 23.4). J. Bernartius (1595, quoted by Hill 1983: 112) explains *somnosque super* as *inter dormiendum* ("during sleep"), the interpretation followed by Melville (1995), and Ross (2004)), which also seems possible, but less pointed.

<sup>55</sup> Vessey (1973: 180f.) and Schetter (1960: 54f.). But cf. Dominik (1994: 58, n. 83).

<sup>56</sup> Vessey (1973: 180) highlights the sexual elements in Polyxo's speech and dream and concludes (p. 181): "It is obvious that Venus, whom Polyxo claims to have seen in a dream, is nothing other than a personification of her own frustrated lusts." See below, chapter three, for a fuller discussion of sexuality in

who is old (*aevi matura*, 5.90) and might therefore be particularly averse to passing “barren years in long lament” (*longis steriles in luctibus annos*, 5.108) without her husband, since she herself will soon be barren, husband or no.<sup>57</sup>

The final significant use of reported speech is also, ironically, the only point at which Hypsipyle observes direct evidence for a divine presence on Lemnos:<sup>58</sup> the appearance of Bacchus to rescue Hypsipyle and her father (i.e., Bacchus’ own son). The scene, like many aspects of Hypsipyle’s tale, directly imitates Aeneas’ account of the fall

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the Lemnian episode. Note that Vessey is not making a Freudian argument here, but is rather pursuing an interpretation of the *Thebaid*, based on the work of Lewis (1936: 49-56), whereby Statius’ poem represents a significant stage in a gradual literary transformation of the Olympian gods from anthropomorphic deities to allegorical concepts (see above, pp. 6f.). In the *Thebaid*, the Olympians begin to fulfil the function of personifications (*Odia*, *Pietas*, *Clementia*, etc.) in representing human concepts and emotions. Thus, the appearance of Venus to Polyxo emblemizes her lust in the same way that the confrontation of Venus and Mars (*Theb.* 3.260-317) emblemizes the struggle between Love and War and the rout of *Pietas* by Tisiphone (11.457-96) emblemizes the defeat of piety by the forces of madness. If, however, we desire to explain Polyxo’s dream as Freud might have, then we must turn to ancient theories. There are many schemes for classifying dreams in the ancient world, none of which completely agree with the others (Kessels 1969 provides a detailed discussion). But nearly all classify some dreams as genuinely divine and predicative, and some as non-predicative and originating from the daytime preoccupations of the dreamer’s mind (Homer’s gates of horn and ivory, *Od.* 19.560-69, display this distinction, although both true and false dreams are attributed to divine agency). Thus, adopting for instance the typology of Macrobius’ *Commentarium in Somnium Scipionis* (written after Statius, in the fifth century AD, but very similar to and apparently sharing a common source with the system of Artemidorus Daldianus’ *Onirocriticon*, written closer to Statius’ day; see Kessels 1969: 395f.), Hypsipyle’s dream is on the surface an *oraculum*, which occurs “when in sleep a parent or another holy and reverend person, or a priest or even a god announces openly what will or will not happen, and what must be done or avoided” (*cum in somnis parens vel alia sancta gravisve persona seu sacerdos vel etiam deus aperte eventurum quid aut non eventurum, faciendum vitandumve denuntiat*, 1.3.8). But, when read in the context of the frustrated sexuality on Lemnos, it appears closer to an *insomnium*, which has no predicative power and “is often caused by distress of the mind or body, or concerning the future: this distress accosts a person as he sleeps in the same way as it had vexed him while awake” (*est enim ἐνύπνιον [= insomnium, cf. 1.3.2] quotiens cura oppressi animi corporisve sive fortunae, qualis vigilantem fatigaverat, talem se ingerit dormienti*, 1.3.4).

<sup>57</sup> Vessey (1973: 179) suggests that “her mental disturbance in part springs from the knowledge that she is aging and that her days of sexual completeness are ending.” The theme of the aging but still-lustful woman is common in Latin poetry (see below, p. 65, n. 57).

<sup>58</sup> The unusual natural occurrences attending the first appearance of Polyxo (5.85-89) and the ominous character of the sacrifices the Lemnian men offer upon their return (174-76) are both, in retrospect, strong indicators of divine influence, but Hypsipyle herself does not explicitly interpret them as such. Statius’ words on the Argives at the end of the funeral games for Opheltes (6.935f.) seem also to apply to the Lemnians and to Hypsipyle herself, eager as she is to call into question the divine influence on Lemnos: *fata patent homini, piget inservare, peritque / venturi praemissa fides* (“the Fates lie exposed to man but he is reluctant to take heed and the foreshown truth of things to come goes to waste”).



*detexit, nato portans extrema Thoanti  
subsidia, et multa subitus cum luce refulsit.  
agnovi: non ille quidem turgentia sertis  
tempora nec flava crinem distinxerat uva:  
nubilus indignumque oculis liquentibus imbrem     270  
adloquitur...*

Then for the first time Thyoneus [Bacchus] revealed himself to us in the night as we trembled, bringing last-minute aid to his son, Thoas, and flashed out suddenly with much light. I recognized him, although he had not adorned his swelling temples with wreaths nor his hair with yellow grapes: cloudy, his eyes streaming with unseemly rain, he spoke to us...

Other details distinguish him from Virgil's Venus:<sup>63</sup> Venus promises to accompany Aeneas all the way to his father's house (*Aen.* 2.620), while Bacchus promises vague help (*Theb.* 5.284) but does not appear again in Hypsipyle's account; Venus seems to have had a relationship with Aeneas before she appears to him at Troy (*non ante oculis tam clara, Aen.* 2.589, suggests that she *has* appeared to him before), while Bacchus may be appearing to Thoas and Hypsipyle for the first time ever (*tunc primum, Theb.* 5.265, which can mean "then for the first time"),<sup>64</sup> Venus is confident and commanding (e.g., *Aen.* 2.604-07), while Bacchus laments the fall of Lemnos and appears more helpless (e.g., *Theb.* 274-77). Ganiban concludes that Bacchus "acts like a victim rather than a helpful divinity with the ability to save his offspring."<sup>65</sup> I would further add that, if the appearance of Venus to Polyxo in a dream may be interpreted as "a personification of [Polyxo's] own frustrated lusts",<sup>66</sup> then the appearance of Bacchus – distressed,

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<sup>63</sup> See Ganiban (2007: 83f.).

<sup>64</sup> Ganiban (2007: 83 and n. 55).

<sup>65</sup> Ganiban (2007: 84).

<sup>66</sup> Vessey (1973: 181).

victimized, and out of character<sup>67</sup> – may be interpreted as an hallucination, a personification of the fear and anguish of Hypsipyle and her father.

Even if this is not the case, Hypsipyle gives us a different reason to be suspicious of Bacchus. In the *Aeneid*, when Venus tells Aeneas that it is the gods who are destroying Troy, she corroborates this assertion by unveiling the divine world to him and actually showing him the gods at their ruinous work (2.601-18), a scene that has won great acclaim from modern commentators.<sup>68</sup> In the *Thebaid*, Bacchus says that Venus is standing at the gates of the city, armed and assisting the Lemnian women: *illa, qua rere silentia, porta | stat funesta Venus ferroque accincta furentes | adiuvat* (“at that gate, where you reckon all is still, Venus is standing deadly and, girt with iron, aiding the women in their frenzy”, 5.280-82). This description echoes the description of Virgil’s Juno:<sup>69</sup> *hic Iuno Scaeas saevissima portas | prima tenet sociumque furens a navibus agmen | ferro accincta vocat* (“here Juno, fiercest of all, is the first to hold the Scaean gates and in her frenzy, girt with iron, she calls her allied troops from their ships”, *Aen.* 2.612-14). But, whereas Juno appears before Aeneas’ very eyes, along with Neptune, Pallas, and Jupiter (*Aen.* 2.608-18), in an “apocalypse of terror” that displays “almost Miltonic vision”,<sup>70</sup> Statius’ Venus is given a perfunctory, three-line description and is not actually visible to Hypsipyle. It is difficult to see why Statius, in a passage so closely modelled on its Virgilian predecessor, should choose to relegate the appearance of Venus

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<sup>67</sup> Ganiban (2007: 84) notes that Bacchus would normally be a cause of the sort of supernatural madness that is infecting Lemnos, and goes on to suggest (but somewhat implausibly) that Statius’ consciously associates Bacchus with the *furor* of the Lemnian women.

<sup>68</sup> E.g., Austin (1964: 234f.).

<sup>69</sup> Ganiban (2007: 85).

<sup>70</sup> Austin (1964: 235).

to a brief second-hand account, unless he intends to cast doubt on the involvement of Venus in the massacre.<sup>71</sup>

So then, the only evidence for Venus' role in the Lemnian massacre turns out to be second-hand information, from characters whose motives we may question. The women who describe Venus' disruptive presence in their marriages (5.64-69) have a vested interest in attributing the massacre to divine causes, thereby deflecting blame from themselves. Polyxo, who asserts that Venus has encouraged the Lemnian massacre (5.134-40), is made particularly vulnerable by her age to a psychological breakdown, which may have manifested itself in a false dream about Venus. Finally, Bacchus, who describes Venus' actual participation in the massacre (5.280-82), does not *show* the scene to Hypsipyle (as one would expect from the parallel in *Aen.* 2.589-623), and may in fact be interpreted as an hallucination. Indeed, when Hypsipyle says that, after putting her father to sea, she returned to the city *multa metu reputans et vix confisa Lyaeo* ("pondering many things in fear and scarcely trusting in Lyaeus [Bacchus]", 5.292), we may suspect that she is describing more than just filial concern – she is in fact recounting a nagging feeling, present even in the midst of the massacre, that Venus' seemingly obvious manipulation of events on Lemnos is in fact open to doubt.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Alternatively, Statius may have feared, proleptically, the judgement of modern critics such as Austin (1964: 235), who condemns Silius Italicus' "near-comic" imitation of *Aen.* 2.589-623 (*Sil. Pun.* 12.703-28) as "a model example of the grotesque banalities of Silius' cardboard epic." But Statius rarely shies away from imitating or even challenging Virgil (cf. e.g., Leigh 2006 and Ganiban 2007), or from risking "grotesque banality" in the pursuit of an arresting presentation.

<sup>72</sup> I believe (as I will discuss below) that Hypsipyle's account of the massacre does not necessarily reflect the exact experiences of Hypsipyle on Lemnos, but is rather a tendentious presentation of events to serve the needs of Hypsipyle in Nemea. That is, the protagonist and "focalizer" (Rimmon-Kenan 1983: 72-85) of the Lemnian episode is Hypsipyle as a girl on Lemnos, but the narrator, whose thoughts and feelings inform her presentation, is Hypsipyle as an older woman in Nemea, removed by two decades from the events she is narrating (*Theb.* 5.466). Nevertheless, *Theb.* 5.292 may also reflect the very natural fears and doubts of Hypsipyle on Lemnos, as a daughter forced to entrust her father to the Aegean in a boat in the middle of the night.

This doubt is explicitly voiced by the women of Lemnos when a report reaches the island that Hypsipyle's father, Thoas, was not killed in the massacre (5.486-88). The women, spurred on by rage and guilt, "demand the crime" (*facinusque reposcunt*, 5.489) that they feel Hypsipyle owes them, and ask, *solane fida suis, nos autem in funera laeta? | non deus haec fatumque?* ("was she alone faithful to her family, while we delighted in death? Was this not all a god and fate?"), 5.491f.).<sup>73</sup> We in turn may ask why Hypsipyle works so hard to cast doubt on the divine impetus for the massacre. This question can be answered in two ways, focussing either on Hypsipyle's own character or on the relationship of the Lemnian episode to the *Thebaid* as a whole. The key to both approaches, however, lies in the death of Opheltes.

### **The death of Opheltes: divinely tragic**

When Hypsipyle leads the Argive army to water, she sets the baby Opheltes down on the ground (4.785-92 [778-85]), where he plays, carefree in the grass (793-800 [786-93]), until he grows tired and falls asleep (5.502-04). A giant serpent, sacred to Zeus (511f.) and enraged by the Nemean drought (518-28), inadvertently grazes Opheltes with the tip of his tail, killing him instantly (538-40).<sup>74</sup> Hypsipyle and the Argives run to

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<sup>73</sup> Although Statius in general omits many verbs, the lack of a verb in the question, *non deus haec fatumque?*, is particularly striking. We may either read *haec* as an accusative and supply some verb like *voluit* (hence, Mozley 1928: "Did not heaven and fate ordain the deed?"), or read *haec* as a nominative, supplying a copula (hence, Shackleton Bailey 2003: "Was it not all a god and fate?"). This second reading, while yielding a more difficult sense, is probably more natural Latin. Furthermore, by directly equating the gods with the events on Lemnos, it brings the question of divine involvement in the massacre into sharp relief.

<sup>74</sup> Opheltes, like Helymus on Lemnos (5.210f., see below, p. 72), awakes just before his death (5.539f.). The first casualty of the Theban war (5.647), like the first murder described in the Lemnian massacre (excluding the human sacrifice preceding the men's return home, 5.159-63), is presented as a rude awakening. More importantly, Opheltes' cries at the moment of his death, *qualia non totas peragunt insomnia voces* ("like the half-finished utterances dreams produce", 5.543), recall the dream of Polyxo in which Venus exhorted and offered her support for the massacre (5.134-40). Thus, the doubtful divine

investigate, Capaneus vanquishes the snake (565-78), and Hypsipyle finds the mangled body of the baby (588-604). There follows a conflict between the Argives (in support of Hypsipyle) and Opheltes' parents (638-709), Hypsipyle is reunited with the two sons she bore to Jason on Lemnos (710-30), and the prophet Amphiaraus reveals that Opheltes has become a god, in whose honour the Argive army must institute the Nemean Games (731-53).<sup>75</sup>

Stattius expends considerable effort to make Opheltes' death horrific, tragic, and imbued with "an almost sentimental pathos."<sup>76</sup> Opheltes, crawling about "in the bosom of the vernal earth" (*in gremio vernaе telluris*; 4.793 [786]), is filled with innocent, carefree joy and wonder (793-800 [786-93]) and is afforded charming comparisons with Olympian gods in their infancies: *sic tener Odrysia Mavors nive, sic puer ales | vertice Maenalia, talis per litora reptans | improbus Ortygiae latus inclinabat Apollo* ("thus was tender Mars in the Odrysian snows, thus the winged boy on the Maenalian heights, in such a way crawling along the shore did naughty Apollo tip the sides of Ortygia", 801-03 [794-96]).<sup>77</sup> This innocence is realistically emphasized, and contrasted with the horror of the snake, by a focus on the grass (*herbae*) in which Opheltes is placed.<sup>78</sup> Opheltes butts

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sanction for the massacre and the death that, as we will see, proves that divine sanction (see below, pp. 38f.) are both located in the psychologically complex realm of dreams.

<sup>75</sup> Opheltes specifically becomes a hero rather than a god (Doffey 1992: 190-93, Miller 2002, and Pache 2004: 95-134 discuss literary and material evidence for the cult of Opheltes). But the distinction was rather flexible by the Roman period (Pache 2004: 113). Stattius is thus either free in his use of *deus* here or, I believe, deliberately echoing Polyxo's pronouncement that *deus hos, deus ultor in iras | apportat* ("a god brings these men, an avenging god brings them to our wrath", 5.133f.). See below, p. 47.

<sup>76</sup> Vessey (1973: 188). Cf. Pache (2004: 106f.) and Brown (1994: 130) on the description of Opheltes, and Dominik (1994: 113) on the helplessness of the baby's father.

<sup>77</sup> Ortygia (an alternative name for Delos) was not anchored to the sea at the time of Apollo's birth and thus could have been tipped by him. It is possible that Apollo is *improbus* as a reference to the Homeric Hymn to him (ll. 70-73), in which Delos fears that the god will be displeased with its appearance and sink it to the bottom of the ocean – the baby Apollo would thus be cruelly teasing the island by tipping its sides.

<sup>78</sup> See Pache (2004: 95-115) discusses the motif of picking flowers (*herbae* in Stattius) in various ancient accounts of Opheltes' death. She shows that this motif is closely linked with falling asleep (cf. *Theb.* 5.502-

the grass with a baby's overlarge head (*nunc faciles sternit procursibus herbas | in vultum nitens*, “now he flattens the yielding grass with his advance, crawling forward on his face”, 4.794f. [787f.]);<sup>79</sup> the snake injures the grass more permanently (*nunc arva gementia radens | pronus adhaeret humo... percussae calidis afflatibus herbae, | qua tulit ora, cadunt*, “now, scraping the groaning fields, on his belly he sticks to the dirt... the grass is struck by his hot breath wherever he turns his face, and dies”, 5.525-28).

Opheltes falls asleep with his hand clutching the grass (*prensa manus haeret in herba*, “his hand sticks in the grass it has clutched”, 504); the snake's encounter with him – an unknowing graze with the tip of its tail (538f.)<sup>80</sup> – leaves blood spattered on the grass ([*Hypsipyle*] *pallida sanguineis infectas roribus herbas | prospicit*, “Hypsipyle paled to look upon grass stained with bloody dew”, 590f.).<sup>81</sup> The full scene of carnage is essentially an obliteration of the baby's body (596-98),<sup>82</sup> which strikes Hypsipyle to the ground and dumb (592-94) – a notable occurrence when compared to her lengthy rehearsal of the horrors on Lemnos. When she finally does speak (608-35, esp. 610-15), her speech is pathetic, more pathetic than anything in her account of Lemnos. Her words are prefaced by a comparison of Hypsipyle to a mother bird finding her nest ravaged by a snake (599-604), a scene tragic both in its own right and in its allusion to the famous

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04) and death. There is also most likely an allusion to the oracular command, recorded in Hyginus (*Fab.* 74.1), not to place Opheltes on the ground before he could walk.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. *Theb.* 5.612.

<sup>80</sup> For the pathos this evokes, cf. Catull. 11.22-24, where the poet's love dies like a flower grazed by a passing plough. The ignorance of the snake, sacred to Jupiter (*Theb.* 5.511), also points to a certain complexity in the god's status as omnipotent (see below, p. 49).

<sup>81</sup> “Bloody dew” again highlights the grass, which would usually display watery dew. There may also be an allusion to Opheltes' extreme youth: two Greek words for dew, ἔρση and δρόσος, may both refer metaphorically to young animals (*LSJ s.v.* “ἔρση” II and “δρόσος” II). Virgil (*Aen.* 12.339f.) and Lucan (9.698) both use the image of bloody dew and Aeschylus, in describing the death of Agamemnon (*Ag.* 1390), paints a picture very much like what Statius may have had in mind for Opheltes' death, although it is Clytaemnestra, not any grass, who is stained with blood (βάλλει μ' ἔρεμνῆι ψακάδι φοινίας δρόσου, “he struck me with a black rain of bloody dew”).

<sup>82</sup> Vessey (1973: 189) calls this description “somewhat grotesque” and the culminating phrase, *totumque in vulnerē corpus*, “a mannered exaggeration.” He understates.

omen on Aulis that declared the fall of Troy (*Il.* 2.308-29).<sup>83</sup> In the face of all this, it is unsurprising that Opheltes' death causes the Argives to mourn (5.637).<sup>84</sup> It also seems clear that Statius intended these events to have great emotional potency.<sup>85</sup>

This potency is significant to the question of divine impetus for the Lemnian massacre because the strong emphasis on the tragedy of Opheltes' death is accompanied by an equally strong emphasis on its divine origin. Statius himself implicates divine powers in Opheltes' death (the *Parcae*, 4.787 [780], and the "gods" in general, 5.501 and 534f.), a judgment supported by the prophecy concerning the baby's death (5.645-49; cf. his divine name, Archemorus, 4.726 [719]; 5.609, 739; 6.517; and 7.93) and echoed by Hypsipyle in her lament (*qui... dei*, 5.610f., and *nosco deos*, 620). The snake, supernatural in its very size (5.513-17 and 549-54; cf. 529-33)<sup>86</sup> is sacred to Jupiter (505, 511-13, and 576-78).<sup>87</sup> Bacchus is also involved, since it is his drought that caused the snake to become *saevior* ("fiercer", 520), wander about in search of water, and ultimately kill Opheltes. Amphiaraus, Apollo's priest, attributes the events to his own god (743-45). Finally, Hypsipyle gives a complex analysis of the causes of Opheltes' death (620-28):

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<sup>83</sup> The bereavement of mother birds forms the basis of several similes of great pathos in Greco-Roman poetry: *Od.* 16.216-19, 19.518-23, *Aesch. Ag.* 48-54, and *Verg. G.* 4.511-15; cf. *Ov. Ars am.* 2.66 and *Met.* 8.213f. on Daedalus and Icarus. Statius makes a highly effective, if unrealistic, innovation on this tradition: where the other birds twitter or cry out (and this is usually the basis for the simile), Statius' mother bird is struck dumb by the silence of her nest. Like the mother bird, Hypsipyle, who so often told her Lemnian tale to her infant charge (5.615f.), now has nothing to say and no one to say it to.

<sup>84</sup> See below, pp. 55f.

<sup>85</sup> It is of course impossible actually to know Statius' intention in any scene (or the reaction of his audience, which I will discuss at length in the next two chapters). But this should not preclude attempts, however speculative. Furthermore, because Statius recited much of his epic before a live audience, discussion of authorial intention and audience reaction seems to be more relevant than in the case of modern literature (see above, p. 12, n. 42; for the recitation of epic in first century Rome and Statius' deep concern with the reception of his recitations, see Markus 2000: esp. 163-68).

<sup>86</sup> Giant snakes appear in divine circumstances in *Verg. Aen.* 2.199-227 and especially *Ov. Met.* 3.31-94, upon which our passage is based (cf. Legras 1905: 72f. and Brown 1994: 147f.).

<sup>87</sup> It also seems to have links to the underworld, as suggested by the epithet *terrigena* ("earthborn", 5.506), which alludes to the generally chthonic and sinister nature of snakes in Greco-Roman poetry (see, e.g., Brown 1994: 146). This collocation of heavenly and infernal forces recalls Venus' association with the Furies in the Lemnian massacre. See Feeney (1991: 344-64) for a discussion of the relationship and struggle in the *Thebaid* between the realms of heaven, earth, and the underworld.

*nosco deos: o dira mei praesagia somni  
 nocturnique metus, et numquam impune per umbras  
 attonitae mihi visa Venus! quos arguo divos?  
 ipsa ego te (quid enim timeam moritura fateri?)  
 exposui fati. quae mentem insania traxit?  
 tantane me tantae tenuere obliviae curae? 625  
 dum patrios casus famaeque exorsa retracto  
 ambitiosa meae (pietas haec magna fidesque!),  
 exsolvi tibi, Lemne, nefas.*

I recognize the gods: ah, the dire presages of my sleep and my night-time fears and she who never through the shadows appeared to me in my shock without harm – Venus! What gods do I accuse? It was I myself (for what should I, soon to die, fear to admit?) who exposed you to the Fates. What madness drew my mind away? Could such forgetfulness of such a charge seize me? While I was recounting the misfortunes of my homeland and the boastful source of my fame (piety this, and great loyalty!), I paid to you, Lemnos, the sin I owed.

### **Unreliable narrators: Hypsipyle?**

The beginning of this passage (5.620-22) explains why Hypsipyle chooses to cast doubt on the role of the gods in the Lemnian massacre: she has been having bad dreams. Venus has appeared to her in the night, uttering or showing fearful prophecies, presumably of Opheltes' death. Confronted with these presages, contemplating the loss of the child she loved like a mother (632f.; cf. 608-10), Hypsipyle might naturally react with denial. In order to rationalize the denial of her dreams' divine origin, however, she had to minimize the role of the gods – Venus, in particular – in the Lemnian massacre itself: if Venus was indeed as responsible for the events on Lemnos as she is portrayed in myth, then Hypsipyle, responsible for the only male survivor of the massacre, could reasonably expect the goddess to threaten and ultimately punish her with a substitute death.<sup>88</sup> It is

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<sup>88</sup> As Vessey (1973: 189) puts it, the death of Opheltes “re-established the equilibrium of fate”. The punishment of Hypsipyle for failing to murder her father parallels the punishment of the Danaid Hypermestra, who failed to kill her husband in the general massacre and, according to one tradition

useful here to compare the analysis by Nugent (1996: 69) of Hypsipyle’s tale in terms of “the language of the unconscious”. Nugent discusses the problems in believing what Hypsipyle says about the fate of her father and concludes that the point is the “problematization” of the question, our inability to decide conclusively whether Hypsipyle did in fact rescue her father or perhaps killed him. Hypsipyle “knows” – because the myth says so<sup>89</sup> – that she rescued her father and that Venus caused the massacre, but her psychological stress (here, the fear of losing Opheltes) is so great that she unconsciously calls these facts into doubt. It is not until she sees the full, pathetic horror of Opheltes’ death, a death suffused with divine influence, that she completely accepts the reality and divine origin of the Lemnian massacre.

Nevertheless, Hypsipyle seems immediately to deny these divine origins (5.622-24). But comparison with two similar passages in the *Thebaid* shows that this is not actually a denial, but rather a focussing of thought from the general to the specific. After Menoeceus sacrifices himself in an attempt to preserve Thebes, his mother blames the gods (10.795) and the sons of Oedipus (10.798-801) for his death, but then proceeds to say, *quid superos hominesve queror? tu, saeve Menoeceu, | tu miseram ante omnes properasti extinguere matrem* (“Why do I complain of gods or men? You, cruel Menoeceus, you more than anyone hastened to destroy your wretched mother”, 10.802f.). With these words she does not deny the divine impetus for Menoeceus’ death – in fact,

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(preserved by Pausanias, 2.19.6 and 21.1) was brought to trial by her father, which seems to have been dramatized in Aeschylus’ lost *Danaids* (*TrGF* fr. 43-46; cf. Winnington-Ingram 1961: esp.148-50, who argues that the longest extant fragment, fr. 44, a speech by Aphrodite on the power of sexual love, was spoken *after* the trial and not in Hypermnestra’s defence at the trial, as is usually assumed). The Danaids, as we recall, were one of the two mythical exempla that Polyxo invoked in exhorting the Lemnian women to their crime (*Theb.* 5.117-19).

<sup>89</sup> Roscher (1886-90: 805.38-64) discusses the mythological sources. Roscher does not dismiss the statement by Herodotus (6.138) that Thoas is killed along with the other Lemnian men, as Nugent (1996: 56) asserts, but in fact satisfactorily explains it as a condensation of a variant (Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.6.4) in which, after the massacre, the Lemnian women discover and kill Thoas (Roscher 1886-90: 6.805.51-64).

she proceeds to attribute his death to *sacra insania* (“accursed madness”,<sup>90</sup> 804) – nor does she relieve Polynices and Eteocles of guilt. Instead, she moves the focus of the lament from general considerations to a specific and believable anger against Menoeceus. A similar situation occurs in Argia’s lament for her husband, Polynices. Holding his dead body in her arms, she complains that she often warned Polynices against going to war (12.333-35; cf. 2.332-52), but then turns to blame herself, saying, *quid queror? ipsa dedi bellum maestumque rogavi | ipsa patrem ut talem nunc te complexa tenerem* (“why do I complain? I myself gave you your war and I myself made entreaty of my sad father – and now I hold you, so frail”, 336f.). Again, Argia does not deny her husband’s guilt in going to war and his death, but rather focuses on her remorse for petitioning her father, Adrastus, on Polynices’ behalf (3.678-710). Thus, when Hypsipyle says, *ipsa ego te... exposui fatis* (5.622f.) and *exsolvi tibi, Lemne, nefas* (628), she does not deny the role of the gods in Opheltes’ death. Rather, she turns to focus on what is at hand – the dead Opheltes, her guilt over leaving him unsupervised, and the constant fear of the crime she owes to Lemnos (cf. 5.489), the crime she has now paid. This progression of thought from divine causation to human guilt and sorrow is a poignant manifestation of the theme, pervading the *Thebaid*,<sup>91</sup> of divine cruelty resulting in human suffering. It echoes the progression of the Lemnian women from infernally (and celestially) possessed murderesses to godforsaken, grieving widows. It also prefigures the end of the epic, in which the celestial and infernal powers withdraw from the poem and the human

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<sup>90</sup> Vessey (1973: 124) points out that, while Menoeceus’ mother sees *sacra insania* in her son’s death, Statius, using the other meaning of *sacer*, calls Menoeceus *sacer aspectu* (“sacred in his aspect”, 10.757). To say, however, that the mother shows a “total misunderstanding of the situation” (p. 124) does not adequately acknowledge the importance of female lament as a serious challenge to the social order of the *Thebaid* (Markus 2004).

<sup>91</sup> Dominik (1994a: 1-75).

characters (Polynices, Eteocles, and the widows of the Argive heroes) are left to fulfill the will of the Fates and the designs of the gods – to fight, die, kill, and grieve – on their own.<sup>92</sup>

### **Unreliable narrators: Statius?**

Hypsipyle, then, casts doubt on the divine causation of the Lemnian massacre out of fear for Opheltes, whose divinely-motivated death ironically leaves Hypsipyle mourning on a very human plane. Statius undergoes a similar process of fear and then mourning in his narration of the *Thebaid* as a whole, which suggests a second reason for the obfuscation of the gods' involvement in the Lemnian massacre. Statius delays the climactic fight of Polynices and Eteocles for eleven books and, although delay is standard procedure for building suspense in Greco-Roman epic,<sup>93</sup> this has led to frequent complaints that the *Thebaid* is episodic, digressive, and tedious.<sup>94</sup> Recent scholarship, however, has shown that Statius carefully manipulates the delays in his narrative to achieve various effects:<sup>95</sup> to develop the poem's preoccupation with the fragmentation of authority,<sup>96</sup> to underscore the tension between Callimachean and epic influences on the *Thebaid*,<sup>97</sup> or to create horror and subvert the Virgilian ideal of *pietas*.<sup>98</sup> I would suggest that, interpreted as a natural reaction to the horrific nature of Statius' subject matter, the

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<sup>92</sup> Feeney (1991: 355-58).

<sup>93</sup> See McNelis (2007: 76f.), who cites the postponement of Lavinia's marriage to Aeneas in the *Aeneid* and of the battles between Achilles and Hector in the *Iliad* and Pompey and Caesar in Lucan's *Bellum Civile*.

<sup>94</sup> E.g., Dimsdale (1915: 459), Williams (1978: 198), and Ogilvie (1980: 233). Butler (1909: 210-13) is perhaps the most charitable, asserting that Statius "fails as an epic writer, but he fails gracefully" (213).

<sup>95</sup> See Vessey (1973: 165-67) for a discussion of the patterns of delays in the *Thebaid*.

<sup>96</sup> Feeney (1991: 339-40), who suggests, sensibly, that "if a poet expends this much effort on calling attention to the eddies and drifts of his narrative, it seems churlish to reproach him for not proceeding briskly to the point" (339-40).

<sup>97</sup> McNelis (2007: 86-93).

<sup>98</sup> Ganiban (2007: 153-75).

delays of the *Thebaid* are partly motivated by the author's fear (real or feigned) of bringing his poem to its necessary climax.<sup>99</sup>

Statius and his audience know how the war at Thebes must end,<sup>100</sup> but, just as Hypsipyle seems reluctant to relive the Lemnian massacre for the Argive army (5.28-39), so Statius seems reluctant to reach the final moment of fratricide. Indeed, when the moment comes and goes, Statius seems relieved and prays – counterproductively for a poet desiring lasting fame (12.810-19) – that the battle be forgotten by future generations (11.578f.).<sup>101</sup> At the outset of the epic, Statius depicts himself as attacked by poetic inspiration (*Pierius menti calor incidit*, “Pierian fire falls upon my mind”, 1.3), a slave to his Muse (*unde iubetis | ire, deae?*, “where do you command me to begin, goddess?” 3f.), pursued by Hippomedon (*urguet... turbidus Hippomedon*, “stormy Hippomedon is upon me”, 43f.), and forced to experience with grief and horror the deaths of Parthenopaeus and Capaneus (*plorandaque bella protervi | Arcados atque alio Capaneus horrore canendus*, “I must mourn the warfare of the rash Arcadian and sing with a different horror of Capaneus”, 44f.).<sup>102</sup> In the face of this relentless assault, Statius – like Virgil's

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<sup>99</sup> Note that I am not referring to the challenges involved in *ending* the *Thebaid* (e.g., the “tension between the closing of [the] text and the struggle to keep it open” identified by Dietrich 1999: 43), which are generic, structural, or thematic in nature (for the ending of the *Thebaid* see Braund 1996, Dietrich 1999, Lovatt 1999, Pagán 2000, and Dominik 2003). Rather, I mean a more straightforward fear of speaking about a fratricide – although, as we will see in the next two chapters, the general attitude towards violence in the *Thebaid* is more nuanced than simple fear.

<sup>100</sup> Knowledge like this, external to the world of the *Thebaid*, is sometimes available even to characters within the epic (Feeney 1991: 341).

<sup>101</sup> We may compare here Lucan's irony-laden apostrophe to Julius Caesar, promising that Caesar's deeds will live on, enshrined in his epic (9.980-86). Lucan realizes that his fame and Caesar's are inextricably linked and that the endurance of his work entails prolonging the memory of Caesar the tyrant: *quantum Smyrnaei durabunt vatis honores, | venturi me teque legent; Pharsalia nostra | vivet, et a nullo tenebris damnabimur aevo* (“as long as fame of Smyrna's bard [Homer] endures, future generations will read me and you; our Pharsalia will live, and we shall be doomed to the shadows by no age”, 984-86). Statius faces the same dilemma but, rather than resorting to dark irony, attempts to separate the future of his work from its subject – he wishes (vainly) that his poetic fame will outlive the sin that created it.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Markus (2003: 434).

Juno or Statius' own Bacchus in the face of Fate (*Aen.* 7.313-15 and *Theb.* 4.677)<sup>103</sup> – is able only to delay the inevitable.

This delay is most overt in Nemea, a bold (or, for some critics, awkward<sup>104</sup>) three-book digression from the main narrative. Set just before the beginning of the Theban war in earnest, tonally and generically isolated from the main action of the *Thebaid*,<sup>105</sup> inhabited by nymphs, unwarlike Bacchus,<sup>106</sup> and the female Hypsipyle, and narrated with the aid of Statius' favourite divine support, Phoebus Apollo,<sup>107</sup> the Nemean episode is the place where we might expect Statius to make his strongest attack against epic convention

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<sup>103</sup> As Ganiban (2007: 99f.) points out, Bacchus explicitly attributes the onset of the Argive army to Juno's influence (4.671f. and 7.156) and expresses no knowledge of Jupiter (or the Fates') role in the war. However, the Bacchus portrayed in the Lemnian episode unfolds a complex of divinities responsible for the massacre: the *Parcae* as the ultimate and remote agents, Jupiter as the agent accessible to Bacchus' petitions, and Venus as the proximate divine cause (5.274-77). It is therefore not inconceivable that, although Bacchus does not explicitly acknowledge Jupiter or the Fates as motivators of the Theban war, he nevertheless realizes their role. This in fact seems likely, given that Bacchus sets out to *delay* the Theban war, not stop it, as he might be expected to attempt if Juno were his only rival.

<sup>104</sup> E.g., Williams (1978: 198).

<sup>105</sup> Vessey (1973: 165) comments on the coolness of Nemea (4.646) as a contrast to the "burning ardour of the Argives". McNelis (2007: 86-93) examines the Callimachean nature of Statius' Nemea.

<sup>106</sup> Bacchus' entrance into Nemea is modelled on Virgil's Juno (*Aen.* 7.286-322; cf. Ganiban 2007: 97f.). But, whereas Juno is *saeva* (7.287) and calls on Allecto (7.331) to do her bidding, Bacchus is *marcidus* ("languid", 4.652; cf. 4.667, *quamquam ore et pectore marcet*, "although his face and heart were languid") and relies on nymphs (4.684-6). Note that, although *marcidus/marcet* probably denotes tipsiness (Ganiban 2007: 98, n. 10), the pointed juxtaposition in *marcidus edomito bellum referabat ab Haemo | Liber* ("Liber was bringing back his battle array languidly from conquered Haemus", 4.652) also emphasizes that Bacchus is only *posturing* as a martial god, *contra* Ganiban (2007: 99 and n. 11), whose assertion that in Euripides' *Bacchae* (302-05) Bacchus "instils fury on the battlefield" seems to be based on a misreading of *μανία* (305) as "fury". The word in fact refers to the *panic* (φόβος, 304) that accosts soldiers before they even begin to fight: Ἀρεῶς τε μοῖραν μεταλαβὼν ἔχει [Διονύσος] τινά· | στρατὸν γὰρ ἐν ὀπλοῖς ὄντα κἀπὶ τάξεσιν | φόβος διεπτόησε πρὶν λόγχης θιγεῖν· | μανία δὲ καὶ τοῦτ' ἐστὶ Διονύσου πάρα, "and Dionysus possesses some share of Ares: for an army in its battle-gear and formation, may be struck by panic before it touches a javelin. Even this madness comes from Dionysus." For Statius, Bacchus can be a god of brawls and of horrible savagery (e.g., 4.661-63 and 5.261-64; cf. Vessey 1973: 168), but not of full-blown war (contrast Bacchus' retinue at 4.657-63 with the House of Mars at 7.40-63). Indeed, Bacchus eventually collapses into "inglorious" (*inhonorus*, 7.151) petulance, with a tearful appeal to Jupiter (7.145-95, esp. 145-54, and 193-95) modelled on Venus' complaints to her father in the *Aeneid* (1.223-56, esp. 223-29, and 254-56); cf. Ganiban (2007: 106f.).

<sup>107</sup> *Quis iras | flexerit, unde morae, medius quis euntibus error, | Phoebae, doce: nos rara manent exordia famae* ("who diverted their wrath, whence the delays, what the wandering in the middle of their march, Phoebus, tell: for us only the scattered beginnings of the story remain", 4.649-51). Cf. *Silv.* 1.5.3, 6.1; 5.1.13, 3.5; and *Achil.* 1.9. The substance of Statius' appeal to Phoebus emphasizes the dilatory nature of the Nemean episode, while the appeal itself marks a strong authorial intervention into the poem, drawing attention to the narrative process and perhaps encouraging the audience to question the received version of the Theban story.

and the strictures of the Theban myth, where the tension should be greatest between the story of the Theban war known to Statius' audience and the narrative that Statius provides. Several scholars have noted the dilatory function of the Nemea,<sup>108</sup> but the function of the events on Lemnos within the Nemean episode remains unappreciated.

I believe that Statius calls into question the role of the gods in the Lemnian episode so as to call into question their role in the *Thebaid* at large. When the Lemnian women ask, at the culmination of Hypsipyle's account, *non deus haec fatumque?* ("Was this not all a god and fate?", 5.492), Statius might just as well be asking this question of the entire Theban war. That is to say, if Venus, Jupiter, and Fate<sup>109</sup> were not responsible for the massacre on Lemnos, then Jupiter, Fate, and the *Pierius calor* that has assaulted Statius (1.3) may not have power over the outcome of the Theban war. Indeed, after laying out (1.197-302) and reiterating (3.218-59) his plan for the destruction of Thebes,<sup>110</sup> Jupiter largely disappears from the poem during the Nemean episode.<sup>111</sup> Instead, the Olympians at Nemea and Lemnos are Bacchus, the patron god of Thebes, Venus, who attempted (immediately after the reiteration of Jupiter's martial intentions in book 3) to prevent Mars from inciting war against Thebes (3.260-91), and Apollo, whom Statius has invoked specifically to narrate the diversion of the Argive army's purpose (4.649-51). Jupiter, when he does appear, delays the beginning of the Lemnian massacre by holding back nightfall (5.177-80), delays the advent of the Argonauts to Lemnos by

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<sup>108</sup> Vessey (1973: 165-67), Brown (1994 *passim*), and McNelis (2007: 86-93).

<sup>109</sup> The proximate (Venus) and ultimate (Jupiter and the *Parcae*) motivators of the Lemnian massacre according to Bacchus (5.271-77).

<sup>110</sup> For Jupiter's control over the events of the *Thebaid*, see Dominik (1994a: 4-33, esp. 25-29).

<sup>111</sup> Is it possible that Statius has Bacchus blame Juno for the Argives' march on Thebes (4.671f.) not to suggest that Bacchus is ignorant of the "larger cosmic plan" motivating the Theban war (Ganiban 2007: 99), but rather to obscure this very cosmic plan – the plan of Jupiter and the dictates of Fate – from his own audience?

stirring up a storm (361-421), inadvertently assists in the death of Opheltes (538f.),<sup>112</sup> which nearly diverts the Argives into a war against the Nemeans (650-98, esp. 691-98), and delays killing Capaneus (583-87).<sup>113</sup> At the end of the Lemnian episode, with Jupiter acting only to effect delays, with the narrative co-opted by a female (i.e., unwarlike)<sup>114</sup> narrator and inspired by Statius' patron god Apollo, with gods friendly to Thebes motivating events, and with a narrative of the Lemnian massacre that calls into question the traditional story of the massacre as motivated by *deus fatumque* (492), it seems just possible that the delay at Nemea may become permanent, that the flow of the epic – which has been reduced at Nemea to “a single secret fount”<sup>115</sup> – may never widen again in Statius' narrative to reach Thebes.

This of course cannot be. Opheltes perishes in an episode replete with divine influence, the Argive heroes go to war against the snake with a “flash of arms” (*armorum radios*, 5.557), and Amphiaraus decrees that funeral games be held in honour of Opheltes, now Archemorus, “Beginner of Doom”.<sup>116</sup> The funeral games of the sixth book constitute only the most superficial of fulfillments to Amphiaraus' prayer that the Theban war be postponed by further delays:<sup>117</sup> instead, they signal a return to epic convention,<sup>118</sup>

<sup>112</sup> The snake that unknowingly kills Opheltes is sacred to Jupiter, the “Inachian Thunderer” (5.511f.).

<sup>113</sup> Jupiter's only appearance in his idiomatically Statian role as cosmocrator (cf. Dominik 1994: 25-29) is when Bacchus says that he has granted Venus the *infandum honorem* (“unspeakable honour”, 5.277) of causing the Lemnian massacre. Nevertheless, Bacchus' testimony here is suspect, as we have seen (above, pp. 30-33).

<sup>114</sup> It is of course somewhat problematic to label women as “unwarlike” during the Lemnian episode. See the discussion of epic and elegiac themes on Lemnos, below, chapter 3.

<sup>115</sup> Brown (1994: 21), who sees the Nemea episode (*Theb.* 4-6) as an excursion into the un-epic world of Statius' *Silvae*: “Epic's flow is reduced and inspiration derives from a single secret fount; we are now, as it were, *inter Silvas*.”

<sup>116</sup> 5.739 (cf. 4.726 [719] and 5.647). Mozley (1928: 560) explains the name's etymology (ἀρχή and Μόρος). A more ingenious interpretation (Feeney 1991: 339 and McNelis 2007: 93) sees Archemorus as the “Originator of Delay” (ἀρχή and *mora*).

<sup>117</sup> *Pace* McNelis (2007: 93).

<sup>118</sup> Cf. the funeral games for Patroclus (*Il.* 23) and Anchises (*Aen.* 5) and the discussions of Vessey (1973: 209-29) and Lovatt (2005).

they form a link to the obsequies for the dead in the twelfth book, and, in fact, they allude in miniature to the epic deaths of each of the Argive heroes in the second half of the book.<sup>119</sup> Indeed, Amphiaraus’ prayer for further delays signals by its very wording that the Nemean challenge to the epic flow of the narrative has ended: *utinam plures innectere pergas*, | *Phoebe, moras* (“would that you might continue to weave more delays, Phoebus”, 5.743f.) acknowledges, by vainly wishing for the opposite, that the delays requested of Apollo by Statius (*unde morae... Phoebe, doce*, “tell, Phoebus, whence the delays”, 4.650f.), woven in actual fact by Bacchus (*nectam fraude moras*, “I shall weave delays by deceit”, 4.677), and extended by Hypsipyle’s tale, have run their course. And the end of these delays constitutes an affirmation of the power of *deus fatumque* (492) over the narrative. Amphiaraus’ assertion that the events at Nemea were divinely controlled (735-40) and that Opheltes is now a god (*deus iste, deus*, “a god he is, a god” 751) echoes and confirms Polyxo’s claim that the Lemnian massacre was divinely ordained (131-40, esp. 133f.: *deus hos, deus ultor in iras | apportat*, “a god brings these men, an avenging god brings them to our wrath”) and perhaps recalls – with its chanting anaphora and proximity to the wish that Phoebus *plures innectere... moras* (743f.) – Bacchus’ own words at the beginning of the Nemean episode, after he has resolved to “weave delays”: *illum, illum tendite campum, | tendite, io comites* (“there, there to that field hasten, come my comrades, hasten”, 4.677f.). The Nemean episode, then, is linked at the beginning, middle, and end by a preoccupation with delay and with the divine. Delay fails in the face of the divine, and the epic narrative, co-opted for a time by a narrative of female violence, runs the usual course of male violence that ends with

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<sup>119</sup> See Vessey (1973: 209-29).

women once again taking centre stage, this time in their traditional role of mourning the fallen.<sup>120</sup>

### **The death of Opheltes: tragically divine (Epilogue)**

This chapter has dealt with Hypsipyle's reasons for problematizing the role of the gods in her account of the Lemnian massacre, and it is therefore her interpretation of the cause of Opheltes' death that has primarily concerned us. Nevertheless, the complex web of supernatural influences on this death is rarely discussed and merits a brief examination. Hypsipyle's initial reaction upon finding Opheltes' body is to blame Venus (5.620-22), who presumably desired the baby's death as a substitute for Thoas, whom Hypsipyle had rescued from Lemnos. Bacchus desired Opheltes' death to motivate the Nemean Games that delayed the Argives from arriving at Thebes.<sup>121</sup> It is notable that the interests of Venus and Bacchus coincide in the death of Opheltes, since the two were at such odds during the Lemnian massacre.<sup>122</sup> It is also notable that Jupiter, who rages against the delay caused by the events at Nemea (7.1-4), is involved in the death of Opheltes (and thus the ensuing delays) through the snake sacred to him (5.511-13). The snake, however, kills Opheltes inadvertently (5.539), and it seems likely that Jupiter

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<sup>120</sup> For the feminine ending of the *Thebaid*, see Braund (1996) and Dietrich (1999).

<sup>121</sup> Ganiban (2007: 101) points out that Bacchus is only explicitly identified as responsible for the drought, not for the subsequent delays in books 5-7, which "seem more the product of chance" (p. 101, n. 26). Moreover, because Bacchus causes the Argive army to encounter Hypsipyle (4.746 [739]), who leads them to water he "essentially ends his own delay roughly one hundred lines after it has started (101)". It should be noted, however, that if the drought had resulted in the death of the Argive army, this would not have been a "delay", but rather an end to the Theban war. Also, the fact that Bacchus causes a drought immediately after saying *nectam fraude moras* (4.677) does not necessarily mean that the drought is the *fraus* he intends. Indeed, the various complexities that follow the drought, and which delay but do not end the Theban war, may be more properly described as *fraus*.

<sup>122</sup> Layers of complexity are added, however, when we remember that both Bacchus and Venus were notably out of character during the Lemnian massacre (e.g., 5.61, 264f., and 282f.), and recall the richly allusive scene where Bacchus asserts Venus' presence at Lemnos (see above, p. 31, n. 60). Statius may not have been above relishing the further twist that Bacchus and Venus generally join forces to create, not destroy, offspring.

unknowingly supplied the brute force for Bacchus' guileful delay of the war at Thebes (cf. 4.677, *nectam fraude moras*, "I shall weave delays by deceit"). Although Bacchus' delay of Jupiter's plan is modelled on Juno's delaying of fate in the *Aeneid*,<sup>123</sup> Jupiter's unwitting complicity in the death of the baby Opheltes is nevertheless a disturbing example of Statius' portrayal of Jupiter as aloof and inactive,<sup>124</sup> characteristics that culminate in Jupiter's permanent disappearance from the poem before the final duel of Polynices and Eteocles.<sup>125</sup>

The role of the *Parcae* in the death of Opheltes (*[Hypsipyle] miserum vicino caespite alumnum | (sic Parcae volvere) locat*, "Hypsipyle places her wretched charge on the sod nearby (so the *Parcae* ordained)", 4.786f. [779]) is notable because it calls into question the pre-eminence of Jupiter as cosmocrator. Although Jupiter appears in general to be omnipotent in the *Thebaid*,<sup>126</sup> Statius' assertion, *sic Parcae volvere*, echoed by the proven<sup>127</sup> prophet Amphiaraus (*recto descendunt limite Parcae*, "the *Parcae* are coming down on an unwavering course", 5.736) and combined with Jupiter's seeming obliviousness where his snake is concerned, suggests that the relationship between the *Parcae* and Jupiter is a complex one.<sup>128</sup> Complex also is the involvement of Apollo in Opheltes' death. Amphiaraus prays to Apollo to "weave more delays" (*plures innectere... moras*, 5.743f.), which seems to mean that he thinks Apollo is responsible for the

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<sup>123</sup> As has been noted by, e.g., Schetter (1960: 70f.), Vessey (1973: 165), Dominik (1994a: 29), and Ganiban (2007: 97). Cf. *Aen.* 7.313-16.

<sup>124</sup> Feeney (1991: 340-64). But see Dominik (1994a: 7-33), who sees Jupiter as "the supreme arbiter of human destiny" (p. 21) and "an autocratic ruler presiding over the destruction of Argos and Thebes" (p. 17).

<sup>125</sup> Feeney (1991: 355f.).

<sup>126</sup> See Dominik (1994: 25-29).

<sup>127</sup> Amphiaraus accurately foresees the deaths of Capaneus, Parthenopaeus, Polynices, Adrastus, Hippomedon, Tydeus, and himself (3.539-47).

<sup>128</sup> As Dominik (1994: 27) notes, certain characters in the *Thebaid* suggest that Jupiter is the "co-executor or superintendent of fate". Nevertheless, Jupiter seems to become involved in Opheltes' death unwittingly, which would hardly place him on equal footing with the *Parcae* in this case.

Nemean interlude. But, as we have seen, it is Bacchus who presides over the events at Nemea and promises to “weave delays by deceit” (*nectam fraude moras*, 4.677).<sup>129</sup> We may believe that Amphiaraus is here giving his god more credit than he is due. We must remember, however, that Statius has asked Apollo to tell him who caused the delays at Nemea (4.649-51) and that Apollo seems to be participating in the narrative through to the funeral games for Opheltes (6.296f.). Also, the word *nectere* is used by Hypsipyle to refer to her account of the Lemnian massacre (*quid longa malis exordia necto?*, “why am I weaving a long preamble to my sad tale?”, 5.36), an account distinguished by its poetic technique.<sup>130</sup> Thus, when Amphiaraus asks Apollo to “weave more delays” (5.743f., cf. 3.495), he is speaking, on a diegetic level, as a prophet praying to his god, but also, on an extradiegetic level, as the voice of Statius, praying to his poetic inspiration.<sup>131</sup> Both prayers, unfortunately, fall on deaf ears.

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<sup>129</sup> The collocation of *mora* or *fraus* with *nectere* is common in Silver Latin (e.g., Sen. *Hercules Oetaeus* 10, Sil. *Pun.* 6.326, Valerius Flaccus 3.374f., and 503). See Brown (1994: 55f.).

<sup>130</sup> Cf. Gibson (2004: 158-66). Roman poets use *nectere* not infrequently to describe the composition of speech or poetry (e.g., Hor. *Carm.* 1.26.8f., *Epist.* 1.19.31, 2.2.96, Ov. *Pont.* 4.2.30, Sen. *Oedipus* 92f., and Verg. *Aen.* 9.219).

<sup>131</sup> See Feeney (1991: 341f.) for other self-referential passages in the *Thebaid*.

**CHAPTER THREE:  
HYSIPYLE AND HER AUDIENCE  
Slaughter as Sex**

Mr. Blonde: [*holding a severed ear*]  
Was that as good for you as it was for me?  
—Quentin Tarantino, *Reservoir Dogs*

**Introduction: *ethos* and *pathos***

“The *Thebaid*,” asserts Vessey, “is above all an epic of emotion.”<sup>1</sup> It is also, like most epics, a poem full of speeches.<sup>2</sup> The emotional and rhetorical content of Statius’ epic intersect at two places: the way in which characters’ personality and temperament affect their speeches and the emotional effect of those speeches on their audience. These two concerns of Statius relate to the concepts of *ethos* and *pathos* in Roman rhetorical schools. A person’s *ethos*, as described by Aristotle (*Rh.* 2.12.1f. and 3.7.6), is determined by his emotions, habits, age, fortunes, and class, all of which influence his behaviour and speech. Because all men want to listen to speeches that reflect their own *ethos*, a successful orator would choose the appropriate words to present both himself and his speech in such a way (2.13.16). By Statius’ day, *ethos* seems to have referred to calm and gentle emotions (i.e., *affectus*) as distinct from *pathos*, which describes more violent ones.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, Quintilian writes that *ethos* determines the appropriate emotions for an advocate to display in various courtroom situations (6.2.13-16) and that it is used to describe scholastic exercises in which a student speaks in the character of *rustici*, *superstitiosi*, *avari*, and *timidi* (6.2.17). This suggests that Aristotle’s concept of *ethos*

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<sup>1</sup> Vessey (1973: 58).

<sup>2</sup> For a thorough typological, statistical, and interpretive study of the *Thebaid*’s speeches, see Dominik (1994b).

<sup>3</sup> Quintilian (*Inst.* 6.2.8f.).

and its effect on rhetoric was still present in the Flavian period.<sup>4</sup> And indeed, Statius presents several scenes in which a character's speech reflects his *ethos*, often reduced (in accordance with Stoic thought on emotions) to one dominant trait.<sup>5</sup> Thus, for instance, the rhetorical confrontation between Amphiaraus and Capaneus before the Theban war (*Theb.* 3.598-677) is one between religious piety and blasphemy, or even between Stoicism and Epicureanism.<sup>6</sup> Contrasts of *ethos* also occur in the speeches of Tydeus and Polynices at Argos (3.345-86) – representing incontinent anger in contrast with more cunning restraint<sup>7</sup> – or in the debate between Jocasta and Tydeus in the Argive camp (7.496-563) – love and piety against anger and martial spirit.<sup>8</sup>

All three of these encounters represent not only the effects of *ethos* on characters' speeches, but also the effects of the speeches themselves on their audience within the poem. Capaneus' rhetoric is met with the furious assent of his supporters (3.618f.), their thunderous reaction sweeping away all in its path like a springtime river in spate (669-76). Tydeus' outburst at Argos leaves the Argive counsellors *trepidi* ("agitated", 3.365), an emotion that Polynices' rhetoric exploits: *commotae questibus irae | et mixtus lacrimis*

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<sup>4</sup> Pseudo-Longinus, probably writing in the early Empire, uses *ethos* in the Aristotelian sense and contrasts it with *pathos*, strong emotion. Discussing the works of Homer, he labels the *Iliad* a work of *pathos* and the *Odyssey* one of *ethos*: "There is a second reason for considering the *Odyssey* in addition to [the *Iliad*], that you might learn how when the emotional power [*pathos*] of great authors and poets declines it gives way to character study [*ethos*]" (δευτέρου δὲ εἴνεκα προσιστορήσθω τὰ κατὰ τὴν Ὀδύσειαν, ὅπως ἡ σοὶ γνῶριμον ὡς ἡ ἀπακμὴ τοῦ πάθους ἐν τοῖς μεγάλοις συγγραφεῦσι καὶ ποιηταῖς εἰς ἦθος ἐκλύεται, *Subl.* 9.15).

<sup>5</sup> Vessey (1973: 58, 65f.).

<sup>6</sup> Snijder (1968: 252f.) and Vessey (1973: 158). Capaneus is *diu tuto superum contemptor* ("a man who had long despised the gods unpunished", 3.602), who doubts the power of augury (617f.), ascribes Apollo's association with the Delphic oracle to cowardice and legend (612), and worships only "the deity of valour and the sword" (*virtus mihi numen et ensis*, 615). Amphiaraus, on the other hand, respects Apollo (625-28), the Fates and Olympians (629f.), and the Furies (630f.).

<sup>7</sup> Vessey (1973: 149-51). For the personalities of Tydeus and Polynices, see *Theb.* 2.391f. and 3.381f.

<sup>8</sup> Vessey (1973: 271-73). This confrontation appears in a more emphatically allegorical form in the encounter between Venus and Mars Gradivus (3.260-316) and again in the rout of *Pietas* by Tisiphone (11.457-96). For further discussion, see Lewis (1936: 50f. and 53f.), Vessey (1973: 86f. and 276f.), Dominik (1994a: 38f.), Feeney (1991: 385-89) and Ganiban (2007: 170-75).

*caluit dolor* (“anger is stirred up by his complaints and indignation, mixed with tears, grows hot”, 382f.). Jocasta and Tydeus bend the Argive army, helpless, to their contrary wills, rendering it first a pride of lions relieved of its *ira* (“anger”) in the aftermath of an attack (7.527-33) and then a sudden storm brewing on the ocean (559-63). Vessey attributes these reactions to *pathos*, the strong emotions that an orator arouses in himself and, through his speech, in his audience.<sup>9</sup> Quintilian (*Inst.* 6.2.29-36; cf. 8.3.61) advises that an orator powerfully envisage the events and experience the emotions he is describing in order to stir up *miseratio* (“pity”) in his audience or produce a sense of ἐνάργεια (“vividness”) whereby his listeners experience his words as if they were present at the events described.<sup>10</sup> Although describing oratory, he draws several examples from Virgil (*Aen.* 9.474, 11.40, and 89). Examples may be taken equally well, as we have seen, from Statius.

Given Statius’ apparent interest in rhetorical ideas about *ethos* and *pathos*, it is strange to find that for Hypsipyle’s speech (the longest by far in the entire epic, at 449 lines) the role of *ethos* and *pathos* is unclear. Hypsipyle enters the *Thebaid* majestically, *pulchro in maerore* (4.747 [740]),<sup>11</sup> her face distinguished by *regales notae* (“marks of royalty”, 751 [744]), her *honor* (“dignity”) not overwhelmed by her unfortunate circumstances (751f. [744f.]).<sup>12</sup> Adrastus addresses her as a goddess (753-71 [746-64]),

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<sup>9</sup> Vessey (1973: 58, 150, and 273). Within the Lemnian episode itself, Polyxo’s speech (5.85-151) is an excellent example of rhetorical *pathos*, with Polyxo’s mad fury spreading to her audience like an infection (143-51; cf. Vessey 1973: 180).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. his discussion of the emotional impact of *ethos* (6.2.13-16). As Quintilian (6.2.8f.) describes it, both *ethos* and *pathos* are concerned with the influence of character on speech and of speech on an audience’s reaction – issues that Aristotle (*Rh.* 2.12.1f. and 3.7.6) subsumes under the heading of *ethos*. For Quintilian, *ethos* is concerned with mild and largely positive feelings, *pathos* with stronger, generally negative ones: anger, hatred, fear, envy, and pity (*ira, odium, metus, invidia, and miseratio*, 6.2.20).

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of this phrase, see below, p. 59.

<sup>12</sup> Vessey (1973: 169) writes that “Statius portrays Hypsipyle as a noble and pathetic figure, who still retains dignity and beauty in her humiliation”.

recalling the Virgilian meeting of Aeneas and Venus on the coast of Libya (*Aen.* 1.314-409). When Adrastus requests the story of the Lemnian massacre, he summarizes what appear to be its central themes: *pande nefas laudesque tuas gemitusque tuorum, | unde hos advenias regno deiecta labores* (“set forth the sin and your laudable deeds and the laments of your people, whence you have come, cast out from your kingdom, to your present toils,” *Theb.* 5.46f.). Hypsipyle’s tale is, on the surface, one of crime, heroism, and tragedy,<sup>13</sup> told by a woman whose *ethos* is marked by such nobility in the midst of grief and piety in the face of *nefas* that she seems a goddess. But, whereas Venus in the first book of the *Aeneid* is truly a goddess, though disguised as a mortal, Hypsipyle immediately admits that she is only human, divine though her lineage may be (*Theb.* 4.776f. [769f.]). And her account of the Lemnian massacre presents such varied thematic and emotional content that different authors have identified it as a tale “of *furor* and *pietas*, of *odium* and *amor*, of sin and repentance,”<sup>14</sup> as a story describing the themes of “supernatural malevolence and human suffering” that pervade the *Thebaid*,<sup>15</sup> as an illustration of “the complete irrelevance of *pietas* in its post-Virgilian world,”<sup>16</sup> or even as a psychologically complex meditation on Hypsipyle’s relationship to and rescue of her father, told by an unreliable narrator.<sup>17</sup> Hypsipyle is not, then, a simple character whose *ethos* and rhetoric are dominated by a single element such as religious piety, rage, or maternal love. Instead, her character and its effect on the tale she tells is difficult to determine.

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<sup>13</sup> Ganiban (2007: 75).

<sup>14</sup> Vessey (1973: 187). See p. 190 (on *Theb.* 5.710-30) for the delayed reward for Hypsipyle’s *pietas*.

<sup>15</sup> Dominik (1994a: 56).

<sup>16</sup> Ganiban (2007: 95).

<sup>17</sup> Nugent (1996: 68f.); cf. Brown (1994: 113-23). Casali (2003) argues that both Hypsipyle and Aeneas (in *Aen.* 2) are potentially unreliable narrators.

The effect of the tale on her audience is even more difficult to assess. Statius, as we have seen, often explicitly describes the reaction of a character's audience to the *pathos* of the speech he or she has given.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, an important model for Hypsipyle's tale, Aeneas' story in the second and third books of the *Aeneid*,<sup>19</sup> is followed immediately by a description of Dido's powerful emotional reaction (4.1-5):

*at regina gravi iam dudum saucia cura  
vulnus alit venis et caeco carpitur igni.  
multa viri virtus animo multusque recursat  
gentis honos; haerent infixi pectore vultus  
verbaque nec placidam membris dat cura quietem.*

But the queen [Dido], now long-smitten by a grievous passion, nurses a wound in her veins and is consumed with a hidden fire. The hero's [Aeneas'] prowess comes often to her mind, often the glory of his line; fixed in her heart remains his face and his words, nor does passion grant her limbs tranquil repose.

But Statius follows Hypsipyle's story with no description of her audience's reaction, but instead writes *talia Lernaeis iterat dum regibus exsul | Lemnias et longa solatur damna querela | inmemor absentis (sic di suasistis!) alumni* ("while the Lemnian exile recounts this to the Lernaean kings and solaces her losses with long lament, forgetful (thus, gods, you compelled!) of her absent charge...", 5.499-501), and then proceeds immediately to the description of Opheltes' death.<sup>20</sup> It is only after this death, and Hypsipyle's tragic lament, that we see the Argives' reaction, reduced to a single Latin word: *terraque et*

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<sup>18</sup> Above, pp. 52f. Other examples (taken from the first six books) include 1.248-50 (Juno to Jupiter), 478-81 (Polynices and Tydeus to Adrastus), 662-66 (Apollo to Coroebus), 681 (Adrastus to Polynices); 2.127-33 (Eteocles to Laius), 352-55 (Polynices to Argia), 410-14 (Eteocles to Tydeus), 451f. (Tydeus to Eteocles), 655 (Tydeus to Menoetes); 3.77f. (Eteocles to Maeon), 253-59 (Gods to Jupiter), 291-94 (Mars to Venus); 4.406-09 (Eteocles to the leader of Bacchanals), 579-81 (Tiresias to Manto), 644f. (Tiresias, Manto, and Eteocles to Laius); 5.40-42 (Argives to Hypsipyle), 247f. (Thoas to Hypsipyle), 635-37 (Argives to Hypsipyle), 672f. (Tydeus to Adrastus and Amphiarus); 6.631 (Supporters of Idas and Parthenopaeus to Adrastus), 738 (Argives to Capaneus), and 824f. (Laconians to Capaneus).

<sup>19</sup> See Legras (1905: 61-70) for the influence of the *Aeneid* 2 on the Lemnian episode, and the more recent discussions of Nugent (1996), Casali (2003), and Ganiban (2007: 71-95).

<sup>20</sup> Brown (1994: 124) notes further than Statius himself offer no editorial comment on Hypsipyle's story.

*sanguine vultum | sordida magnorum circa vestigia regum | vertitur et tacite maerentibus imputat undas* (“[Hypsipyle], her face fouled with dirt and blood, crawls around the feet of the kings and, as they grieve, silently claims credit for the waters”, 5.635-37).<sup>21</sup>

Statius declines explicitly to describe the Argives’ reaction, perhaps, because doing so would have destroyed the emotional tension that the complexities of Hypsipyle’s tale create. This tension will be the subject of this chapter and the next, but in order to understand how it is created, we must view the Lemnian episode from the appropriate standpoint. Scholarship has traditionally read the episode in one of two ways, both of which entail relatively straightforward emotional responses. First, read as a self-contained unit, a performance given in the Nemean woods by Hypsipyle to the Argive army, the Lemnian episode demands the emotional response implied in the introduction to the speech, whereby Hypsipyle’s seemingly and regal *maeror* (“grief”, 4.747-52 [740-45]) in recounting the crimes and sufferings of the Lemnians and her own noble actions (5.46f.) would inspire the Argives to marvel at her *pietas* and share – through the agency of *pathos* – in her grief.<sup>22</sup> Alternatively, the Lemnian episode has been read in the context of the *Thebaid* as a whole: Statius, as a narrator working through his character Hypsipyle, presents an “epic within an epic”, the themes of which interact with the main narrative in ways that his Roman (or modern) audience may fully appreciate only upon reaching the

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<sup>21</sup> Mozley (1928) incorrectly translates *et tacite maerentibus imputat undas* as “and secretly as they grieve lays the waters to their charge,” that is, “blames them for the disaster, of which the stream was the cause, by separating her from the babe” (n. 45 *ad loc.*). Although this usage of *imputare* is common (*L&S*, s.v. “imputo” II), in Statius’ three other uses of the verb, all from the *Silvae* (2 *praef.*, 2.7.30, and 4 *praef.*), he refers to something (in the accusative) which has been done as a favour or for the benefit of someone (in the dative). Thus, the translation of *Theb.* 5.637 by Shackleton Bailey (2003) is correct: “and as they grieve, silently claims credit for the waters,” that is, Hypsipyle invokes her assistance of the Argives during the drought as a reason for them to honour the plea for death she made in lines 628-33.

<sup>22</sup> It must be noted that even this straightforward reading does not prevent Hypsipyle from being an unreliable narrator with respect to the *facts* she presents – we may believe the sincerity of the emotions she portrays while recognizing, for example, that her careful and psychologically complex narrative has “problematized” our understanding of the fate of her father (Nugent 1996: 69) or the role of the gods in the massacre (see above, chapter two).

conclusion of the *Thebaid*.<sup>23</sup> This approach subjects the emotional impact of Hypsipyle’s tale to that of the *Thebaid* itself: for instance, pleasure at the reunion of Hypsipyle with her sons as a delayed reward for her *pietas* on Lemnos – but a pleasure made “piquant” by comparison with Jocasta and her sons<sup>24</sup> – or, alternatively, displeasure at the cruelty of Venus on Lemnos as part of a larger pattern of divine malevolence and human suffering in the *Thebaid*.<sup>25</sup> A third reading, which I will explore, seeks to understand the Lemnian episode through the perspective of Statius’ contemporary audience.<sup>26</sup> This audience would have experienced Hypsipyle’s tale in the context of a rich literary tradition<sup>27</sup> – of which only a small portion remains extant – and of their own contemporary culture – of which we can acquire only a rough understanding. While it is thus difficult and, inevitably, somewhat speculative to read the Lemnian episode in this way, interpreting Hypsipyle’s tale in isolation, or even in the context *only* of the *Thebaid*’s literary influences,<sup>28</sup> fails to acknowledge Statius’ demonstrable concern with the popular reception of his poetry<sup>29</sup> and his success in obtaining public favour for the *Thebaid*<sup>30</sup> –

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<sup>23</sup> Vessey (1970 and 1973: 170-87), Dominik (1994a: 54-63) and Ganiban (2007: 71-95) are perhaps most successful at integrating the Lemnian episode into their respective readings of the *Thebaid* as a whole.

Dominik (1994a: 56, n. 79) provides an extensive bibliography of similar approaches.

<sup>24</sup> Vessey (1973: 187, 190).

<sup>25</sup> Dominik (1994a: 56).

<sup>26</sup> Ahl (1986) and Dominik (1994a) take this approach to some extent, although their focus is on contemporary politics, while mine is on literary and cultural influences.

<sup>27</sup> Vessey (1973: 15-28) examines the various addressees of Statius’ *Silvae* based on available historical information and Statius’ own words and describes them as “cultured and critical dilettantes, many of [whom] toyed with the art of poetry, dabbled in philosophy and spent their wealth in creating or acquiring objects of beauty” (p. 27). While the audience of Statius’ *Thebaid* would presumably have been more varied in their education than the addressees of Statius’ incidental poetry, a good proportion must have been familiar with the literary context most relevant to our discussion of the Lemnian episode, that is, Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, and the generic conventions of Latin love elegy.

<sup>28</sup> Some recent studies deal in large part with the interactions between Statius and Ovid (Keith 2002 and Newlands 2004), Virgil (Ganiban 2007), Callimachus (Brown 1994 and McNelis 2007), and Stoic writers (Vessey 1973 and Billerbeck 1985).

<sup>29</sup> See, e.g., Vessey (1973: 36-40) on the prose prefaces to Statius’ *Silvae*.

<sup>30</sup> If we believe the testimony of Juvenal: *curritur ad vocem iucundam et carmen amicae | Thebaidos, laetam cum fecit Statius urbem | promisitque diem: tanta dulcedine captos | afficit ille animos tantaque libidine vulgi | auditur* (“They all run to his pleasing voice and the song of his beloved *Thebaid* when

both of which suggest that Statius was aware of and interested in whatever factors would have influenced audience reception of his epic.

**Generic conflict: *artis arma inserta toris***

The Lemnian massacre, one of the most gruesome episodes of the entire *Thebaid*, has been called “horrific and pathetic”,<sup>31</sup> and this emotional response of horror and pity – doubtlessly Hypsipyle’s intention – is likely to be produced by reading the massacre in isolation, or even in the context of the *Thebaid* as a whole. But a Roman audience, experiencing the gruesome horror in the context of their literary tradition and contemporary culture (especially that of the Roman arena), may have felt very different, *positive* emotions in tension with the negative ones that Hypsipyle herself seems to evoke.

Experiencing Hypsipyle’s tale in the context of the Roman literary tradition – especially elegiac poetry – would have evoked positive emotions that were in part erotic (surprising though this may seem). Authors have noted the obvious sexual content of Polyxo’s speech (5.104-42),<sup>32</sup> but in fact a sexual tone is created at Hypsipyle’s first appearance in the *Thebaid* and maintained until she concludes her description of the massacre. While much of this sexuality stems from allusions to acts that are (at least from a modern perspective) quite disturbing – rape, incest, paedophilia, and general sexual violence – I will argue that the nature of these allusions would have provoked a response, if not of amusement, at least of titillation.

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Statius has made the city joyful and promised a [recital] day: such is the sweetness by which he transfixes their captive minds, such the crowd’s rapture with which he is heard,” 7.82-86). Cf. Markus (2003: 432-34) for Juvenal’s reliability here.

<sup>31</sup> Dominik (1994a: 59).

<sup>32</sup> E.g., Schetter (1960: 54f.) and Vessey (1973: 179-81).

Hypsipyle's first appearance in the *Thebaid*, which we have already interpreted as majestic,<sup>33</sup> also yields erotic details when read in the appropriate literary context.<sup>34</sup> Hypsipyle appears suddenly to the Argives, unnamed and *pulchro in maerore* ("in beautiful grief", 4.747 [740]). The translations in the Loeb series treat *pulchro* as a transferred epithet: Hypsipyle is "beauteous in her grief" or "fair in her sadness".<sup>35</sup> But this does not capture the full force of the Latin, for Statius has called Hypsipyle's *grief*, not Hypsipyle herself, *pulcher*.<sup>36</sup> Adopting this literal reading not only acknowledges the paradox common in the *Thebaid* whereby violence, death, and grief are experienced as pleasurable,<sup>37</sup> it also recalls the sexual appeal of a woman's distress as a recurrent motif in the poetry of Ovid.<sup>38</sup> A striking example, and one to which we will return, is the rape

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<sup>33</sup> Above, pp. 53f.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Brown (1994: 98, 109, and 116).

<sup>35</sup> Mozley (1928) and Shackleton Bailey (2003).

<sup>36</sup> In similar fashion, the tears of Parthenopaeus, after he unfairly loses a footrace, add to his beauty (*accessit lacrimarum gratia formae*, "the appeal of tears adds to his beauty", 6.623).

<sup>37</sup> Many examples of such contradictions may be found. The Lemnian women sacrifice Polyxo's son and *dulce nefas in sanguine vivo | coniurant* ("swear to their sweet sin in living blood", 5.162f.). A similar though less conventionally wicked love of slaughter fills the pious Amphiaraus before his death (*ardet inexploto saevi Mavortis amore*, "he burns with an insatiate love of savage warfare", 7.703; cf. 705f.). Like pleasure appears in the *aristeiai* of all the major characters (Vessey 1973: 260f.). Several characters, cast in a Stoically pious mould (cf. Vessey 1973: 101-33), exult in their own destruction or lament its deferral (e.g., Coroebus, 1.662-64; Maeon, 3.68; Hoplesus and Dymas, 10.444; and Menoeceus, 10.774-76; cf. Argia and Antigone, 12.456-63, and Leigh 2006 on Capaneus as a representative of Statius' mad desire, doomed from the start, to exceed the *Aeneid*). The (female) relatives bereaved by these glorious deaths do not see any appeal in the situation (e.g., Menoeceus' mother, 10.793-814; cf. Vessey 1973: 124). At the beginning of Hypsipyle's tale, Statius tells us that *dulce loqui miseris veteresque reducere questus* ("it is sweet for the wretched to speak and recall old laments", 5.48). It is not actually entirely clear who speaks this *gnome*, as noted by Nugent 1996: 50, n. 12: it could be Statius, Adrastus, or even Hypsipyle; see also Hill 1983: 108). Hypsipyle's extended lament, the beginning of the final delay before the Theban war, is renewed at the end of the war when bereaved women run onto the battlefield like crazed Thyiads (12.790-93) and *gaudent lamenta novaeque | exultant lacrimae* ("their laments rejoice, their new tears exult", 793f.). Markus (2004) discusses the dangerous allure of lament in the *Thebaid*.

<sup>38</sup> This motif is most common for the women in Ovid's rape narratives (cf. Richlin 1992: 162): *Ars am.* 1.126 (the Sabine women), *Fast.* 2.757 (Lucretia), 5.608 (Europa), *Met.* 1.525-30 (Daphne), and 4.230 (Leucothoe). In the *Amores*, Ovid likens his mistress, whose hair is dishevelled by a beating from him, to Ariadne and Cassandra, beautiful in their distress (1.7.12-18). Cf. *Am.* 3.6.47f., where Ilia, her hair and cheeks rent by fingernails in the aftermath of her rape, pleases the river Anio. The Ovidian character of Nemea itself (cf. Newlands 2004: 141-44) adds plausibility to the interpretation of Hypsipyle as an Ovidian woman in distress. Cf. also Catull. 64.50-75, whose description of the distress of Ariadne, abandoned and naked on Naxos, is markedly erotic.

of Philomela by Tereus in which, after the initial violation and its subsequent re-enactment (“in a brutal upward displacement to the mouth”,<sup>39</sup> Tereus hacks off his victim’s tongue), Tereus “is said in his lust to have renewed assault on her mutilated body again and again” (*fertur | saepe sua lacerum repetisse libidine corpus*, 6.561f.). Less overtly disturbing, but more important in its specific similarity to Hypsipyle’s portrayal, is a scene from the *Amores* in which Ovid catches his mistress kissing another man: stung by his reproaches, *spectabat terram – terram spectare decebat; | maesta erat in vultu – maesta decenter erat* (“she stared at the ground – at the ground it became her to stare; she showed grief on her face – her grief became her”, 2.5.43f.). It is certain that Statius and at least part of his audience were familiar with the generic conventions of elegy out of which this Ovidian observation springs.<sup>40</sup> For this part of the audience, the erotic implications of Hypsipyle’s “beautiful grief”, only the first of several references to elegy in the Lemnian episode, would have complicated the emotional impact of the Lemnian massacre.

As Hypsipyle’s “beautiful grief” echoes that of Ovid’s mistress, so too does her downward glance before she first speaks to Adrastus (4.775 [768]). Although this gesture on the surface seems one of chaste modesty,<sup>41</sup> it has erotic implications as well. We see these by comparison not only with Ovid’s shamefaced mistress, but also with a similar

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<sup>39</sup> Segal (1994: 261).

<sup>40</sup> Two of the addressees of Statius’ *Silvae* wrote elegy, L. Arruntius Stella (*Silv.* 1.2.95-99) and Pollius Felix (2.2.114f.), and Stella’s poetry is known to young men and women throughout the city (1.2.172f.). In addressing Stella, Statius himself shows knowledge of the lives and works of Philetas, Callimachus, Propertius, Tibullus, and Ovid (*Silv.* 1.2.252-55), even adapting a programmatic statement from Tibullus (1.1.5f., *me mea paupertas vita traducet inertis, | dum meus assiduo luceat igne focus*, “let humble means lead me to an indolent life, so long as my hearth blazes with a constant fire”, cf. *Silv.* 1.2.255, *divesque foco lucente Tibullus*, “Tibullus, rich in his blazing hearth”). He also shows easy familiarity with several conventions of Roman elegy: *militia amoris* (1.2.65f., 95f.), *servitium amoris* (77f.), and *recusatio* (96-99). Statius claims that his poem to Stella, 277 hexameters, was written in two days (*Silv.* 1 *praef.*), which suggests that the references to elegy it contains lay ready at hand.

<sup>41</sup> It echoes the attitude of the daughters of Adrastus on their wedding day (2.232). Even here, though, their chastity is portrayed in contrast to its imminent loss (232-34).

posture assumed by the Hypsipyle of Apollonius Rhodius' Lemnian episode, who addresses Jason with the appearance of a chaste maiden but the intention of enticing the Argonauts to remain on Lemnos (*Argon.* 1.790-92):<sup>42</sup>

ἡ δ' ἐγκλιδὸν ὄσσε βαλοῦσα<sup>43</sup>  
παρθενικὴ ἐρύθηνε παρηίδας· ἔμπα δὲ τόνγε  
αἰδομένη μύθοισι προσέννεπεν αἰμυλίοισιν.

Her eyes cast askance, her cheeks blushed in maidenly fashion. But despite her modesty, she addressed him with crafty words.

By alluding to this instance of her dissembling modesty in Apollonius, Statius suggests an erotic element to Hypsipyle's appearance in Nemea and hints perhaps that her meeting with the Argives is not entirely straightforward. In fact, there is a tradition in Roman elegy of women who use their eroticism, including that obtained through feigned modesty, to achieve their own ends. This is best exemplified by the stock advice of the *lena* ("bawd"), who teaches the poet's mistress to profit by her relationships.<sup>44</sup> For instance, the *lena* Dipsas tells Ovid's mistress that a modest blush, when false, is profitable (*Am.* 1.8.35f.), and that "while you are looking at your lap, eyes becomingly downcast, you must examine what each lover brings you" (*cum bene deiectis gremium spectabis ocellis, | quantum quisque ferat, respiciendus erit*, 37f.). Myers sees the *lena* as an alter-ego of the poet, a woman "learned" (*docta*, Prop. 4.5.5) in the ways of love and eloquence, who espouses behaviour inimical to elegiac conventions and challenges the

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<sup>42</sup> Brown (1994: 116). Her assertion that this scene recalls "Helen's seduction of Paris" in Homer (*Il.* 3.427ff.) is not entirely appropriate: Helen averts her glance (427) out of disdain for her lover's poor showing against Menelaus, not out of modesty. Nevertheless, she does inflame unprecedented lust in Paris (441-46), in the first extant instance of the *dura puella* theme common in Augustan elegy (e.g., Prop. 2.1.78).

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *Argon.* 3.1008, where Apollonius uses this exact phrase to describe Medea's (genuine) attraction to Jason.

<sup>44</sup> The figure of the *lena* has roots in Greco-Roman comedy and mime (Barsby 1973: 91-93 and McKeown 1987: 198f.).

poet's control over his mistress and his power to construct her literary persona.<sup>45</sup>

Hypsipyle echoes the elegiac *lena* (or, more appropriately to her beauty, the mistress instructed by the *lena*) in several ways. The *lena* endorses love as a means of profit; Hypsipyle uses her erotic appeal and her eroticized tale of Lemnos to win the support of the Argives. The *lena* challenges the conventions of elegy; Hypsipyle challenges the conventions of Virgilian epic by presenting herself as a female Aeneas in a feminized Fall of Troy.<sup>46</sup> The *lena* threatens the poet's control over his mistress and his poetry; Hypsipyle threatens to derail the martial course of the *Thebaid's* entire narrative, stranding it in a feminized world divorced from epic and linked to elegy.<sup>47</sup>

This link to elegiac love poetry becomes explicit and specific in Hypsipyle's prelude to her tale, when she says to Adrastus (5.29-32):

*inmania vulnera, rector,  
integrare iubes, Furias et Lemnon et artis  
arma inserta toris debellatosque pudendo  
ense mares.*

Monstrous are the wounds, lord, you bid me renew: Furies and Lemnos  
and weapons put into confined beds and men subdued by a shameful  
sword.

Although Hypsipyle is in fact referring to actual scenes of death, the language she uses may be read as an elegiac appropriation of the language of epic: the common metaphor of the *militia amoris*.<sup>48</sup> On the surface, *vulnera*, *arma*, and *debellare* are all overblown, epic

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<sup>45</sup> Myers (1996). This challenge eventually aids the poet in exposing the hypocrisy of the idealized elegiac world (p. 21).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Ganiban (2007: 78-86).

<sup>47</sup> For the challenge to the *Thebaid's* narrative, see above, pp. 43-46.

<sup>48</sup> There are many discussions of this metaphor: see, e.g., Spies (1930), Thomas (1964), Murgatroyd (1975), McKeown (1987: 257-80, 1995), Cahoon (1988), Hallett (2002: 339-41), and Lyne (2002: 350-59). It is found in Roman comedy (Duckworth 1952: 337), in Tibullus and Propertius (where it is used to recommend the lover's way of life in preference to conventional public life, e.g., Lyne 2002: 350-59), and in Ovid (where the antithesis between real *militia* and the *militia amoris* is dissolved for comedic effect, e.g., McKeown 1995: 296f.).

descriptors of a nocturnal mass murder. But in the minds of those familiar with the elegiac juxtaposition of love and warfare, they evoke the “wounds” of love (or sexual intercourse), the “weapons” used in the bedroom, and the “vanquishing” of one’s lover. There is, however, a more specific and unambiguous reference in these lines. The adjective *artus* (or its synonyms *angustus* and *contractus*) is not a usual epithet for *torus* (or *lectus* or *cubile*) in Latin poetry up to the Flavian period<sup>49</sup> – couches and beds tend to be *altus* (“raised”), *mollis* (“soft”), or, for unfortunate lovers, *vacuus* (“empty”). The only other instances of a bed being described as “narrow” or “confined” are in the poetry of Propertius. First, Cynthia declines to travel the world and seek its riches, instead preferring to remain in Propertius’ bed, “narrow” though it be (*illa vel angusto mecum requiescere lecto | ... maluit*, “she preferred to lie with me in my bed, though it was narrow”, 1.8.33f.). In a later poem, Propertius declines to write epic poetry and resolves instead to write what he knows best: *nos contra angusto versamus proelia lecto* (“for my part, I wage wars in my narrow bed”, 2.1.45). The full significance of *angustus* emerges in this second reference, for, a few lines earlier, Propertius observed (39-42):

*sed neque Phlegraeos Iovis Enceladique tumultus  
intonet angusto pectore Callimachus,<sup>50</sup>  
nec mea conveniunt duro praecordia versu  
Caesaris in Phrygios condere nomen avos.*

But, neither could Callimachus, with his narrow breast, thunder out the uproar of Jupiter and Enceladus at Phlegra, nor is my heart fit to enshrine in stern verse the name of Caesar amongst his Phrygian ancestors.

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<sup>49</sup> Except for Hypsipyle’s words and the two passages of Propertius mentioned above, I find no combination of these words in the verse of Catullus, Lucretius, Virgil, Horace, Propertius, Tibullus, Ovid, Seneca, Persius, Lucan, Valerius Flaccus, Statius, or Silius Italicus.

<sup>50</sup> Callimachus writes, βροντᾶν οὐκ ἐμόν, ἀλλὰ Διός (“thundering is not for me, but for Zeus”, *Aet.* fr. 1.20 Pfeiffer). The *angustum pectus* (“narrow breast”) in Propertius is probably both psychological and physiological – Callimachus is supposed to lack both the “heart” for epic poetry and the lung-power for loud utterance.

Propertius, then, identifies his *angustus lectus* with the *angustum pectus* of Callimachus – itself an allusion to that poet’s Μοῦσα λεπταλέη<sup>51</sup> – and aligns his love poetry with Callimachean generic conventions in opposition to the *durus versus* suitable for mythological or historical epic. Rather than describe exotic lands, rich kings, or epic battles, he prefers to produce – on an *angustus tornus* (“narrow lathe”, 2.34.43) no less<sup>52</sup> – poetry describing mock battles waged in an *angustus lectus*.<sup>53</sup> Thus, when Statius refers to *artis arma inserta toris*, he is not only describing the physical incongruity of a sword within the confines of a bed, but also a generic conflict: Hypsipyle’s Lemnos is a land of Callimachean elegy invaded by epic *arma*, the metaphorical *militia amoris* turned real.<sup>54</sup> As we will see, it is difficult to determine whether this invasion is a cause for terror or titillation.

### **Polyxo’s speech**

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<sup>51</sup> Apollo instructs Callimachus, saying, “singer, rear your victim as fat as possible, but your Muse, my good man, delicate” (ἀοιδέ, τὸ μὲν θύος ὄττι πάχιστον | θρέψαι, τή]ν Μοῦσαν δ’ ὠγαθὲ λεπταλέην, *Aet.* 1.23f. Pfeiffer). Propertius translates λεπταλέος as *angustus* based on the expanded lexical range of the synonym λεπτός, which can mean “narrow” (*LSJ s.v.* “λεπτός” 5). More common Latin translations are *tenuis*, “slender”, and *deductus*, “fine-spun” (see, e.g., Gilbert 1976 on the Callimachean implications of *Ov. Met.* 1.4, *perpetuum deducite... carmen*, “spin out an unending song”).

<sup>52</sup> For the metaphor, cf. Horace (*Ars P.* 441), who famously describes Quintilius Varus advising poets to scrap and reforge verses that have been *male tornatos* (“poorly fashioned on the lathe”).

<sup>53</sup> Wiggers (1977) discusses this elegy and notes the Callimachean significance of *angustus* (p. 338). For another example of an allusive couch, cf. *Hor. Ep.* 1.5.1, where the poet’s description of his *Archiacis... lectis* (“couches made by Archias”) seems to imbue a formulaic apology for a spartan meal (e.g., *Plaut. Stich.* 619, cf. *Poen.* 696, *Juv.* 11.96, and *Apul. Met.* 1.22.69) with an allusion to the fate of a Theban magistrate named Archias, who met his death because he refused to open a warning letter while he was “reclining at a banquet” (*accubans in convivio*, *Nepos, Life of Pelopidas* 3.2). Cf. Kilpatrick 1986: 62).

<sup>54</sup> On the Callimachean undertones of books 4-6 in general, see McNelis (2007: 76-96) and Brown (1994).

Vessey has commented on the sexual tone of Polyxo's speech (5.104-42).<sup>55</sup> He suggests that Polyxo's advanced age (*aevi matura Polyxo*, "Polyxo, advanced in age", 5.90) makes her particularly susceptible to madness stemming from frustrated lust – she knows that her fertile years are numbered.<sup>56</sup> But it is important to note also that lust-crazed old women, as a common theme in Greco-Roman poetry, were treated with much savage mirth and little tact.<sup>57</sup> Like Polyxo, these women were presented as ferociously dominant and their lust as a dangerous madness.<sup>58</sup> But, by dwelling obscenely on the lust, madness, and unattractiveness of these women in satire, invective, epigram, and elegy, Greco-Roman men transformed them from threats to objects of censure and ridicule, the very excess of their undesirable traits increasing the humorousness of their portrayal.<sup>59</sup> Thus, the scene of a sex-starved, raving mad crone, her four children in tow (5.90-99),

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<sup>55</sup> See above, p. 29, n. 56. In the description of the marital strife preceding the departure of the Lemnian men (5.61-80) and Polyxo's ensuing speech there is quite obvious sexual content. More subtle is the erotic tone of the men's motivation for going to war in Thrace (75-80): see Nugent (1996: 57-59). Although Nugent argues (p. 58) that the erotic tone alludes to other versions of the Lemnian myth in which the men go to Thrace to capture new brides, her question whether "sexuality and violence, for the Lemnians, [are] in fact distinguishable" (p. 59) anticipates our present discussion.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Vessey (1973: 179), who argues that, in contrast to Polyxo and the other women, Hypsipyle resists madness because she is still a virgin (5.81f.). This alone cannot explain everything, however: surely Hypsipyle is not the only virgin on Lemnos, and yet the madness stirred up by Polyxo seems to be shared by all (5.147-51). Dominik (1994a: 58, n. 83) sees in Hypsipyle a "psychological strength and moral superiority" – not unreasonably, considering that Hypsipyle, as narrator, has control over her own portrayal.

<sup>57</sup> Cokayne (2003: 134-152, esp. 140-44) provides an extensive discussion, with references to many Greek and Latin authors. Note especially the prevalence of the topic in Statius' contemporary, Martial (3.32, 93; 7.75; 10.67, 90; and 11.21). Unfortunately, it is impossible to know exactly how old Polyxo is intended to be. She has four children (5.125), all apparently old enough to walk (98f.), and (like Beroë at *Aen.* 5.620) she is old enough to assume a commanding role amongst the other women, but these facts do not help much. Virgil uses the phrase *aevi maturus* of Acestes (*Aen.* 5.73), who is nevertheless not too old to compete in the archery contest. In any case, Statius presents Polyxo to us defined by her age (90), her madness and ferocity (91-96 and 102f.) and her fecundity (98f. and 125) – that is, her sexuality.

<sup>58</sup> Cokayne (2003: 143f.). Festus writes, in a telling false etymology, that *anus* refers to an old woman *quod iam sit sine sensu, quod Graece dicitur ἄνοος* ("because she is now devoid of sense, which in Greek is termed ἄνοος", *Gloss. Lat.* 5.25-27). Like Polyxo, lustful old women may be associated with Maenads (*Theb.* 5.92-94; cf. Hor. *Carm.* 1.25.9-15, where the wind is *bacchans*, reflecting by pathetic fallacy Lydia's lust-crazed state). The lust of all women, not merely old women, could be seen as dangerous, as Ovid argues with epigrammatic force: after listing a series of tragic myths (*Ars am.* 1.327-40) that he blames on "female lust" (*feminea libido*, 341) he concludes, for his male audience, that "it is keener than ours and has more of madness" (*acrior est nostra, plusque furoris habet*, 342).

<sup>59</sup> Cokayne (2003: 140-44).

stirring up all the women of Lemnos to a council at the citadel of Pallas (99-101) – the *virgin* goddess – might have evoked pleasant associations of mirth in Statius’ Roman audience, even though the outcome of the council was a human sacrifice (152-63). The evocation would have been strengthened by the plan of Polyxo’s speech, which is based on the speech of the Virgilian Iris (disguised as Beroë) urging the Trojan women to burn their ships (*Aen.* 5.618-40),<sup>60</sup> but which adopts a structure and tone hopelessly hysterical in comparison.<sup>61</sup> Just as in Nemea Hypsipyle subverts, by her mortality, the Virgilian precedent of Aeneas’ meeting with Venus,<sup>62</sup> so on Lemnos we have not the *goddess* Iris impersonating the noble Beroë, “the aged wife of Tmarian Doryclus, who once possessed family, name, and children” (*Tmarii coniunx longaeva Dorycli, | cui genus et quondam nomen natiue fuissent, Aen.* 5.620f.), but instead the mortal Polyxo, “advanced in age... like a Teumesian Thyiad seized by the mad god... with wide eyes and pupils flushed with quivering blood” (*aevi matura... [92] insano veluti Teumesia Thyias | rapta deo... [95] erecta genas aciemque effusa trementi | sanguine, Theb.* 5.90-96).<sup>63</sup> Iris-Beroë’s speech is excited,<sup>64</sup> but logically constructed: the Trojan women are miserable (*Aen.* 5.623-25);

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<sup>60</sup> Besides having similarly structured speeches, the two episodes show similarities in their general circumstances (a group of women, urged on by a goddess in the absence of their husbands, resolves to commit a wildly destructive act) and specific verbal reminiscences (*tertia canet hiems, Theb.* 5.112, *septima... vertitur aestas, Aen.* 5.626; *quin... consulite, Theb.* 140f., *quin agite, Aen.* 5.632; *o miserae, Theb.* 5.140 and *Aen.* 5.623; *dum tempus agi rem, Theb.* 5.140, *iam tempus agi res, Aen.* 5.638; *en... spumant... aequora, Theb.* 5.141f., *en quattuor arae | Neptuno, Aen.* 5.639).

<sup>61</sup> Nugent (1996: 59) notes that the speech’s structure is “strikingly illogical” and relies on a specifically Lemnian idea that sexuality may be renewed through violence (p. 60), that is, by killing and replacing the original husbands.

<sup>62</sup> See above, p. 54.

<sup>63</sup> It may be significant that Polyxo, unlike Beroë, is not introduced alongside her husband’s name. She is thus deprived of the respectability and esteem that the name could bestow, and is instead merely mad and old. Statius names her husband at the moment when she offers her son as a human sacrifice (5.159f., *natum Charopeia coniunx | obtulit*, “Charops’ wife offered her son”), thereby permanently depriving herself of matronly respectability and familial esteem.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Williams (1960: 162-64).

they have travelled for six years and endured many hardships at sea (626-29);<sup>65</sup> their current location would be suitable for founding a city and, if they do not act, they may never find a home (630-34); they must, therefore, burn their ships (635), for Cassandra has appeared to Beroë in a dream to approve their course and Neptune himself will support their actions (636-40). Polyxo's speech starts out well enough and in a similar vein, although with some jumping from topic to topic: Polyxo has come to approve a *res summa* ("a great matter", *Theb.* 5.104) at the urging of the gods and the Lemnians' own *meritus dolor* ("just indignation", 104<sup>66</sup>); the Lemnian women are wretched (106-08); Polyxo has found a divinely approved solution, if only the Lemnians will match their strength to their grief (109-11); indeed, a third winter is passing with the women alone and enduring many (sexual) hardships (111-16).<sup>67</sup> Here, however, in place of Iris-Beroë's reasonable statement that a city could be well-founded in their current location, Polyxo appeals for exempla to the coupling of wild beasts and birds (116f.), the mass-murder committed the Danaids (117-19), and the filicide committed by a Procne who, in Statius' version, eats her son right alongside Tereus (120-23).<sup>68</sup> As a climax to this increasingly disturbing (and disturbed) argument, Polyxo points out her four children, her *ingens*

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<sup>65</sup> See Quinn (1967) on the time period implied by *septima aetas* (*Aen.* 5.626).

<sup>66</sup> As translated by Shackleton Bailey (2003). Note, however, that in retrospect *meritus dolor* may equally mean "deserved anguish" – as Hypsipyle tells us, the gods resolved to overthrow Lemnos but the Lemnian women themselves were not free from blame (5.57f.). For the subtle differences in meaning of *dolor*, see *L&S s.v.* "dolor" II.1 and 2.

<sup>67</sup> Even this seemingly reasonable beginning of Polyxo's argument is suspect when compared to Iris-Beroë's speech: three years at home without husbands is not quite so dire as six years at sea without a home.

<sup>68</sup> Before these final two exempla, Polyxo calls the Lemnian women *segnes* ("sluggish", 117) and a *vulgus iners* ("an idle crowd", 120), as if their failure to engage in mass-murder or cannibalism stems from a disinclination to strenuous activity. In fact, Statius uses these adjectives often to describe those averse to, unskilled in, or disconnected from warfare (*Theb.* 2.601, 695; 3.17; 4.333, 661; 5.383; 7.688; 8.576, 674; 9.290, 568; 10.296, 900; 11.485; and *Achil.* 1.801). Woman is by nature *iners* (*Achil.* 1.848), but the elegiac poet consciously chose to abandon the conventional pursuits of Roman manhood and thereby become *segnis inersque* (*Tib.* 1.1.58) – except, of course, in the warfare of love (cf. *Silv.* 1.2.65f., where Cupid assures his mother that *nulla mihi dextera segnis | militia*, "my right hand is never idle in any campaign).

*sudor* (“great labour”, 124),<sup>69</sup> and vows, “in my lap (though they delay with their embrace and their tears) I will run them through with steel, mingle the brothers’ gore and wounds, and put their father on them while they still breathe” (*in gremio (licet amplexu lacrimisque morentur) | transadigam ferro saniemque et vulnera fratrum | miscebo patremque super spirantibus addam*, 126-28).

Presumably satisfied with her case, Polyxo asks, *ecqua tot in caedes animum promittit?* (“will anyone here show the resolve for so many slaughters?”, 129). It may not be fanciful to suppose that here Statius addressed this question directly to his audience, wondering if they themselves, attuned to the elements of skilful rhetoric (lacking in this speech) have been persuaded to listen on to the massacre itself. In any event, Polyxo continues to exhort the women (129f.), until the imminent arrival of the Lemnian men provokes her to reveal, finally, that Venus has appeared to her in a dream and promised better marriages after the women have slaughtered the men (132-40). Polyxo reserves this crucial piece of information until the last moment, long after the point at which Iris-Beroë had invoked her own dream in support of a deed far less disastrous than the Lemnian massacre, long after Polyxo herself had already promised to kill her four children as punishment for a three-year separation. But her final words explain all the illogic of her speech: *Bistonides veniunt fortasse maritae* (“perhaps [with our husbands] come Bistonian brides”, 142). This accusation reminds us that, as Apollodorus (*Bibl.* 1.9.17), Hyginus (*Fab.* 15.1), Apollonius Rhodius (*Argon.* 1.611-15), and Valerius Flaccus (2.126-34) tell the story, the Lemnian women killed their husbands in revenge for real or

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<sup>69</sup> *Sudor*, literally “sweat”, is often found in Statius associated with warfare or as a euphemism for fighting (*Silv.* 5.3.55; *Theb.* 3.210f., 327, 404; 7.82; 8.7, 637; 9.98, 151; 10.783; 11.92; and *Achil.* 1.159). Thus, although *sudor* can refer to any labour (e.g., the sweat of Vulcan at his forge, 2.275f.), its military associations, reinforced by Polyxo’s unwillingness to be *segnis* or *iners*, underline her aspirations to epic status.

perceived infidelity.<sup>70</sup> Although this single sentence constitutes “barely a hint of human jealousy”<sup>71</sup> when judged by its length, its prominent position in the speech and status as a complete *non sequitur* make us think: although Hypsipyle adorns her tale of the Lemnian massacre with divine anger, human *nefas*, and grand tragedy, when read from outside the conventions of epic, it is nothing more than a tale of jealous wives, stirred up by an irrational, frustrated old lady to tawdry domestic violence with their husbands.<sup>72</sup> Of course, the ensuing human sacrifice (152-63) makes this reading of Polyxo’s speech difficult.<sup>73</sup> But that is the point. Epic *arma* have been thrust into the *artus torus* of elegiac Lemnos, and the encounter is tense.

### The human sacrifice

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. Dominik (1997: 31-34).

<sup>71</sup> Dominik (1997: 33).

<sup>72</sup> This reading is motivated by more than simply the conventions of non-epic literature: it is something the Romans, as human beings, may have felt “in their gut”. The “battle of the sexes” has an evolutionary basis. From the standpoint of evolutionary fitness, the females of many species “want” their mates to remain faithful, thereby increasing the resources available for successfully rearing (a necessarily limited number of) young. On the other hand, the males “want” to be unfaithful, thereby increasing the (potentially unlimited) number of their offspring. For species where males invest resources in the rearing of young, they also “want”, while remaining unfaithful themselves, to prevent female infidelity – this accords well with the Roman double standard whereby a husband may legally philander, with a few restrictions, while a wife may not (for this practice, see Hallett 2002: 332 and 345, n. 15). Holland and Rice (1999: 5087f. and nn. 7-31) provide a bibliography of biological studies on this so-called “intersexual conflict” (i.e., *militia amoris*) in various species – in particular, studies on male traits that increase male fitness while actually *decreasing* female fitness. Polyxo herself encourages us (and Statius’ Roman audience) to think in terms of biological imperatives when she invokes the “law of the wild” (5.116f., cf. Vessey 1973: 180) in underlining the injustice of the Lemnian women’s husbandless plight.

<sup>73</sup> It is, however, worth noting at this point Legman’s discussion of dirty jokes (1975: 481), in which he argues that these jokes serve to control or dispel the anxiety caused by certain taboo subjects and that for this purpose, “the grosser the vocabulary and the more horrible and excruciating the actual content of the joke or poem, the better it seems to serve” (p. 767). For instance, the excessive obscenity of Hor. *Epod.* 8 bestows the potential for humour on what would otherwise have been simply cruel abuse of an old woman. By extending this principle to excessive violence we see that, if a listener had already begun to understand Polyxo’s speech in the context of humorous portrayals of jealous wives and violently lust-crazed old women, then the sheer brutality resulting from Polyxo’s speech could be seen as improving the joke.

The human sacrifice, the first appearance of violent *arma* on Lemnos, carries a strong undercurrent of eroticism.<sup>74</sup> The Lemnians slaughter Polyxo's son in a grove shaded by "Minerva's high hill" (*iuga celsa Minervae*, 5.152, i.e., the *Pallados arces*, "citadel of Pallas", 5.100). But the virgin's shade is invaded by infernal goddesses come as witnesses (155-57), and "mingling everywhere unseen is Venus, Venus holds the arms, Venus brings the ire" (*sed fallit ubique | mixta Venus, Venus arma tenet, Venus admovet iras*, 157f.). The juxtaposition *Venus arma* is striking – it is lust itself (personified as Venus<sup>75</sup>) that causes the violence. As Hypsipyle the virgin witnesses this, she feels like a doe surrounded and pursued by bloody wolves (164-69). This simile is not only a reference to the Roman arena, as we will see,<sup>76</sup> but is eminently appropriate as a description of women driven mad by lust. *Lupa* was a regular term for a prostitute.<sup>77</sup> If, however, the normal "prey" of a *lupa* is her client, here it is Hypsipyle, the virgin – that is, the lust of the Lemnian women is preying upon chastity itself.<sup>78</sup> Hypsipyle's status as

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<sup>74</sup> Erotic too is the uproar that precedes the sacrifice. Statius' statement, *furor omnibus idem* ("the madness was the same for all", 5.148) recalls Virgil's description of the universality of amatory desire, even in the natural kingdom, where animals *in furias ignemque ruunt: amor omnibus idem* ("rush into madness and the fire [of lust]: love is the same for all", *G.* 3.244). Hershkowitz (1998: 47, n. 191) explains that "even Venus is Maenadic, mad, not herself on Lemnos." A truer interpretation, perhaps, is not that love on Lemnos is mad, but that madness on Lemnos is erotic.

<sup>75</sup> See above, p. 29, n. 56.

<sup>76</sup> Below, pp. 95f.

<sup>77</sup> Adams (1983: 335-35). An epigram by Martial demonstrates that the dual meaning of *lupa* was felt in the Flavian period and that a witty play on the two senses was possible: describing a tame lion who unexpectedly kills several young groundskeepers in the Flavian arena, Martial scolds the lion by saying *crudelis, perfide, praedo, | a nostra pueris parcere disce lupa!* ("Cruel, treacherous, brigand! Learn from our she-wolf how to spare boys!", 2.75.9f.). The reference is to the she-wolf who suckled Romulus and Remus – and to prostitutes who "spare" boys too young for their services. Note that, although the sex of the wolves in Statius' simile is not explicitly stated (*cruentis... lupis*, 5.165f., may be any gender), we may assume that they are female, consistent with the explicitly female animals in two other similes (*leae*, 204, and *iuvencae*, 332). Furthermore, the sex of animals that lacked strong sexual dimorphism, such as wolves, may not have been very important to a Roman audience (it often is not today), and was probably assumed to accord with the sex of the Lemnian women in the tenor of the simile: indeed, Latin poets sometimes manipulated an animal's sex for convenience even in sexually dimorphic species, such as lions (see below, p. 86, n. 22).

<sup>78</sup> Burkert (1970: 8, n. 1) argues that the etymology of Hypsipyle's name ("high-gated") connects her in Lemnian ritual with "the 'high gate' of the Great Goddess", but an alternative interpretation may point to

a virgin also helps elucidate a slightly odd feature in this simile, the fact that Hypsipyle is like a doe being *chased* by wolves (when in the tenor of the simile Hypsipyle is not really being chased at all, but simply watching the Lemnian women's sacrifice). This apparent incongruity may in fact be a reference to Ovidian rape scenes in which a rapist, often compared to a wolf, pursues a virginal victim who feels, like Hypsipyle, that at any moment she will be caught.<sup>79</sup> In Ovid's poems, a god or goddess often rescues this victim from her pursuer, but in the realm of sexualized violence that characterizes Hypsipyle's tale, the pursuit of chastity by the lust of the Lemnian *lupae* is only the prelude to the inevitable crime.

Statius, following the titillating example of Ovid's extended pursuits, delays this consummation by replacing sexualized violence with literal sexuality on the evening of the slaughter. Venus grants the Lemnian women and their husbands "a brief truce" (*brevis pax*, 193), the metaphor of the *militia amoris* is inverted, and sex marks a *cessation* of marital (and, for the war-weary men, martial) hostilities.<sup>80</sup> But after this brief

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her virginity. The word πύλη ("gate" could be used as a vulgar allusion to the vagina (Archil. fr. 196a.21 West *IE*<sup>2</sup> and Ar. *Lys.* 1162-64). Thus, "high gate" could in this case be an intact gate, like those of ὑψίπυλος Θήβη (*Il.* 6.416) or Τροία (16.698 and 21.544), thereby signifying virginity.

<sup>79</sup> *Iam iamque teneri | credit et elusus audit concurrere morsus* ("each moment she thinks herself caught and hears the bites snap together as she avoids them", *Theb.* 5.168f.). The two longest pursuits in Ovid (which do not actually end in a rape, because the victims are transformed in the nick of time) are those of Daphne by Apollo (*Met.* 1.502-52) and Arethusa by Alpheus (5.601-22). In each scene the pursuit is compared, among other things, to wolves hunting lambs (1.505 and 5.626f.). Apollo, the first rapist of the *Metamorphoses*, starts off Ovid's long series of rapes and erotic pursuits in irreverent style, reasoning with his quarry that "the terrain you're rushing over is rough: run more slowly, I beg you, and restrain your flight – and I myself will follow more slowly" (*aspera, qua properas, loca sunt: moderatius, oro, | curre fugamque inhibe, moderatius insequar ipse*, 1.510f.). The Ovidian corpus contains several other erotic pursuits (Io and Jove, *Met.* 1.597-600; Syrinx and Pan, 1.701; Lotis and Priapus, 9.347; Atalanta and all men, 10.565; and Chloris and Zephyr, *Fast.* 5.202) and several other similes of rapists as wolves (*Met.* 1.505, 5.626f., 6.528, 11.772, *Ars am.* 1.118, and *Fast.* 2.800; cf. *Ars am.* 2.364, 3.8, and 419).

<sup>80</sup> Prop. 4.8.87f. presents a similar situation. There, however, Propertius and Cynthia lay down their arms (*solvimus arma*, 88) only after he pledges himself to her (the verb is *despondere*, 88, used of marriage pledges, *L&S*, s.v. "despondeo" I.B.), thereby acknowledging defeat. The situation on Lemnos is rather a cease-fire.

respite and with the beginning of the massacre, sex and violence once again become intertwined.

### **Helymus and Gorge**

The first and longest scene of violence in the massacre is a sexualized murder with a dominant murderess and a not-unwilling male victim (5.207-17):<sup>81</sup>

*Helymum temeraria Gorge  
evinctum ramis altaque in mole tapetum  
efflantem somno crescentia vina superstans  
vulnera disiecta rimatur veste, sed illum 210  
infelix sopor admota sub morte refugit.  
turbidus incertumque oculis vigilantibus hostem  
occupat amplexu, nec segnius illa tenentis  
pone adigit costas donec sua pectora ferro  
tangeret. is demum sceleri modus; ora supinat 215  
blandus adhuc oculisque tremens et murmure Gorgen  
quaerit et indigno non solvit bracchia collo.*

As audacious Gorge stands over Helymus, wreathed in branches and breathing out on a high pile of cushions the wine that grows stronger in his sleep, she probes in his disordered garments for a wound, but his unlucky slumber flees just before death's approach. Confused and with his eyes doubtfully awake, he attacks his enemy with an embrace, nor is she more sluggish in driving from behind into his ribs as he holds her, until she touches her own breast with the weapon. This at last was the end of the crime; he lets his head fall back, still affectionate, his eyes trembling; he seeks Gorge with his murmurs, and does not loosen his arms from her unworthy neck.

Although the composition of this scene was not necessarily influenced by the two most extended descriptions of sexual intercourse in Augustan elegy, Propertius 2.15 and

Ovid's *Amores* 1.5, a comparison with these poems will underscore the erotic tone of the

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<sup>81</sup> For a good discussion of this scene, to which mine is indebted, see Nugent (1996: 63f.). It is tempting, given the harmful violence of Gorge's encounter with Helymus, to read the murder as a rape. Nevertheless, Helymus does not attempt to escape Gorge's attentions, instead actively participating in the "sex" and emerging satisfied at the end. We may compare a genuine rape of a man by a woman, that of Hermaphroditus by the naiad Salmacis in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (4.285-388), which involves a struggle, an unwilling participant, and an unhappy conclusion. Despite the differences, Ovid's scene shares with Statius' a necessary feminization of the male victim.

murder and highlight Statius' exploitation of elegiac conventions. The murder has several elements in common with the elegiac poems: heavy drinking (Prop. 2.15.42 and *Theb.* 5.209), a sleeping or reclining man met with a standing or wakeful woman (Prop. 2.15.7f.; *Am.* 1.5.2, 9f.; and *Theb.* 5.207-09), obstructing garments (Prop. 2.15.11f., 17f.; *Am.* 1.5.13f.; and *Theb.* 5.210<sup>82</sup>), and lovemaking presented as battle. This last element is most important. The elegiac poets use the language of warfare and violence metaphorically<sup>83</sup> – *rixa* (“brawl”, Prop. 2.15.4), *luctari* (“to struggle”, 5), *proelium* (“battle”, 48),<sup>84</sup> *pugnare* (“to combat”, *Am.* 1.5.15.), *vincere* (“to conquer”, 15f.), and *proditio* (“betrayal”, 16) – but both poets also hint at actual violence – Ovid tore away (*deripui*, *Am.* 1.5.13) his mistress's tunic while she struggled (playfully) against his actions, and Propertius threatens to tear his mistress's tunic (if she continues to come to bed clothed), beat her, and leave her arms bruised (2.15.17-20). Cahoon examines the relationship between metaphorical violence (the *militia amoris*) and real violence in this and other Ovidian elegies, and concludes that the metaphor constitutes a serious examination of the damaging potential of the Roman male obsession with domination (both in the bedroom and on the battlefield) – the *militia amoris* is a “nightmare”.<sup>85</sup> Notwithstanding this serious undertone, the metaphor of *militia amoris* in the two elegies (and indeed throughout Augustan elegy) is *on the surface* a pleasant one, used either to

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<sup>82</sup> Helymus' garments are emphasized by the difficulty of Statius' diction: *vulnera disciecta rimatur veste* (5.210) means literally that Gorge “probes for wounds in the disordered clothes”. The Loeb translations interpret *vulnera* as “a place to strike” (Shackleton Bailey 2003, cf. Mozley 1928), i.e., a place to *make* a wound. But this seems to be doubtful Latin. It is possible that *vulnera* here means a hole in Helymus' garments (*L&S*, s.v. “vulnus”, I.B), the choice of word looking forward to the literal *vulnus* that Gorge is about to inflict.

<sup>83</sup> Propertius, in fact, contrasts his activities with real warfare, the horrors of which would not occur if all men were to follow his practice (2.15.41-48; cf. Hallett 2002: 339-41 and Lyne 2002: 50-59). Such a sentiment has reappeared more than once in the millennia following the Augustan elegists.

<sup>84</sup> Fedeli's 1984 Teubner edition prints *pocula* at line 48, but lists *proelia* as a conjecture by Fontein.

<sup>85</sup> Cahoon (1988: 307). She discusses *Am.* 1.5 on p. 296. Fredrick (2002: 466-68) gives a similarly dark reading of Prop. 2.15 and also discusses *Am.* 1.5.

contrast the lover with the soldier (in Tibullus and Propertius) or humorously to equate the two (in Ovid).<sup>86</sup> Real violence is a disturbing (at least from most modern perspectives), but subsidiary, element.

In the murder on Lemnos, real violence comes to the foreground<sup>87</sup> and, where the Augustan elegists only call the lover a soldier, Statius makes Gorge a soldier in fact. Nevertheless, the erotic context of the scene and the actions of Helymus prompt us to see a metaphorical undertone to Gorge's own actions. Helymus "attacks his enemy" (*hostem occupat*, 5.212f.), but it is with an embrace (*amplexus*).<sup>88</sup> For her part, Gorge responds immediately (*nec segnius*, 213), and the denial that she is *segnis* characterizes her as an epic hero in contrast to the *segnis inersque* lover of elegy.<sup>89</sup> Indeed, her stabbing of Helymus (*pone adigit costas*, 214) echoes a Virgilian phrase (*transadigit costas*) used in three death-scenes from the *Aeneid*.<sup>90</sup> But in the erotic language of *militia amoris*, this epic slaying is the pornographic penetration that our two elegiac poems tactfully (Prop.

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<sup>86</sup> See above, p. 62, n. 48.

<sup>87</sup> The violence is emphasized to the point that it has obscured the erotic elements for some readers. The ancient commentator Lactantius Placidus, explaining *indigno collo* (5.217), writes, *non indigno collo, sed indignae uxoris. nam amplexus eam fuerat auxilium petens* ("not 'to an unworthy neck', but [to the neck] of an unworthy wife. For [Helymus] had embraced her in search of aid"). As I argue, it is not *auxilium* that Helymus is seeking.

<sup>88</sup> The word-order prompts me to translate *occupat* as "attacks", rather than "seizes" (cf. *L&S*, s.v. "occupo" I.B.2), since it is not until one reads or hears *amplexu* that the action becomes amatory. Ovid uses *occupat amplexu* to describe Bacchus sneaking up on Ariadne and surprising her with a hug (*Fast.* 3.508f.). Even here, the military context remains, with Bacchus executing a surprise-attack.

<sup>89</sup> Tibul. 1.1.58. See above, p. 67, n. 68, for *segnis* as an elegiac word in opposition to epic.

<sup>90</sup> The deaths of Euryalus (9.432), of an unnamed Arcadian (12.276), a "youth of exceptional form and gleaming armour (*egregium forma iuvenem et fulgentibus armis*, 275), and of the Rutulian Sucreo (12.508), the first to be killed by Aeneas in the renewed fighting at the end of the *Aeneid*. There is disagreement over the reading of *Aen.* 9.432 in the three primary manuscripts (although the variants have almost identical connotations): *transabiit* appears in *R*, *transadigit* in *P* and as a correction in *M* (the original reading in *M*, the future-tense *transadibit* is a nonsensical conflation of the two other variants). The verb *transadigere* may take as a subject either a person wielding a weapon (12.508) or the weapon itself (12.275), so it may stand as the verb of the subject *ensis* (9.430) in the death of Euryalus. The word *adactus* (9.431), immediately preceding *transabiit/transadigit*, undoubtedly influenced the production of the variation, but the direction of that influence (i.e., assimilation of *-abiit* to *-adigit* or "correction" of the perceived error in *transadigit*) cannot be determined.

2.15) or teasingly (*Am.* 1.5.25) elide.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, the penetration is particularly risqué: not only is it from behind, it is executed by a woman and the penetrating object drives entirely through the man to touch the woman's breast (both of which details are probably contrary to expectation).<sup>92</sup> Nevertheless, Helymus is left satisfied. As he dies (an apparently common metaphor for an orgasm<sup>93</sup>), he keeps his arms about Gorge, murmurs to her, and remains *blandus* ("affectionate", 5.216) – a term that can describe, in its sense as "charming" or "alluring", the elegiac style in general.<sup>94</sup> Thus, we can see that, although Gorge's actions are portrayed in the language of epic, and although the murder is in actuality quite brutal, both the circumstances surrounding the murder and Helymus' response to his wife's attack encourage an interpretation of the scene in an elegiac context. In Augustan elegy, the *militia amoris* is an amusing, erotic metaphor with an undercurrent of serious violence; the murder of Helymus by Gorge is a violent murder undercut by (amusing?<sup>95</sup>) eroticism.

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<sup>91</sup> The so-called "erotic *aposiopesis*" (McKeown 1987: 118f.). The ability of various verbs for cutting, splitting, and piercing to be used as *ad hoc* sexual metaphors (see Adams 1982: 150f.) suggests that *pone adigere* (or *transadigere*, for that matter) could accommodate a sexual undertone.

<sup>92</sup> Being stabbed in the back would have been a mark of shame, whereas falling on one's sword, as Gorge nearly does, is noble (i.e., manly: cf. Horace's description of Cleopatra's unwomanly suicide, *Carm.* 1.37.21-32). Thus, both the sexuality and the violence of the murder entail a role-reversal: Gorge is an aggressive "man" in the bedroom and a heroic one on the "battlefield".

<sup>93</sup> See Adams (1982: 159), who does not state that dying referred specifically to an orgasm. However, the example he gives from Ausonius, *labitur exanguis* ("he falls, bloodless", *Cent. nupt.* 131), surely refers to the aftermath of an orgasm, just as the example from Apuleius, where Photis tells Lucius to *derige et grassare naviter et occide moriturus* ("draw up [your troops] and attack courageously and kill me, soon to die yourself", *Met.* 2.17), must anticipate Lucius' orgasm. Another example may be Lesbia's *passer* ("sparrow") in Catullus (2-3): if it is intended as a reference to the poet's penis (which is far from certain: see Jones 1998), then the death of the *passer* would represent Catullus as "worn out and exhausted by a physical exertion erotic and deadly to that part which makes a person a man" (*confectum et exhaustum lucta* [sic] *Veneraea et funerata... ea parte quae virum facit*, Voss 1684, quoted by Jones 1998: 188). The association between orgasm and death endures in the French expression *la petite mort*.

<sup>94</sup> The style of Propertius in particular (*Ov. Tr.* 2.1.465, 5.1.17). Cf. Allen (1950: 145).

<sup>95</sup> Throughout this chapter, I characterize the tension of Hypsipyle's tale as one between amusement and horror. Alternatively, one may see a tension primarily between arousal and repulsion, or between excitement and fear. The various alternatives amount to the same thing in general, but emphasize different aspects of the complex appeal of sexualized violence in Statius and the Roman world.

## The other murders

Although the erotic is less pronounced for the remainder of the massacre, the clear equation of violence with sex in this opening scene allows what follows to be experienced in a similar way. The description of the next two murders – *quod te, flave Cydon, quod te per colla refusis | intactum, Crenaeae, comis... vidi lapsare* (“[I recall] that I saw you fall, blond Cydon, and you, Crenaeus, with untouched locks flowing down your neck”, 5.220-23) – emphasizes not only the young age of the victims, but also their sensuality. Long blond hair is usually associated in Roman literature with women, and particularly with goddesses or, on the other hand, women of unmatronly mores.<sup>96</sup> When men are *flavus* or *intactus comis*, it is usually a mark of youth and androgynous beauty.<sup>97</sup> Thus, Statius portrays both Parthenopaeus and Achilles, disguised as a girl on Scyros, as beautiful and blond.<sup>98</sup> Parthenopaeus in particular is notable for his “languorously sensual”<sup>99</sup> description and for his long, flowing hair, which plays an instrumental role in his defeat during the foot-race (6.607-17). The hair of Cydon and Crenaeus – like the passivity of Helymus – thus marks them as feminized recipients of sexualized violence.

The inversion of gender roles in the deaths of Helymus, Cydon, and Crenaeus seems to continue with the murder of Epopeus:<sup>100</sup> *inter sertae torosque | barbara ludentem*

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<sup>96</sup> McKeown (1987: 340f.) on *Ov. Am.* 1.13.2.

<sup>97</sup> See, e.g., McKeown (1987: 417f.) on *Ov. Am.* 1.15.35. Note that long hair could be a mark of *masculinity* in the Greek world (e.g., the Homeric phrase *κάκη κομόωντες Αχαιοί*, “long-haired Achaeans”, or Herodotus’ description of the Spartans exercising and combing their hair before the battle of Thermopylae, 7.208).

<sup>98</sup> Parthenopaeus: *Theb.* 4.251-63, 274; 6.569-81, 607-13; 9.880, and 900-02. Achilles: *Achil.* 1.603-14.

<sup>99</sup> Vessey (1973: 218). Vessey states (p. 218) that only in descriptions of Parthenopaeus does Statius’ *Thebaid* approach “anything like eroticism”. Although he therefore neglects the eroticism pervading the Lemnian episode, he does note elsewhere the marked “sensuality” of Polyxo’s speech (p. 180).

<sup>100</sup> The intervening murder of Gyas, Hypsipyle’s betrothed, is the only one in which the victim is not feminized nor the murder sexualized (Gyas is *fortis*, “brave”, 5.222, and Hypsipyle chastely fears him, 222f.). Hypsipyle is as careful to keep herself chaste as she is to dissociate herself from the violence of Lemnos (Nugent 1996: 60-62).

*fodiebat*<sup>101</sup> *Epopea mater* (“as he played amongst the chaplets and couches, Epopeus’ mother savagely stabbed him again and again”, 5.224f.). Here, the collocation *Epopea mater*, emphatically delayed until the end of the sentence and line, possibly was meant to recall the *Epopeus pater*,<sup>102</sup> the king of Lesbos who had sex with his daughter Nyctimene, resulting in her transformation into an owl by Minerva.<sup>103</sup> Although the incestuous undertones thus created would not seem to be pleasant, it must be noted that the primary description of this incest in Latin poetry before Statius occurs in a less-than-serious context in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (2.589-95): a crow complains to a raven that she has been supplanted as Minerva’s favourite bird by Nyctimene, even though the goddess transformed her from a princess to a crow to rescue her from the lustful pursuit of Neptune (569-88) but made Nyctimene an owl as a punishment for her incest. In any case, to a contemporary Roman who knew the story of Epopeus and Nyctimene, the scene of a *mother* killing (in the context of sexualized violence) a *son* named Epopeus might have been a darkly amusing inversion.

The inversion of sexual roles continues with the final murder Hypsipyle describes, before the sight of a daughter carrying her father’s severed head<sup>104</sup> drives her to her

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<sup>101</sup> Note that *fodiebat* is an iterative imperfect – on a small child, this seems to be overkill. Note also, in the context of generally sexualized violence on Lemnos, that the potential sexual implications of *fodire* and *ludere* – and of course *torus* – may have been felt (Adams 1982: 151f. and 162f.).

<sup>102</sup> Hyg., *Fab.* 204 (*hanc Epopeus pater amore incensus compressit*, “Her father Epopeus, inflamed with love, raped her [Nyctimene]”); cf. 253 (of course, I do not suggest that Statius is echoing the actual wording of this passage, the date of which is in any case impossible accurately to determine, but rather that the natural phrase *Epopeus pater* may have sprung to the mind of a Roman listener). Note that Lesbos was famous for the sexual perversity of its inhabitants, particularly its aggressively sexual women (Dover 1989: 182-84), and would thus have been suitable for comparison to the aggressive Lemnian women.

<sup>103</sup> Either as a punishment (Ov. *Met.* 2.589f.) or out of pity (Hyg. *Fab.* 204). See Bömer (1969: 382f.) for the extant sources of the Nyctimene myth. Hyginus (*Fab.* 204 and 253) names Nyctimene’s father as Epopeus.

<sup>104</sup> The severed head, like the still-affectionate Helymus, murmurs (5.236f., *etiamnum in murmure truncos | ... patris vultus*, cf. 216f., *murmure Gorgen | quaerit*). It is surprisingly difficult to decide which of the two occurrences is more unsettling.

father's chambers.<sup>105</sup> Lycaste stands weeping over her brother Cydimon, who is the same age as his sister, possesses a face like hers, a bloom on his cheek, and hair that she herself had decorated with gold (226-29). Cydimon is fully feminized and even more passive than Helymus – he does not even wake up before his sister kills him (233-35, cf. 210f.).

## Conclusion

We can see that the Lemnian massacre is marked by an inversion of gender roles and the sexualization of violence. While this may be seen as disturbing, the blend of elegiac sexuality and epic violence – epic *arma* thrust into a Callimachean *artus torus* – allows the episode to be seen as a literal-minded twist on the jealous girlfriends, dominant mistresses, and *militia amoris* of elegy. Although it is difficult to know exactly how a Roman audience would have interpreted this, a reaction of amusement or titillation does not seem impossible. We may at least be sure that one element of the massacre, the assumption by the women of traditionally male roles, could be viewed as humorous in Roman eyes.<sup>106</sup> Aside from the Lemnian women's clumsy defence against the Argonauts,

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<sup>105</sup> And even here there may be erotic, incestuous undertones (Brown 1994: 120f.).

<sup>106</sup> That is not to say that this humour did not conceal real concern. We have already seen that humour was used to combat the (perceived) threat of (supposedly) aggressive lust in Roman women (above, p. 65). We may observe this in Ovid's account of the rape of the boy Hermaphroditus by the naiad Salmacis (4.285-388), an episode that features the Lemnian themes of gender inversion, sex, and violence. The scene is quite funny: in attempting to inquire casually into Hermaphroditus' identity and romantic situation (320-26), Salmacis blunders through an insinuation of incest (323f., *et frater felix, et fortunata profecto | si qua tibi soror est, et quae dedit ubera nutrix*, "your brother is lucky and your sister – if you have one – is fortunate for sure, and the nurse who gave her breasts to you") into a bald offer of sex, adulterous or otherwise (327f.); faced with resistance, she wants to get at least *sororia oscula* ("kisses a sister would get", 334f. – and we recall that Hermaphroditus' putative sister is *fortunata profecto*) but her hands reaching for his neck (335) betray unsisterly intentions; rebuffed, she spies on her prey with humorously exaggerated lust – not only does *she* burn with longing, but so do her very eyes, as if they were mirrors reflecting the light of the sun (346-49); finally, when she attacks him as he swims in her pool, she ensnares

which Hypsipyle describes as a source of embarrassment for Pallas and of laughter for Mars,<sup>107</sup> there is a mention in the *Silvae* of female gladiator matches in Domitian's arena (*Silv.* 1.6.51-64), which Statius describes alongside dwarf fights, calling the spectacles a source of *levis voluptas* ("light pleasure", 53) for the audience and, once again, laughter for *Mars pater et cruenta Virtus* ("Father Mars and bloody Valour", 62).<sup>108</sup> Martial describes female gladiators (*Spect.* 7) and lion hunters (*Spect.* 8) at the inaugural games of the Flavian amphitheatre in AD 80, spectacles that inspire in him, if not amusement, then pleasant wonder at their incongruity.<sup>109</sup> Thus it seems that for a Roman audience, a woman taking up arms was not necessarily frightening.

Nevertheless, the various alluring undertones of the Lemnian massacre would not have been felt effectively if they were swamped by the horror of the violence that Hypsipyle describes. A ten-line summary of the bloody aftermath of murder (5.252-61) stands out in particular as perhaps the most creatively and gruesomely bloody tableau in the entire *Thebaid*. In order to understand how a Roman audience may have reacted to this, we must turn in the next chapter to a fuller examination of the venue in which Domitian staged his female and dwarf gladiator bouts – the Roman arena. As we will see, the savage spectacles in the arena suggest that a Roman audience might not have been horrified by the violence of the Lemnian massacre at all.

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him like an octopus ensnaring its prey (366f.) – an unusual and humorously accurate description. But, despite all this, the rape has a serious consequence: Hermaphroditus and Salmacis merge into an hermaphrodite, and any man who enters the pool of Salmacis thereafter "softens" (*mollescere*) into a *semivir* ("half-man", 386). As Richlin (1992: 166) explains, "when a female acts male [by acting as an aggressive rapist], the result is the unmaning of all men, and the narrative makes it clear that this is a bad thing (e.g., 4.285-86)."

<sup>107</sup> 5.356f. See below, p. 108, n. 87.

<sup>108</sup> Dio Cassius also mentions similar fights, which Domitian staged at one point to appease a discontented crowd (67.8.4). Cf. Suet., *Dom.* 4.1.

<sup>109</sup> Juvenal, who wrote under the emperors Trajan and Hadrian, describes women aspiring to participate in gladiatorial matches (6.246-67) and assumes a tone both outraged and amused. Cf. esp. 259-64, where he writes that women who cannot tolerate the heat and chafing of the most delicate clothes will willingly don the accoutrements of a gladiator. Like Mars and *Virtus*, Juvenal laughs at the incongruity (264).

**CHAPTER FOUR:**  
**HYSIPYLE AND HER AUDIENCE**  
**Slaughter as Spectacle**

Marcus Andronicus: Why dost thou laugh? It fits not with this hour.  
—Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, Act 3, Scene 1

**Introduction: the arena**

Modern scholarship has largely moved past the point where authors, citing the Roman arena and its influence on Roman culture, thought, and literature, expressed only revulsion and then summarily dismissed the issue – a sentiment strikingly articulated by Nisbet and Hubbard’s note (1970: 330) on Horace, *Odes* 1.28.17: “In a bitter figure the Romans sometimes likened great military exploits, particularly those of the civil war, to the contests of the arena, where the vilest slaves were butchered for the pleasure of a sadistic proletariat.” Instead, scholars now recognize that the arena was “one of the most significant cultural institutions of Rome,”<sup>1</sup> with effects extending into the spheres of politics, art, literature, love, and everyday conversation<sup>2</sup> – far beyond the immediate gratification of the “sadistic proletariat” (that is, the crowds of varied age, ethnicity,

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<sup>1</sup> Gunderson (2003a: 637).

<sup>2</sup> Politics: Gunderson (2003a) evaluates the importance of the arena to the image and success of Vespasian and Titus, while Bartsch (1994: 1-62) discusses Nero’s public performances (although this performer was not subject to violence as in the Roman arena, his audience certainly was). Art: Brown (1992) discusses artistic representations of scenes from the arena, largely from the third and fourth centuries AD. Literature: Shelton (2000: 90ff.) and Monaghan (2003) discuss the influence of the arena on Senecan drama, Saylor (1987: 593-602) does the same for Petronius’ *Cena Trimalchionis*, Most (1992: 400ff.) for Lucan’s *Bellum Civile*, and Zissos (2003) for Valerius Flaccus’ *Argonautica*. Cf. also Hor. *Ep.* 1.1.2, where the poet compares his literary career to that of a gladiator. Love: note especially Ovid’s practical advice (*Ars am.* 1.89-134) for finding suitable amatory partners at the games (*ludi*, 97, in the “curved theatres”, *curvi theatri*, 89) where women “come to watch and come to be watched themselves” (*spectatum veniunt, veniunt, spectentur ut ipsae*, 99); Ovid also recommends looking for women at the Circus (135-162), gladiatorial matches held in the Forum (163-170), a *naumachia* (171-176), and triumphs (219-28). Everyday conversation: Horace (*Sat.* 2.6.43f.) cites gladiators as an example of typical small-talk.

social status, and gender<sup>3</sup> that frequented various venues and, following its inauguration in AD 80, the 50,000-seat Flavian amphitheatre<sup>4</sup> in order to view incredibly lavish spectacles presented by statesmen and emperors from the Republic to the Severan dynasty and beyond<sup>5</sup>). Although Horace himself had fought at Philippi (*Carm.* 2.7.9-16), his comparison of war to the gladiator matches reminds us that for most Roman authors and their audience during the *pax Romana* of the early Empire (including in all likelihood Statius<sup>6</sup>), the spectacles of the arena would have been the primary, if not the only, opportunity for witnessing bloodshed and military activity<sup>7</sup> – an observation of great importance to a proper understanding of Statius’ Lemnian episode.

The importance of the arena to the Roman world is attested both by the resources (human or otherwise) expended upon various spectacles<sup>8</sup> and by their longevity, with gladiator matches beginning at the funeral of Junius Brutus in 264 BC (*Livy, Per.* 16.6; *Val. Max.* 2.4.7; *Serv. in Aen.* 3.67, *Thilo-Hagen* 1.349.10-14) and extending until the abolishment of gladiator schools by Honorius in AD 404 (*Theodoret, Ecclesiastical History*, 5.26). The incredible brutality of the arena is manifest in the writings of ancient

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<sup>3</sup> Kyle (1998: 3).

<sup>4</sup> Hopkins (1983: 2). I mention merely the most important amphitheatre in the Roman world, but amphitheatres were ubiquitous in the empire, and an important part of Roman identity (Wiedemann 1992: 40-47).

<sup>5</sup> Hopkins (1983: 9) and Kyle (1998: 90 and 191).

<sup>6</sup> Vessey (1973: 146). Statius may have observed battles during the civil war of AD 69, but if this is true, he makes no mention of them in his extant works.

<sup>7</sup> Hopkins (1983: 2).

<sup>8</sup> Hopkins (1983: 7-12) makes the most of unfortunately scant evidence to provide a good overview of the incredible cost of Roman spectacles. Plass (1995: 46-55) gives a more detailed treatment, pointing out that the actual cost of a spectacle was less important than that it be *perceived* as extravagant and extraordinary – in both quantity and quality. Statius illustrates this point in describing the death of a trained lion beloved of the emperor (*Silv.* 2.5.27-30): *...magni quod Caesaris ora | inter tot Scythicas Libycasque et litore Rheni | et Pharia de gente feras, quas perdere vile est, | unius amissi tetigit iactura leonis* (“...because, among so many beasts from Scythia and Libya and the banks of the Rhine and the people of Pharos, whom it is cheap to squander, the loss and expenditure of one lion touched the countenance of mighty Caesar”). Statius compliments the emperor twice, for the quantitative and the qualitative extravagance of his games: first, because he could so casually squander such a great quantity of exotic animals and, second, because he possessed a trained lion of such extraordinary quality that its loss saddened even his own imperial person.

authors, of which Seneca provides some of the most arresting testimony, both for the spectacle and the spectators (*Ep.* 7.3-5):

*Casu in meridianum spectaculum incidi, lusus exspectans et sales et aliquid laxamenti quo hominum oculi ab humano cruore adquiescant. Contra est: quidquid ante pugnatum est misericordia fuit; nunc omissis nugis mera homicidia sunt. Nihil habent quo tegantur... [4] Hoc plerique ordinariis paribus et postulaticis praeferunt... Quo munimenta? quo artes? omnia ista mortis morae sunt. Mane leonibus et ursis homines, meridie spectatoribus suis obiciuntur. ... [5] ‘Sed latrocinium fecit aliquis, occidit hominem.’ Quid ergo? quia occidit, ille meruit ut hoc pateretur: tu quid meruisti miser ut hoc spectes? ‘Occide, verbera, ure! Quare tam timide incurrit in ferrum? quare parum audacter occidit? quare parum libenter moritur?’ ... Intermissum est spectaculum: ‘interim iugulentur homines, ne nihil agatur’.*

I happened to drop in on a midday show, expecting fun and wit and some relief in which human eyes could rest from human blood. Quite the opposite: whatever fights there were before were acts of mercy, for now all the trifling is gone and it is straight-up homicide. The men wear no protective equipment.... Most spectators prefer this to the regular and the special-request pairings... Why have protection? Why skill? All that delays death. In the morning, men are thrown to the lions and bears, at midday to their own spectators... ‘But,’ you say, ‘so-and-so was a brigand, he killed a man.’ And so? Because he killed, he has deserved to suffer this. What have you done, wretch, to deserve to watch this? ‘Kill him, beat him, burn him! Why does he rush against the sword so timidly? Why does he kill with so little boldness? Why does he die so unwillingly?’ ... And when there's an intermission: ‘Let some throats be cut meanwhile, so there's still something going on.’

It must be noted that, while Roman society on balance clearly did not disapprove of the spectacles of the arena, neither did the authors of our extant (pagan) sources,<sup>9</sup> even Seneca and Cicero, who have sometimes been advanced as opponents of Roman games.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Wiedemann (1992: 128-64) discusses the sources in detail, focussing on philosophers, historians, and Christian authors. Considering the Augustan poets, Segal (1994: 257 and n. 2) asserts that Virgil, Horace (*Carm.* 3.13), and Lucretius (5.1308-49) expressed disgust for bloody spectacles. But he advances no evidence to demonstrate Virgil's distaste for the arena, while Horace's description of sacrificial blood staining the *fons Bandusiae* (*Carm.* 3.13.6-8) is disturbing only from a modern perspective (see West 1967: 127-30, whose insistence that Horace must be read in his ancient context applies equally well to all Classical literature). Lucretius' disapproval of involving wild animals in warfare (5.1308-49) stems not so much from the savagery of the results as from the complete failure of the act as a military strategy. Furthermore, the opening lines of Lucretius' second book express the sort of disdainful superiority that

That the Roman games were not condemned by authors as philosophically literate as these, and that they could be chatted about by a poet as amiable as Horace (*Sat.* 2.6.43f.),<sup>11</sup> are testaments to the radical difference between Roman and modern attitudes towards violence (and thus the importance of understanding this Roman attitude when examining Roman literature).<sup>12</sup> For the spectacles of the arena were bloody indeed. Blood pours onto the ground in many extant mosaics of gladiatorial and venatorial

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seems to have been an important factor in the enjoyment of spectacles (see below, p. 88): using the sea as a metaphor for the perils of an unenlightened life, Lucretius writes that “it is sweet when the winds are stirring up the waves on the wide sea to look out from the shore at the great struggles of another; not because the troubles of anyone are a pleasant delight, but because it is sweet to see that you are free from such troubles” (*suave, mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis | e terra magnum alterius spectare laborem; | non quia vexari quemquam est iucunda voluptas, | sed quibus ipse malis careas quia cernere suave est*, 2.1-4). This attitude verges upon what must have been common for arena spectators, *Schadenfreude* – the Greek’s called it ἐπιχαίρεικακία (cf. Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 1108b) – but Lucretius (l. 3) is careful to specify that this is in fact *not* what he feels. Propertius, in contrast, has fewer qualms about feeling an unphilosophical joy (*iucunda voluptas*, “pleasant delight”, 1.10.3) at the amatory misfortunes of his rival Gallus (for an ironic reading of Prop. 1.10 and the poet’s *iucunda voluptas* as an expression of *Schadenfreude*, see Lyne 1980: 110-14 and Arnold 1997).

<sup>10</sup> Kyle (1998: 3f.). Seneca’s concern in the passage I have quoted is not for the suffering of the condemned but for the minds of the spectators, and thus his objections are limited to those executions in which he saw no educative purpose, which in fact encouraged the audience to act in the same sub-human, beastlike fashion for which the condemned prisoners were being executed (Shelton 2000: 99f.; cf. Barton 1989: 8). Provided that deaths in the arena furnished *exempla* of *virtus* or terrifying warnings against committing crimes, Seneca does not seem to have disapproved (Wistrand 1990: 42; cf. Shelton 2000: 96-101). Cicero’s famous story of an audience sympathising with beleaguered elephants at Pompey’s games in 55 BC (*ad Fam.* 7.1.3) is suspect because he was writing to console a friend who missed the spectacle, and may thus have been trying to minimize its appeal (Wiedemann 1992: 139f.). In any case, the sympathy was directed towards animals, not humans. An amusing parallel to this sort of selective sympathising comes from a scene in the 2003 movie *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, in which a group of heroic knights of Rohan battle a horde of evil men of Harad, mounted on giant elephant-like creatures called mumakil. In a commentary included on the Special Extended DVD edition (2004, New Line Cinema), the director and co-writers (Peter Jackson, Fran Walsh, and Philippa Boyens) noted that during test-screenings of this scene, audiences were so sympathetic with the mumakil (but *not* with the men of Harad) as they succumbed to arrow wounds that shots of mumakil stomping on Rohan horses had to be emphasized in order to return audience sympathy to the heroes of the movie.

<sup>11</sup> See above, p. 80, n. 2.

<sup>12</sup> The Christian elements of modern civilization, centred upon a victim of a horrific Roman execution, allow little sympathy for Roman violence (see Tenney 1964 for a medical account of the suffering and death of Christ). Neither did the other half of the Greco-Roman world revel in violent deaths as the Romans did; in fact, the historical trend in Athens seems to have been towards *less* gruesome methods of capital punishment (Barkan 1935: 4 and *passim*), such as hemlock, “the last and most humane phase of capital punishment in Athens” (p. 73), the very gentle effects of which Plato describes in the death of Socrates (*Phd.* 117e-118a; see Barkan 1935: 73-78 for its use in Athens and Bloch 2001 for a detailed confirmation of the medical accuracy of Plato’s description).

events.<sup>13</sup> The *Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (8.21) records a martyr in the Severan period who bled so profusely after only one bite from a leopard that he regarded it as a second baptism and the crowd mocked him by shouting a greeting that traditionally followed a good bath – *salvum lotum! salvum lotum!* (“Well washed! Well washed!”, 8.21.2).<sup>14</sup> It is difficult to decide which response to this incident is more disturbing to modern eyes, the savage wit of the audience or the religious fervour of the condemned. In any case, the bloody quality of these spectacles yielded only to their quantity: the author of a recent book on the Roman games acknowledged the immense number of humans and animals slaughtered in the arena by devoting four of his book’s nine chapters partially or entirely to discussing the disposal of corpses.<sup>15</sup>

### **“Fatal charades”**

The testimony of Seneca quoted above suggests that the noon-time spectacles, between the morning *venationes* and the afternoon gladiator matches, had a particularly repulsive quality. But, as Vessey (1973: 251) has cogently observed, “What is repulsive is not necessarily horrific, and grotesqueries are always on the brink of absurdity.” This is true – even, it seems, in Roman eyes – of a feature of the noon-time spectacles that has particular bearing on our interpretation of Statius’ Lemnian episode: what Coleman (1990) calls “fatal charades”. These fatal charades, literary records of which are extant for the late Republic up until the Severan period,<sup>16</sup> were public executions or

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<sup>13</sup> E.g., Brown (1992: figs. 9.3-4, 6-8, and n. 29).

<sup>14</sup> See Musurillo (1972: 131, n. 131) for the greeting *salvum lotum!*

<sup>15</sup> Kyle (1998: chs. 4-7)

<sup>16</sup> Coleman (1990: 60-66).

punishments staged as enactments of (and sometimes clever variations on) the fates of various characters from mythology.

Ancient authors provide evidence for what Coleman<sup>17</sup> plausibly interprets as enactments in the arena of the self-castration of Attis (Tert. *Apol.* 15.4f.) and the burning of Mucius Scaevola's hand (Mart. 8.30 and 10.25), the near-fatal nocturnal swim of Leander (Mart. *Spect.* 28 and 29), the immolation of Hercules (Tert. *Apol.* 15.4f., *Anth. Pal.* 11.184), the rape of Pasiphaë (Mart. *Spect.* 6), and the deaths of Daedalus (Mart. *Spect.* 10) and Orpheus (Mart. *Spect.* 24-25).<sup>18</sup> The final three charades are all recorded in Martial's *Liber Spectaculorum*, a collection of epigrams commemorating the inaugural games of the Flavian Amphitheatre in AD 80, eleven years before the probable publication of Statius' *Thebaid*.<sup>19</sup> The epigrams pertaining to Daedalus, Orpheus, and Pasiphaë all convey a tone of amazement, amusement, and delight at the clever enactments or modifications of traditional mythology. In the "Daedalus" charade, a condemned prisoner may have "flown" above the arena on a stage mechanism imitating wings, which would have been removed upon his landing,<sup>20</sup> leaving him helplessly

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<sup>17</sup> Coleman (1990:60-67) describes all of the charades I mention except that of Leander. Coleman (2006) treats each of the epigrams from the *Liber Spectaculorum* individually, adopting a numbering system different from that which she uses in Coleman (1990): *Spect.* 5 (Coleman 1990) = *Spect.* 6 (Coleman 2006), 8 = 10, 24 = 21, 25 = 21b. I follow the more recent system.

<sup>18</sup> Both are mauled by bears, *παρ' ἴστορίαν* ("contrary to the story", *Spect.* 21.8). Orpheus was in fact torn apart by Thracian women (Verg. *G.* 4.520-22 and Ov. *Met.* 11.1-43), while the story of Daedalus' death was not commonly told.

<sup>19</sup> The dating of the *Liber Spectaculorum* and the identity of the "Caesar" that Martial addresses have been the subject of much debate, summarized by Coleman (2006: *xliv-lxiv*). The identification of Titus' games in AD 80 as the occasion for the collection is the *communis opinio* (Coleman 2006: *xlvi*). Dominik (1994a: 181-83) gives a timeline of the political and personal events pertaining to Statius' life, including the probable publication of the *Thebaid* in AD 91.

<sup>20</sup> For this interpretation, see Coleman (1990: 63) and (2006: 97), who compares a similar "flight" in Nero's amphitheatre by an "Icarus" (Suet. *Nero* 12.2). Coleman (2006: 97f.) also cites a personal communication from David West, suggesting that "Daedalus" and the bear may have been placed into a high-walled, open-topped maze representing the Minotaur's labyrinth. Although the mythological Daedalus of course did not die in the labyrinth (but see Garstad 2008 on his fate in Euripides' fragmentary *Cretans*; I have not been able to obtain D'Alfonso 2006, whose arguments Garstad summarizes), we may be fairly certain that

exposed to the death that Martial describes: *Daedale, Lucano cum sic lacereris ab urso, | quam cuperes pennas nunc habuisse tuas!* (“Daedalus, since a Lucanian bear is tearing you apart like this, how you must wish you had your wings now!”, *Spect.* 10).

Martial is clearly amused by the irony of this modification to the standard myth.

He presents a similar reaction to the “Orpheus” charade, in which a condemned prisoner may have been released into a mock-up of a forest, filled with rocks and trees (*Spect.*

24.3f.), various species of harmless animals and birds (5f.), and a bear (7f.): *ipse sed ingrato iacuit laceratus ab urso. | haec tantum res est facta παρ’ ἴστορίαν* (“but

[Orpheus] himself fell, torn apart by an unappreciative bear. Only this detail occurred contrary to the story”).<sup>21</sup> Orpheus, famed in myth for captivating all of nature with his

music, could not please in reality the bear that killed him. In the following epigram,

Martial returns to this charade, accounting for the departure from the traditional myth by providing his own mythological explanation:<sup>22</sup> *Orphea quod subito tellus emisit hiatu |*

*ursam accituram, venit ab Eurydice* (“as for the fact that the earth produced from a sudden chasm a bear to summon Orpheus: it came from Eurydice”, *Spect.* 25).

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neither did he at the paws of a bear – grisly innovations to familiar stories seem to have been part of the fun.

<sup>21</sup> Coleman (2006: 177) provides a hypothetical reconstruction of the enactment of this scene, and a discussion of the final line (pp. 180f.), which is corrupt in the manuscript tradition.

<sup>22</sup> See Coleman (2006: 182-84) for a discussion of this epigram, its link to the previous one, and its textual problems (the most important of which is that *ursam accituram* is a correction for the evidently corrupt readings of the manuscripts, *versa miramur* and *versa is amur*). The sex of the bear has changed from the previous epigram to avoid the serious ambiguity that would have resulted from a masculine *ursum acciturum*: that is, it could be the bear “summoning” Orpheus (to his death) or Orpheus summoning the bear with the power of his music. Coleman suggests that a Roman audience might not have felt the animal’s sex to be significant and notes (pp. 180 and 185) that the sex of animals in Latin poetry is sometimes determined (or changed) by metrical constraints, e.g., Stat. *Achil.* 1.465f., *simul hirtus aper, simul ursa lupusque | cogitur et captos contempsit cerva leones* (“The bristling [male] boar is driven together with the [female] bear and the [male] wolf, and the [female] deer despises the captured [male] lions”), or Lucr. 5.1310-19, *et validos partim prae se misere leones... [1315] terrificas capitum quatientes undique cristas... [1318] inritata leae iaciebant corpora saltu | undique* (“and sometimes [armies] sent before them mighty [male] lions... tossing the terrifying manes on their heads everywhere... the [female] lions hurled their frenzied bodies all over the field”).

These charades of Daedalus and Orpheus show how the influence of the arena could shift the emotional content of traditional mythology, turning what were conventionally lamentable stories (e.g., Verg. *Aen.* 6.14-33, Ov. *Met.* 8.183-235, and *Ars am.* 2.21-96 on Daedalus and Icarus; Verg. *G.* 4.453-527, Ov. *Met.* 10.1-85, and 11.1-66 on Orpheus and Eurydice) into gruesomely funny spectacles.<sup>23</sup> More than this, we see that the “Orpheus” charade prompted Martial not only to change the traditional emotional tone of the myth, but even incorporate, however facetiously, new details.

The charade involving Pasiphaë concentrates not on a clever reimagining of the traditional myth, but rather a startling confirmation of its veracity (*Spect.* 6):<sup>24</sup>

*Iunctam Pasiphaën Dictaeo credite tauro:  
vidimus, accepit fabula prisca fidem.  
ne se miretur, Caesar, longaeva Vetustas:  
quidquid Fama canit, praestat harena tibi.*

Believe that Pasiphaë was mated with the Dictaeon bull: we have seen it, the ancient fable has gained credence. Don’t let ancient Tradition marvel at herself, Caesar: whatever Myth sings of, the arena provides for you.

If the amused tone of the other epigrams is absent here, it is replaced by one of amazement and delight – by presenting a tale of horrifying perversion as an execution even more “horrifying” (for a modern audience), the amphitheatre once again has provoked a response of pleasure rather than revulsion.<sup>25</sup> It seems fair to conclude, as has

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<sup>23</sup> We may already see the influence of the arena in Ovid’s presentation of the death of Orpheus (*Met.* 11.1-43), which contains a simile comparing Orpheus to a stag in the morning arena, about to be killed by dogs (11.25-27, see below, p. 95). Note that although Ovid’s account of Orpheus and Eurydice is much more comical than the high tragedy of Virgil (Mack 1995 supplies a straightforward comparison of the versions), this may be interpreted as a sympathetic humanization of Orpheus, rather than an Ovidian spoof (Segal 1972).

<sup>24</sup> Coleman (1990: 63f. and 2006: 64f.) discusses in explicit detail how this charade might have been staged. For an accurate appreciation of earlier scholarship on the *Thebaid*, it is important to note, e.g., that when Vessey (1973: 146) wrote that Statius “would have been acquainted with scenes of revolting bestiality in the arena,” it is unlikely he had in mind this particular definition of “bestiality”.

<sup>25</sup> For a Roman spectator who saw female sexuality as dangerous there would have been the added, sadistic pleasure of seeing a woman punished by the very instrument with which women threaten men, that is, unnatural and uncontrollable lust (see above, p. 65, n. 58).

been suggested, that fatal charades such as these “conditioned the way the public ‘saw’ myths,”<sup>26</sup> and, furthermore, that this new way of seeing could extend to the treatment of myths in – at least epigrammatic – literature.<sup>27</sup>

### **The point of punishment (in the arena and on Lemnos)**

These positive reactions to what a modern audience would consider reprehensible spectacles reflect the Roman attitude towards the punishment of criminals. Roman penal philosophy saw punishment not primarily as a means of correcting the condemned or preventing recidivism,<sup>28</sup> but rather an opportunity to exact revenge and to inflict pain and humiliation commensurate (in Roman eyes) with the magnitude of the crime.<sup>29</sup> The humiliation produced by such punishment – fatal charades, for example – seems to have created a gulf between the condemned and the spectators, reducing the possibility of spectator sympathy and uniting them “in a feeling of moral superiority as they ridiculed the miscreant.”<sup>30</sup> The criminals, by violating the laws of Roman society, had excluded

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<sup>26</sup> Kondoleon (1986, quoted by Brown 1992: 210, n. 12).

<sup>27</sup> The generic conventions of epigram, as opposed to epic or tragedy (i.e., urbane, incisive wit as opposed to pathos), cannot sufficiently account for Martial’s positive response to these charades. If we trust Seneca’s account (from the Neronian period) of the bloodthirsty audiences for the noon-time shows at which these charades were sometimes staged (*Ep.* 7.2ff., see above, p. 82), or Tertullian’s assertion (from the Severan period) that the charades involving Attis and Hercules were farces that provoked laughter (*Apol.* 15.4f.), then it seems that Martial’s epigrams are simply giving eloquent voice to the generally positive response of the Roman audience.

<sup>28</sup> Although relapse would obviously have been impossible after one had been executed, many non-lethal punishments seemed designed more to punish and humiliate than to discourage or preclude future crime. Thus, tattooing and branding were commonly used as punishment in the ancient world in order to produce a permanent, degrading disfigurement (Jones 1987: 146-151).

<sup>29</sup> Coleman (1990: 45-49).

<sup>30</sup> Coleman (1990:47). Spectator sympathy was made even less likely by a feeling that the condemned had earned punishment (and not pity) by their actions. Cf. Seneca’s comment on a condemned murderer in the arena: *quia occidit, ille meruit ut hoc pateretur* (“because he killed, he has deserved to suffer this”, *Ep.* 7.5). Ovid makes a similar point in describing the punishment of Erysichthon, who cut down a tree sacred to Ceres and received from the goddess an insatiable hunger that drove him to self-cannibalism: Ovid writes that Ceres “contrived a type of punishment that would have been pitiable, except that his actions had made him pitiable to no one (*moliturque genus poenae miserabile, si non | ille suis esset nulli miserabilis actis, Met.* 8.782f.).

themselves from that society and reduced themselves to the sub-human level of the beasts – or the non-human level of the fire – by which they were often killed.<sup>31</sup> Thus, just as modern audiences feel little compunction in enjoying the deaths of an action movie’s villainous or expendable characters – who are not real people anyhow – a Roman audience had little difficulty enjoying the deaths of people in the arena – who were not really people either.<sup>32</sup> I would add that, if Roman executions were seen as an enactment of the struggle between civilized order and the forces of lawlessness and disorder,<sup>33</sup> then enjoying the inevitable triumph would not only have been easy, but even laudable.

We now return to Statius. The Lemnian massacre, as Hypsipyle describes it, is a punishment, divinely ordained for the crime of failing to give Venus proper worship (5.57-60):

*dis visum turbare domos, nec pectora culpa  
nostra vacant: nullos Veneri sacravimus ignes,  
nulla deae sedes; movet et caelestia quondam*

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<sup>31</sup> Shelton (2000: 90f.). We may note here the two criteria advanced by Aristotle (*Poet.* 1452<sup>b</sup>30-1453<sup>a</sup>7; cf. Adkins 1966) as necessary for a good tragedy, the arousal in the audience of pity (ἔλεος) and fear (φόβος). Pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves (1453<sup>a</sup>4-6, ὁ μὲν γὰρ περὶ τὸν ἀνάξιόν ἐστιν δυστυχοῦντα, ὁ δὲ περὶ τὸν ὅμοιον, ἔλεος μὲν περὶ τὸν ἀνάξιον, φόβος δὲ περὶ τὸν ὅμοιον). A condemned criminal was not unworthy of his punishment nor, in the dehumanized environment of the arena, was he like to the spectators. Thus, the importance of fatal charades to the public perception of myth must not be underestimated: traditionally tragic myths are transformed into material that is, by Aristotle’s definition at least, ἀτράγαδος.

<sup>32</sup> A similar enjoyment with a slightly different justification is found in the various modern “reality” television shows (or even news programs) in which people are involved in horrific accidents or dangerous stunts but – either “miraculously” or through the design of the show – survive unharmed. Here, the gulf between spectator and spectacle is created not by dehumanizing the people but rather by defanging the violence presented. At the risk of overtaxing the comparison between the Roman arena and modern media, I would also suggest that the power exercised by the common spectator over the course of the games and the fates of the “performers” in the arena (cf., e.g., Kyle 1998: 9 and Potter 1996: 147ff.) may be likened to the ability of modern television audiences to vote for their favourite performers on programs such as *American Idol* or *Dancing with the Stars*.

<sup>33</sup> Wiedemann (1992: 46) states this case eloquently: “The arena was the place where civilisation confronted nature, in the shape of the beasts which represented a danger to humanity; and where social justice confronted wrongdoing, in the shape of the criminals who were executed there; and where the Roman empire confronted its enemies, in the persons of the captured prisoners of war who were killed or forced to kill one another in the arena.”

*corda dolor lentoque inrepunt agmine Poenae*

It pleased the gods to throw our homes into turmoil, nor were our hearts free from fault: we consecrated no fires to Venus, the goddess had no temple. Even heavenly hearts are stirred in time with indignation and in slow array the *Poenae* creep on.

But the penalty that the *Poenae* exact for the Lemnians' *culpa* is itself a crime, a massacre that Hypsipyle calls a *scelus* (5.103, 201, 206, 215, 244, and 301), *nefas* (32, 54, 162, 202, and 328; cf. 492), *crimen* (320 and 487), and *facinus* (489).<sup>34</sup> Like the criminals in the Roman arena whose crimes left them excluded from Roman society and at the mercy of sub- or inhuman forces, the Lemnians' disrespect for religious order leaves them exposed to a collapse of social order – crime begets crime and the civilized wealth of Lemnos (5.54-56 and 305f.) falls into impiety and savagery.<sup>35</sup> The eventual arrival of the Argonauts, like the ultimate outcome of the arena, is a victory for civilized order. The Furies that had seized the minds of the Lemnian women are gone (5.350). The women's sex returns to their hearts – that is, an aversion to the masculine world of warfare (396f.). The Lemnians confess their crimes to the Argonauts, the heroes forgive them, and they are married, all under the auspices of the gods (445-48 and 452). But, as in the arena, this return to civilization constitutes the completion of the Lemnians' punishment, as the women realize when they first catch sight of the *Argo*: *nec ratis illa salo, sed divum sera per aequor | iustitia et poenae scelerum adventare videntur* ("it seemed not a ship on the salt sea, but the gods' late justice and punishments for crimes

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<sup>34</sup> She also uses the descriptors *pudendus* (31), *pudibundus* (296), *impius* (190, 300, and 488), and *infandus* (277 and 450).

<sup>35</sup> The women are *impiae* (5.190, 300, and 488), filled with *furor* (33, 91, 148, 245, 281, and 298), and *saevae* (228, cf. 145 and 260), like the quintessentially uncivilized inhabitants of Thrace against whom the Lemnian men wage war (76 and 84; cf. Vessey 1973: 180). For the relationship of Statius' Lemnos to Ovid's Thrace, see below, pp. 92-94.

that drew near over the deep,” 5.359f.).<sup>36</sup> The just punishment that the women anticipate is death in a supposed Thracian invasion (just as the Lemnian men died in a massacre of Thracian savagery<sup>37</sup>). Instead, they are led by Venus (5.445f.), Juno (446-48), and the other gods (452) into love, marriage, and childbirth with the Argonauts, only to be abandoned once again as the heroes sail away and the women re-experience the grief of their original husbands’ departure (*heu iterum gemitus, iterumque novissima nox est*, “alas, there was lamentation once more, once more that final night”, 478). The gods reforge the customary bonds between men and women on Lemnos and, by breaking those bonds thereafter, break the pledge upon which the Lemnian massacre was founded – Venus’ promise to give the women *faces alias melioraque foedera* (“other marriages and better unions”, 5.138). This promise of new husbands – a promise contrary to Roman ideas about (female) marital piety,<sup>38</sup> a promise falsely made in revenge for the Lemnians’ religious impiety – is broken by the rupture of *foedera* that were *meliora* only in the superiority of the Argonauts’ heroic masculinity (i.e., their ability to reassert the customary dominance of men over women). As in the arena, *iustitia* and *poenae* entail the triumph of (Roman) civilization over forces deemed uncivilized.

### **Similes: Hypsipyle and Orpheus**

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<sup>36</sup> I follow Hill (1983) in printing *poenae* at 5.360 and *Poenae* at 5.60. Nevertheless, it would not be unreasonable to see personified *Poenae* in both instances, creeping in (*inrepunt*) at 60 and arriving (*adventare*) at 360. In this case, the *Poenae* at 360 would find a natural companion in a personified *Iustitia*, a common personification in Latin literature: e.g., Hor. *Carm.* 1.24.6 and Verg. *G.* 2.474; cf. Ov. *Met.* 1.150, who names the equivalent Greek deity, Astraea (cf. Arat. 98).

<sup>37</sup> See below, pp. 92-94.

<sup>38</sup> Roman women were legally bound to remain faithful to their husbands, while Roman men were free from such restrictions, provided that they did not sleep with a virgin or another man’s wife (Hallett 2002: 332 and 345, n. 15). Thus, killing a husband for the express purpose of obtaining a new one could be viewed as spousal impiety on two counts.

The similar character of the punishments on Lemnos and in the Roman arena demonstrates only that Statius' telling of the story agrees with Roman penal philosophy. But we may find a more explicit link between Lemnos and the arena in the similes used in Hypsipyle's tale. Hypsipyle compares the Lemnian women to animals five times during the Lemnian episode. Three of these similes simply express the sub-human, bestial irrationality of the Lemnian women:<sup>39</sup> at the outset of the massacre they are Hyrcanian lionesses encircling a herd (5.203-05), in their mourning after the massacre they are a maimed drove of heifers bereaved of the lead bull (330-34), and in their flighty preparation for battle with the Argonauts they are thronging cattle or fleeing birds (349). The other two similes, however, which describe individuals rather than the Lemnians as a whole, are more complex.

We have already discussed the simile comparing Hypsipyle to a doe chased by wolves (5.165-69) as a metaphorical attack on chastity by lust or, more specifically, as a reference to the chases that appear in several Ovidian rape scenes.<sup>40</sup> We may also compare it to the scene from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in which Orpheus, who spurned the love of women (10.79-82), falls victim to a group of Thracian women and is torn apart (11.1-53).<sup>41</sup> In establishing the relationship between this scene and Hypsipyle's simile, we must note that Orpheus and Thrace appear quite frequently in and around the Lemnian episode. The Lemnian men cast off their wives in favour of war against the *tumidi Thracae* ("puffed-up Thracians", 5.75), a war motivated – at least in other versions of the

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<sup>39</sup> But even these similes contain complex details. In the first, the Hyrcanian lionesses are hunting a herd because their cubs are begging for nourishment (5.205), but the Lemnian women slaughter their own "cubs". In the second, the herd has been bereaved of its lead bull by a lion (332), but it was the Lemnian women, as "lionesses" who slaughtered all their own "bulls".

<sup>40</sup> Above, pp. 70f.

<sup>41</sup> Good discussions of the relationship between Orpheus, Thrace, Hypsipyle, and Lemnos, are provided by Nugent (1996: 56-59), who emphasizes the violent eroticism of Thrace, and Brown (1994: 125f.), who discusses the Orphic influence on Hypsipyle's portrayal as a poet and a bereaved mother.



beak, since in the tree she can see only blood and feathers, straying about the captured nest (*Theb.* 5.599-604).

*qualis populea maerens philomela sub umbra  
amissos queritur fetus, quos durus arator  
observans nido implumis detraxit; at illa  
flet noctem, ramoque sedens miserabile carmen  
integrat, et maestis late loca questibus implet.* 515

Like a swallow, mourning in the poplar shade, bewails the brood she lost when a hard ploughman caught sight of them and dragged them, featherless, from the nest; but she laments through the night and sits on a branch, renewing her wretched song, and fills her wide surroundings with sad complaints (*Verg. G.* 4.511-15).

In her lament, then, Hypsipyle the aspiring poet is identified with Orpheus the archetypal singer,<sup>47</sup> but with the difference that Orpheus' calamity transforms him into an eloquent nightingale, while Hypsipyle's loss – figured as a silent nest – leaves her dumbstruck. The Orpheus of Virgil and Ovid remains eloquent even after death, and it is this death (to return to the *Thebaid's* simile of the doe and wolves) that first equates Hypsipyle and the Thracian poet. Both the Thracian women who attack the Ovidian Orpheus and the Lemnian women who murder their husbands are enraged by their frustrated sexual desires (*Met.* 11.7 and *Theb.* 5.106-16), “rash” in their actions (*temerarius*, *Met.* 11.13 and *Theb.* 5.207),<sup>48</sup> and – in what is surely an intentional verbal parallel – ruled by a Fury (*insanaque regnat Erinys*, “and an insane Fury rules”, *Met.* 11.14; *cuncto sua regnat Erinys | pectore*, “in every heart a personal Fury rules”, *Theb.* 5.202f). Faced with these madwomen, Hypsipyle is like a flighty doe pursued by bloody wolves, while Orpheus is like a stag fallen prey to dogs (*Met.* 11.23-27): aspiring poet and archetypal singer fall

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<sup>47</sup> See Gibson (2004: 158-60) for Hypsipyle's portrayal of herself as an epic poet.

<sup>48</sup> This adjective, occurring ten times in Statius' corpus, may have had a generally Ovidian feel. Virgil, Horace, and Lucretius do not use it, nor is it found in Catullus, Seneca's tragedies, or Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*. By my count, it is used once by Propertius (2.8.13), twice by the authors of Tibullus' third book (3.4.7 and 6.27), and five times by Lucan (5.501, 682; 7.590; 8.579, and 795). Ovid uses the word 32 times.

victim to the canine fury of wild women. Orpheus loses his head but maintains his lament. Hypsipyle avoids the savagery of Lemnos (Orpheus' decapitation falls instead on Alcimedede's father, 5.236f.) but, when Lemnos finally catches up to her with the death of Opheltes,<sup>49</sup> she loses both the impetus and audience for her song.<sup>50</sup>

Hypsipyle's simile, then, looks back to the literary world of Ovid's

*Metamorphoses*. Orpheus' simile looks explicitly to the world of the Roman games (*Met.* 11.23-28):

*inde cruentatis vertuntur in Orphea dextris  
et coeunt ut aves, si quando luce vagantem  
noctis avem cernunt. structoque utrimque theatro           25  
ceu matutina cervus periturus harena  
praeda canum est, vatemque petunt et fronde virentes  
coniciunt thyrsos.*

Then they turn on Orpheus with their bloodied hands and throng like birds, if ever they spy a bird of the night [an owl] wandering in the day. And, just as in the amphitheatre a stag, soon to die in the sand of the morning show, falls prey to dogs, they attack the poet and hurl their green-leaved *thyrsos*.

This juxtaposition of ancient Greek myth with contemporary Roman entertainment suggests the pervasive influence of the arena even in Ovid's time, before the construction of the Flavian amphitheatre: an urban audience under Augustus (or the Flavians) would presumably have been much more familiar with most wild animals in the context of the arena than in their natural setting.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, the simile seems designed to modify the

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<sup>49</sup> See above, pp. 39f.

<sup>50</sup> I believe that Hypsipyle constantly repeated her tale of Lemnos not only to solace her grief (cf. Markus 2004: 109f.), but also because she feared that the divine retribution she had escaped on the island (by not killing her father) would eventually come down upon her. Opheltes' death fulfils, and thus ends, these fears, removing a primary reason for her reiteration of the Lemnian tale and obliterating her primary audience (cf. 5.615f. and 6.162). Opheltes' death and the silence it engenders (5.593f.) represent Hypsipyle's failure as an Orphic poet or, in the idiomatically enigmatic formulation of Henderson (1998: 247), the "suicide of narration".

<sup>51</sup> Modern audiences probably think of neither the arena nor any natural setting, but instead of a zoo or nature documentary.

emotional impact of Orpheus' death, undermining the tragedy (as found in Virgil's treatment) with the decidedly un-tragic excitement of a morning spectacle.<sup>52</sup> Hypsipyle's simile has a similar result and, in a way, a greater effect, since her description of the doe's close pursuit by bloody wolves (5.168f.) focuses attention on the excitement of the chase, presumably a primary attraction of such events in the arena.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore this allusion to violent excitement is complemented by the allusion to sexual excitement of the erotic pursuits in several Ovidian rape scenes,<sup>54</sup> for, as several scholars have noted, the pleasure experienced by spectators in the Roman arena seems to have been partly erotic.<sup>55</sup> Thus, sex and violence are conflated in the usual Lemnian pattern as the rapes of

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<sup>52</sup> Like condemned criminals, suffering animals did not arouse in their spectators Aristotle's prerequisites for good tragedy: pity or fear (which arises when a spectator identifies with the sufferer; see above, p. 89, n. 31). Cicero demonstrates this by describing an exception to the rule at Pompey's games in 55 BC (*Ad fam.* 7.1.3): *extremus elephantorum dies fuit: in quo admiratio magna vulgi atque turbae, delectatio nulla exstitit; quin etiam misericordia quaedam consecuta est atque opinio eiusmodi, esse quandam illi beluae cum genere humano societatem* ("The last day was that of the elephants, on which there was great astonishment amongst the commoners and the crowd, but no pleasure; no, there followed even a certain pity and a kind of belief that that animal has a certain fellowship with the human race").

<sup>53</sup> We may compare Martial's description of a chase in the Flavian arena, during which a doe "by various tricks concocts sluggish delays" for her canine pursuers (*damma... varia lentas neceret arte moras*, *Mart. Spect.* 33.1f.). The doe here seems not so much to be fleeing the dogs as teasing the audience by delaying the inevitable outcome.

<sup>54</sup> Gibson (2004: 160), who notes the allusion to the arena in the next simile we will discuss, misses in the current simile both the allusion to the arena and to Ovid's rape scenes. He notes instead (n. 39) the comparison that Gruzelier (1994: 158f.) makes to a Virgilian simile describing Dido as a doe wounded by an arrow (*Aen.* 4.69-73). This simile, aside from the presence of a doe, has no details in common with Hypsipyle's simile; its importance lies instead in a general identification between Hypsipyle and Dido (cf. Gruzelier 1994), which I will not discuss.

<sup>55</sup> Most recently Edwards (2007: 63-66). Evidence comes mostly from Christian authors writing after Statius, but Juvenal, Statius' near-contemporary, gives evidence that gladiators were popular with Roman women, and not for their good looks (see Wiedemann 1992: 26f. for a fuller discussion of the sexual appeal of gladiators). Juvenal describes one Eppia, a senator's wife who leaves her family for a gladiator, and writes that the man was exceptionally ugly, "but he was a gladiator: this fact turns those men to Hyacinthos; this is what she preferred to her boys and her country, to her sister and her husband. It's the sword they love" (*sed gladiator erat: facit hoc illos Hyacinthos; | hoc pueris patriaeque, hoc praetulit illa sorori | atque viro. ferrum est quod amant*, *Juv. Sat.* 6.110-12). Ancient Greek athletes probably provoked a similar, although less discreditable, response in many of their fellow citizens: Carne-Ross (1985: 29), describing the ancient Olympic games, suggests that "even today we tend to blink at the fact that those young men who competed naked under the Mediterranean sun must have aroused more than athletic admiration, and that the victor back home must have been the cause of much sexual commotion" (but note that nudity alone is not enough to guarantee eroticism, since partial or total nudity was rather common in the Archaic and Classical periods; see Hannah 1998). A similar sexuality seems to apply in a modern arena

Ovid, the death of Orpheus, and the spectacles of the arena combine to produce a complex emotional response that is much more positive than may be suggested by the bare details of the human sacrifice that the Lemnian women perform.

### **Similes: Lycaste and Martial's arena**

The Roman arena influences the emotional content of the Lemnian massacre once again, and more explicitly, in the next simile we will consider. As the young Lycaste prepares to kill her young brother in the last of a series of sexually-inverted murders on Lemnos,<sup>56</sup> she hesitates against the urgings of her mother, “like a beast, disaccustomed to anger because of a gentle trainer, that is slow to show fight and in spite of goads and frequent lashes refuses to assume its native temper” (*ut fera, quae rabiem placido desueta magistro | tardius arma movet stimulisque et verbere crebro | in mores negat ire suos*, 5.231-33). Gibson (2004: 160) rightly interprets this as a reference to trained animals in the arena, adducing several descriptions by Statius and Martial of tamed lions in the Flavian amphitheatre.<sup>57</sup> More relevant is Martial's account of a rhinoceros' slow reaction to the goads of his trainers, a description that focuses on the disappointment of the spectators (*Spect.* 26.1-4):

*Sollicitant pavidum dum rhinocerotam magistri  
seque diu magnae colligit ira ferae,  
desperabantur promissi proelia Martis;  
sed tandem rediit cognitus ante furor*

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sport, the Spanish bullfight: Mitchell (1991: ch. 5) gives a discussion, making several comparisons with the Roman arena.

<sup>56</sup> See above, pp. 71-77.

<sup>57</sup> *Silvae* 2.5 and *Mart.* 1.6, 14, 22, 48, 51, 60, and 104. Statius' poem describes, with what seems to be genuine solemnity, the death of a trained lion. Martial's epigrams display more overt amusement in their descriptions of lions that have been trained to attack large prey while ignoring rabbits that enter their mouths.

While the trainers were nervously agitating a rhinoceros and the anger of the great beast was taking a long time to gather itself, the audience began to despair of any battles in the conflict they had been promised; but finally the rage we had known before returned.

After describing the bloody results (the rhinoceros attacks a bear, two bulls, an aurochs,<sup>58</sup> and a lion, 5-11), Martial concludes (probably ironically, given the bloody reward for the spectators' patience): "go now, spectators, and complain about the sluggish delays!" (*i nunc et lentas corripe, turba, moras!*, 12).

Martial's epigram suggests the eagerness with which spectators anticipated bloodshed – the more spectacular the potential bloodshed, the greater the anticipation (and the greater the disappointment if a delay stretched on too long).<sup>59</sup> The murder that Lycaste commits, the fratricide of her fraternal twin (5.226f.), is certainly spectacular bloodshed and, by describing the hesitating murderess as an inirascible arena animal, Statius transforms his audience into a mob of spectators, eager for bloodshed and impatient of delay. In this way he prods his audience's sympathy away from Lycaste's brother, the victim of her attack, towards Lycaste's mother, the "trainer" who goads her like an animal into an attack (229f.).

### **Similes: Lemnos and the Centauromachy**

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<sup>58</sup> Martial writes *bubalus*, properly a species of African antelope. But the term was also used mistakenly for *urus*, the aurochs, which was a large species of cattle (now extinct). See Coleman (2006: 191).

<sup>59</sup> We may compare several epigrams in which unexpected violence by "trained" animals in the arena is greeted with varying degrees of delight: Mart. 2.75 (see above, p. 70, n. 77), *Spect.* 11, 12 (with Coleman 2006: 112f.), and 21 (with Coleman 2006: 164). Coleman (2006: 112f.) makes the perspicuous, and probably correct, assertion that "For Martial's contemporaries, the potential for bloodshed was as thrilling as the likelihood that the animal would submit to the mastery of its trainer." An anchorwoman for CNN.com made a strikingly similar point on the day I wrote this note (April 23, 2008): discussing the television program *American Idol*, she observed that "We love to watch these live shows, because it's like waiting for something bad to happen."

If audience sympathy shifts from the murdered to the murderesses, if the suspense of delay lies not in the hope that Lycaste will spare her brother but in the wish that she will kill him, if fratricide, patricide, and filicide change from crimes into spectacles, then we may better understand the “bizarre morbidity”<sup>60</sup> of the massacre, and especially of the culminating tableau that Hypsipyle and her father see, a bloodbath to rival anything on the bloodied sands of the arena (5.252-61):

*hic impressa toris ora extantesque reclusis  
 pectoribus capulos magnarum et fragmina trunca  
 hastarum et ferro laceras per corpora vestes,  
 crateras pronos epulasque in caede natantes 255  
 cernere erat, iugulisque modo torrentis apertis  
 sanguine commixto redeuntem in pocula Bacchum.  
 hic iuvenum manus et nullis violabilis armis  
 turba senes, positique patrum super ora gementum  
 semineces pueri trepidas in limine vitae 260  
 singultant animas.*

Faces pressed into couches and sword hilts projecting from opened chests, broken fragments of great spears among the bodies and clothes shredded by the sword, overturned mixing bowls and victuals swimming in gore were here to see, and wine, mixed with blood, flowing in torrents from open throats back into the cups. Here was a group of young men and a crowd of the old, whom no weapons should profane, and, laid over the faces of their groaning fathers, half-dead boys sobbed out breaths that wavered on the threshold of life.

For an audience attuned to the bloody excitement of the arena, it is perhaps not the cruelty and inhumanity of this tableau that is most striking, but rather the absurd volumes of blood and gore, the strange reversal of the wine’s regular flow, the sadistically bizarre placement of the boys – in short, the scene’s savage ingenuity. The prominence of these elements would have been supported by the allusion that immediately follows (261-64):

*...gelida non saevius Ossa  
 luxuriant Lapitharum epulae, si quando profundo  
 Nubigenae caluere mero: vix primus ab ira*

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<sup>60</sup> Dominik (1994a: 59).

*pallor, et impulsis surgunt ad proelia mensis.*

Not more savagely does the feast of the Lapiths run riot on frozen Ossa, whenever the Cloud-Born Ones [the Centaurs] grow hot with deep draughts of wine: scarcely the first pallor of wrath and they leap up for battle, overturning the tables.

The battle of the Lapiths and Centaurs is common enough in Greco-Roman literature and art,<sup>61</sup> as Statius perhaps acknowledges in saying that the battle starts “whenever” (*si quando*) the Centaurs get drunk.<sup>62</sup> But the most elaborate description of the brawl, and the one to which I believe Statius is alluding, is found in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (12.182-535).<sup>63</sup> This Centauromachy, narrated as a first-person flashback by Nestor in the Achaean camp during the Trojan War, fulfils the same function in Ovid’s “Iliad” (i.e., the Trojan material in books 12 and 13) as do Odysseus’ *apologos* (*Od.* 9-12), Aeneas’ tale at the court of Dido (*Aen.* 2-3), and Hypsipyle’s account of the Lemnian massacre. Furthermore, although the Centauromachy does not have the sorts of structural or narrative details that link Aeneas’ Fall of Troy to Hypsipyle’s Lemnian massacre, the two share the Lemnian themes of savagery intruding upon civilization and violence precipitated by frustrated lust.<sup>64</sup> Finally, Ovid’s battle is, like Statius’ massacre, a

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<sup>61</sup> *Il.* 1.266-72, *Od.* 21.295-304, *Eur. Andr.* 790-93, *Ap. Rhod. Argon.* 1.40-43, *Orph. Argonautica.* 413-18, *Verg. G.* 2.455-57, and *Hor. Carm.* 1.18.8f. The phrase οἶνος καὶ Κένταυρον (*Od.* 21.295) gained proverbial status (cf. *Anth. Pal.* 7.725 and 11.1), and Horace lists the battle among a series of epic themes that he rejects in favour of praising Lycimnia (*Carm.* 2.12.5). In art, the Centauromachy was portrayed most famously on the west pediment of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia and on the south metopes of the Parthenon.

<sup>62</sup> Shackleton Bailey (2003: 289, n. 17) observes that Statius seems to portray the Centauromachy as a recurrent event, but he makes no attempt to explain this observation.

<sup>63</sup> Statius’ and Ovid’s account share a few narrative details (although shared details were probably inevitable, given the shared subject matter): both authors call the Centaurs the “Cloud-Born Ones” (*nubigenae*, *Theb.* 5.263 and *Met.* 12.211), referring to the phantom, Nephele, who gave birth to them; both authors say the Centaurs grow hot with wine (*Theb.* 5.263 and *Met.* 12.220f.); and both describe the sudden overturning of the dinner tables (*Theb.* 5.263f. and *Met.* 12.222).

<sup>64</sup> Lemnos falls into ruin from the height of civilized prosperity (cf. 5.305, *insula dives agris opibusque armisque virisque*, “an island rich in land and wealth and arms and men”), while the violence of the Centauromachy turns a wedding – one of the foundations of civilization – into the “image of a sacked city” (*captaeque erat urbis imago*, *Met.* 12.225). I have already discussed the role of frustrated lusts in the

virtuoso bloodbath. Dying Centaurs spit teeth mixed with blood (*Met.* 12.256f.) and brains mixed with wine (238-40). A Lapith's crushed face pops out its eyes, its nose lodging in his palate (252f.), while a Centaur's gouged eyeballs stick to his beard and to the stag's antlers that his attacker wields as a spear (268-70). Javelins pin a Centaur's hands to his forehead (385-87) and another's tongue to his chin and chin to chest (456-58). A Centaur falls from Mount Ossa into a tree and "dresses" (*induere*) it with his entrails (337-40); another tramples and bursts his innards as they spill from his opened and soon empty belly, finally tripping himself up (390-92). A Lapith's shattered skull oozes brains from every orifice, like whey strained from curd through a woven basket or grape juice in a wine press (434-38).<sup>65</sup> Groins, human and Centaur, are impaled (439-41, 453f.). Finally, in what is perhaps the model for the cleverest detail of the bloodbath on Lemnos (*Theb.* 5.256f.), the throat of a drunken Lapith is impaled and refills the cups he holds with dark blood (*Met.* 12.325f.).<sup>66</sup>

Fraenkel represents older scholarship in his pronouncement that the Centauromachy "sounds more like Lucan than Ovid" – not a complimentary judgement in his day.<sup>67</sup> Scholars more sympathetic to Ovid's purpose in this scene have recognized that creative gore seems to have been an important end in itself.<sup>68</sup> This gore was almost certainly intended to be entertaining rather than terrifying: if, as Vessey says,

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Lemnian massacre; the Centauromachy begins when the Centaur Eurytus tries to rape Pirithous' bride (*Met.* 12.219-25)

<sup>65</sup> This is omitted, without explanation, from Merkel's 1908 Teubner edition.

<sup>66</sup> Although certainly not a model for the death of Helymus (*Theb.* 5.213-15), the death of Crenaeus (*Met.* 12.312-15) shows a similar concern for the placement of a wound on either the back or the front (see above, p. 74, n. 92): Crenaeus looks back as he flees, takes a blow between his eyes, and thus receives a frontal wound although he had turned his back in flight.

<sup>67</sup> Fraenkel (1945: 102). Along similar lines, Vessey (1973: 147) writes that first-century Roman epics "produce nothing more revolting than Ovid's account of the battle between Centaurs and Lapiths." A damning statement, coming from the premier twentieth-century interpreter of the *Thebaid*.

<sup>68</sup> Musgrove (1998: 225) and Galinsky (1975: 126-28), who sees *variatio* in the manner of deaths as the "main concern" of the scene.

“grotesqueries are always on the brink of absurdity,”<sup>69</sup> then here Ovid has plunged gleefully and intentionally over the precipice into a realm occupied by modern cartoons – or the ancient arena.<sup>70</sup> Statius’ Lemnian episode, although unquestionably informed by the “cartoon violence” of the arena, cleaves closer to the brink separating horror and humour, for his purposes are different from Ovid’s.<sup>71</sup> Ovid’s goal seems to have been a virtuoso display of mock-epic violence to take the place of the Trojan battles that he omits from the Iliadic material of *Metamorphoses* 12.<sup>72</sup> But Statius, as we have seen, is concerned with creating a tension between positive and negative reactions to the Lemnian massacre. Thus, just as Statius alludes to (primarily Ovidian) elegy to give a titillatingly erotic undertone to the terror of the Lemnian massacre, so too does he invoke the ingeniously extravagant violence of the Roman arena and Ovidian mock-epic in order to prompt a less-than-horrified reaction to the violence on Lemnos.

### **Confused viewpoints: *dulce nefas***

It is difficult to decide, then, whether the Lemnian massacre is a horrific crime or a titillating and exciting spectacle. Hypsipyle encapsulates the dilemma in her two-word description of the massacre as a *dulce nefas* (“sweet sin”, 5.162): to the victims it was a

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<sup>69</sup> Vessey (1973: 251).

<sup>70</sup> Martin (2004: 561) notes that the battle of Perseus and the suitors in *Metamorphoses* 5 – the first of three increasingly violent “mock-heroic” battles, followed by the hunt of the Calydonian Boar (book 8) and the Centauromachy – is reminiscent of “an afternoon spent watching professional wrestling or the violence of animated cartoons”. He does not mention the Roman arena as a potential influence, but if Ovid’s battle scenes were not wholly uninfluenced by his contemporary surrounding – and for such an acute observer of Roman city life, very little was – then the gladiator fights of the arena would have been a logical model: Ovid, like Statius, probably never witnessed actual warfare.

<sup>71</sup> Ovid’s purposes are of course far from uncomplicated (e.g., Musgrove 1998 discusses how Nestor’s version of the Centauromachy highlights various problems inherent in epic narration). I suggest only that these purposes are served by an uncomplicated *tone* – one of giddy, hyper-epic violence.

<sup>72</sup> Musgrove (1998: 225).

*nefas*, to the murderesses, *dulce*.<sup>73</sup> It is the point of view that determines the emotional response.<sup>74</sup> If we return to the discussion of *ethos* and *pathos* with which the previous chapter began, we recall that Statius' contemporary Quintilian (*Inst.* 6.2.29-32) advises a forensic orator to visualize what he is describing so that he and his audience may respond as if they were present at the events themselves.<sup>75</sup> He goes on to say that when pity (*miseratio*) is to be aroused, an orator must convince himself that the crime against which he pleads had actually happened to himself, speaking as he would if he were complaining about a personal injustice.<sup>76</sup> In describing the crime of the Lemnian massacre, Hypsipyle certainly experiences the events and their attendant emotions as if she were once again

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<sup>73</sup> Although the Lemnian women come to regret their crime, they enter into it not as a *nefas* but as an epic *res summa* ("a great matter", *Theb.* 5.104), urged by the gods and their own just indignation.

<sup>74</sup> My realization of this fact was inspired partly by a landmark scene from the Quentin Tarantino film, *Reservoir Dogs* (Live Entertainment, 1992), in which "Mr. Blond", a sadistic bank robber, brutally tortures a policeman while his accomplice "Mr. Brown" lies unconscious nearby. The scene is constructed in such a way that the viewer, initially and naturally sympathizing with the policeman, suddenly finds himself encouraged to identify with Mr. Blond. As Self (1996: 75f.) explains it, "We lose sight of whose, exact POV [point of view] we are inhabiting. The sadist who is doing the torturing? The policeman? The incapacitated accomplice? It is this vacillation in POV that forces the sinister card of complicity upon the viewer. For in such a situation the auteur is either abdicating – or more likely *foisting* – the moral responsibility for what is being depicted onscreen from himself to the viewer" (italics original). For Statius' audience, used to viewing the cruelly bizarre violence of the arena (and apparently with little moral compunction), complicity in the Lemnian massacre probably did not create real discomfort until the death of Opheltes (see below, pp. 114-18). The sort of cinematic violence ushered in by the films of Tarantino allows many illuminating comparisons with the violence of both Roman spectacles and Roman epic, particularly in the cases where repulsive violence is portrayed with alluring skill. Peter Markham (in the documentary *Playing it Fast and Loose*, included on the 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition DVD of *Reservoir Dogs*, Lions Gate, 2002) describes this phenomenon in Tarantino's films – but his words might equally be applied to the violence of post-Virgilian epic: "There's the sense of a mischievous, subversive, arrogant creative intelligence at work here, and we feel challenged, when we see graphic violence presented by somebody who's that clever." Erren (1970) and Segal (1994) recognize similar challenges in the violence of Statius and Ovid, while Barton (1989: 9) recognizes in Lucan and Seneca the sort of problematic presentation of violence that Self found in Tarantino: "The writers of the Neronian period, in particular, gloried in the violence they abhorred. They not only described but created scenes of violence against victims with whom they could simultaneously identify and sympathize. They were at once both victims and spectators."

<sup>75</sup> Webb (1997) discusses the views of Quintilian and other Greco-Roman authors on this oratorical process (particularly Pseudo-Longinus, e.g. *Subl.* 15).

<sup>76</sup> *Inst.* 6.2.34: *Ubi vero miseratione opus erit, nobis ea, de quibus queremur, accidisse credamus atque id animo nostro persuadeamus. nos illi simus, quos gravia, indigna, tristia passos queremur, nec agamus rem quasi alienam, sed adsumamus parumper illum dolorem. ita dicemus, quae in nostro simili casu dicturi essemus* ("But when there is a need for pity, we must believe that the crimes about which we make our complaint have happened to us, and convince our minds of this. Nor must we plead the case as that of another, but we must instead take on our client's suffering for a while: and thus we will say what we would say in a similar case that concerned us.")

present on Lemnos.<sup>77</sup> She also identifies with the victims when, for instance, she passes over the bulk of the massacre in order to describe the more personally affecting deaths of her own family (5.218f.), or when, after (merely) witnessing the human sacrifice, she feels as if she herself were being attacked by the Lemnian women (165-69). If, on the other hand, the Lemnian massacre is not a crime to be pitied in a Roman courtroom, but rather a spectacle to be enjoyed in the Roman arena, then it is not the victims with whom Hypsipyle and her audience identify and sympathize, but rather with the killers. And indeed, when Hypsipyle sees Alcimedede carrying her father's severed head, the head appears to her as that of her own father, and Alcimedede's hand as her very own hand (5.239f.).<sup>78</sup> Simply by observing the Lemnian massacre, Hypsipyle becomes (momentarily) a murderess.<sup>79</sup> An odd enough occurrence, until we consider the seductive

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<sup>77</sup> 5.32f. (*redit ecce nefas et frigida cordi | Eumenis*, “the sin returns – look! – the freezing Fury returns to my heart”). Cf. Quintilian's instructions for describing a murder in court (*Inst.* 6.2.31): *hominem occisum queror: non omnia, quae in re praesenti accidisse credibile est, in oculis habebō? non percussor ille subitus erumpet? non expavescet circumventus? exclamabit vel rogabit vel fugiet? non ferientem, non concidentem videbo? non animo sanguis et pallor et gemitus, extremus denique exspirantis hiatus insidet?* (“I make a complaint that a man has been murdered: shall I not bring before my eyes everything which is likely to have happened at the actual event? Will not the murderer himself suddenly spring forth? Will not the man who is assailed tremble, cry out, beg, or flee? Shall I not see the one strike, the other fall? Will not the blood, paleness, groans, and finally the last gasp of the dying man lodge themselves in my mind?”).

<sup>78</sup> This vision is modelled upon one that appears to Aeneas after he sees Priam killed by Neoptolemus (*Aen.* 2.559-63). Although a *saevus horror* (“ferocious horror”) assails both Hypsipyle and Aeneas (*Theb.* 5.238f. and *Aen.* 2.559), a subtle difference in the presentation of the scenes partially aligns Hypsipyle with Neoptolemus himself. At Troy, a vision of Aeneas' father appears in his mind upon witnessing Priam's death (*subiit cari genitoris imago, | ut regem aequaevum crudeli vulnere vidi | vitam exhalantem*, “a vision of my dear sire suddenly appeared as I saw the king, of like age, gasping out his life under a cruel wound”, *Aen.* 2.560-62); at Lemnos, Hypsipyle sees the mangled father of Alcimedede as her own father and, moreover, the hand of Alcimedede as *her own hand* (*meus ille Thoas, mea dira videri | dextra mihi!*, “to me he seemed to be my Thoas, it seemed to be my own dire hand!”), 5.239f.). That is, Hypsipyle identifies herself with Alcimedede and thus with Alcimedede's equivalent, *degener Neoptolemus* (“degenerate Neoptolemus”, *Aen.* 2.549; Neoptolemus applies the epithet to himself flippantly, feeling perhaps that killing Priam will “really show” his father, but from Priam's perspective, which is understandably in line with the dictates of *Zeus Hikesios*, it is damning – here too the audience must identify with either killer or victim in deciding how to react to the story).

<sup>79</sup> Hypsipyle assimilates herself to the murderesses once again, after her father is dispatched (in a boat, onto the sea), by standing with a bloody sword beside a pyre of her father's sceptre, armour, and clothes (5.313-19). For these actions she is made the queen of the murderous Lemnians (320-22). For the possibility that Hypsipyle actually did murder her father (or that she is unsure of what exactly happened), see Nugent (1996).

power of the arena, which turns the viewer into a vicarious killer.<sup>80</sup> The Greek Christian Athenagoras, writing less than a century after Statius, explains it thus: “since we regard seeing a man killed to be much like killing him, we have renounced such spectacles” (ἀλλ’ ἡμεῖς πλησίον εἶναι τὸ ἰδεῖν [τὸ] φονευόμενον τοῦ ἀποκτεῖναι νομίζοντες, ἀπηγορεύσαμεν τὰς τοιαύτας θέας, *Legatio* 35.5).<sup>81</sup>

Thus, the Lemnian massacre vacillates between crime and spectacle, the narrative’s point of view vacillates between killers and killed, and the audience’s emotional response hangs in tension between pity and pleasure, entertainment and terror.<sup>82</sup> This tension is resolved first in favour of pleasure and entertainment during the

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<sup>80</sup> Such vicarious enjoyment is not confined to the arena or to acts of violence. We find it also, following the familiar link between violence and sex, in the eroticization of the gaze that is a feature of much Ovidian poetry (and of modern pornography, of course). An example is found in the episode, to which we will return (below, pp. 109-11), of Tereus and Philomela in *Metamorphoses* 6. As Tereus watches Philomela begging her father to allow a visit with her sister, he wishes that he were the father in order to receive her kisses and her embrace (6.479-82) and, merely “by watching, he handles her in advance” (*spectat eam Tereus praecontractatque videndo*, 478). In the arena, in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, and on Lemnos, seeing is as good as doing – a troubling thought when we recall that Roman orators tried to bring their words to life in the “mind’s eyes” of their audience (Quint. *Inst.* 8.3.62: “For oratory is not fully effective nor asserts itself as it ought if its effect extends only to the ears and the judge feels that the facts he must examine are being narrated to him rather than portrayed fully and displayed to the eyes of his mind”, *non enim satis efficit neque, ut debet, plene dominatur oratio si usque ad aures valet, atque ea sibi iudex de quibus cognoscit narrari credit, non exprimi et oculis mentis ostendi*; cf. Pseudo-Longinus, *Subl.* 15.1).

<sup>81</sup> The Christian critic Lactantius, writing in the late 3rd century, makes a similar assertion: *nam qui hominem quamvis ob merita damnatum in conspectu suo iugulari pro voluptate computat conscientiam suam polluit, tam scilicet quam si homicidii quod fit spectator et particeps fiat* (“Anyone who thinks that a man, however deservedly condemned, is killed for his own viewing pleasure pollutes his own conscience, just as much as if he were a participant in the killing to which he is a spectator,” *Div. Inst.* 6.20.10). The dangers of viewing the violence of the arena, a favourite topic for Christian writers, concerned Seneca as well, as seen in his address to a spectator at an execution: ‘*Sed latrocinium fecit aliquis, occidit hominem. Quid ergo? quia occidit, ille meruit ut hoc pateretur: tu quid meruisti miser ut hoc spectes?*’ (“‘But,’ you say, ‘so-and-so was a brigand, he killed a man.’ And so? Because he killed, he has deserved to suffer this. What have you done, wretch, to deserve to watch this?’, *Ep.* 7.5).

<sup>82</sup> Such emotional tension is not unique to Statius or to Latin poetry: it could also be found in rhetoric or the amphitheatre, two arenas that I have treated as polar opposites for the sake of my argument in the previous paragraph. A forensic orator’s business was inspiring real pity in the court, but a declaimer used the same set of rhetorical skills and similar (hypothetical) crimes to delight his audience (but see Gunderson 2003*b* for an examination of declamation as more than mere entertainment). Spectators in the arena could be amused and entertained by the fights and executions on display, but it seems that, at least under the less stable emperors, they were not entirely free from the risk of adding to the spectacles themselves: Dio (59.10.3) writes that Caligula once dealt with a shortage of condemned prisoners by having a section of the crowd thrown to the wild beasts (he had the victims’ tongues cut out first to prevent any complaint), while Suetonius (*Dom.* 10) reports that Domitian had a spectator dragged from his seat and thrown to the dogs

battle of the Lemnians and the Argonauts, and then ultimately in the other direction with the death of Opheltes. The first, temporary resolution is achieved by wrenching the audience's sympathy and identification away from both the murderesses and the victims. The second and much more challenging resolution occurs when victim and murderess merge into one.

### **Obfuscated viewpoints: Lemnians, Argonauts, Thracians, Athenians**

The battle that the Lemnian women fight with the arriving Argonauts continues the “battle of the sexes” begun by the massacre, but with a change of setting. If we view the Lemnian episode as elegy infused with epic violence, then the action moves from the familiar epic topos of the nocturnal raid (e.g. *Il.* 10 and Verg. *Aen* 9) to the equally familiar topos of the storm at sea (here mixed with a land-sea battle); if, on the other hand, we view the Lemnian episode as a spectacle in the arena, then the action moves from individual executions or gladiatorial combat to a full-blown *naumachia*.<sup>83</sup> Either way, the dimensions of the battle expand: daggers in confined beds (5.31f.) give way to spears thrown down from city walls and lofty towers (350-52) onto a ship as big as an island or an uprooted mountain (338f.); gloomy fog and impenetrable darkness (183-85) become the warring winds, swelling sea, and lightning flashes of a Jovian storm (366-70, 394f.); the Lemnian women turn from a band of hunting lionesses (203-05) to thronging cattle and flocking birds (347-49); and their opponents are no longer old men, boys, and

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because he had uttered a witty comment at the emperor's expense (see also Suet. *Claud.* 34.2, *Calig.* 35.1, and Dio 72.20.2). Ovid has spectators become spectacle in a happier way when he remarks that often a man in the crowd has been afflicted by love for a woman, “groaned under his wound, felt the winged barb [of Cupid], and himself been part of the show he was watching” (*saucius ingemuit telumque volatile sensit | et pars spectati muneris ipse fuit*, *Ars am.* 1.169f.).

<sup>83</sup> Most evidence for *naumachiae* (mock sea battles) in the Flavian period comes from descriptions of the inauguration of the Flavian amphitheatre (Mart. *Spect.* 27, 34, Suet. *Tit.* 7.3, and Dio 66.25.3f.).

drunken soldiers, but rather the “huge” (*ingentes*, 395) Argonauts, “demigod heroes” (373) overtopped by Hercules, whose bulk rocks the already huge Argo with his every movement (400-02). These expanded dimensions demand a widened focus, and so the narration switches from the claustrophobic, first-person viewpoint of the massacre to a panoramic, dynamic, and impersonal perspective.<sup>84</sup> From such a vantage point, the uncomfortably shifting identification and sympathies that characterized the original massacre disappear. Statius’ audience is no longer thrust into the midst of carnage, forced to identify alternately with murderer or victim, but can instead enjoy the battle like true arena spectators, more or less safely separated from the bloodshed below, experiencing the thrill of murder and death – but only vicariously, from a distance. And Statius removes a further barrier to the audience’s unfettered enjoyment of the naval battle by blunting the force of the combatants: he removes the power of the Furies from the Lemnians (350), fixes unwarlike femininity back in their hearts (396f.), and incapacitates their opponents with the force of the storm (383f.). As a result, the epic battle of the Lemnians and Argonauts actually produces no bloodshed,<sup>85</sup> and the categories of killer

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<sup>84</sup> The claustrophobia of the massacre is best exemplified by the murder of Helymus, in which the audience is shown the tip of a knife protruding from his chest and crossing the tiny distance of an embrace to touch his wife’s breast (5.213-15). Hypsipyle emphasizes her first-person viewpoint during the massacre in describing the human sacrifice (*talia cernenti mihi*, 164), the murders in her family (*vidi*, 223), and the bloody tableau that she and her father witness (*speculamur*, 251). But during the battle with the Argonauts, Hypsipyle almost disappears from the narrative (only when Jason first appears is her presence felt: *miseræ nondum mihi notus Jason*, “Jason, not yet known to wretched me”, 403). Her narration also becomes more dynamic, temporally and spatially, with references to future events (343 and 403) and a viewpoint that moves like a video camera: in lines 364-80, the narrator zooms from a wide shot of the storm into a close-up of the oars falling back onto the Argonauts’ chests, then cuts to a panoramic view of the Lemnians on shore before following the path of their missiles and arrows back to Telamon, Peleus, and Hercules on the Argo. The massacre, in contrast, is depicted nearly as a series of freeze-frames (e.g., 220-24, 236-38, and 249-61).

<sup>85</sup> Maintaining our comparison to the arena, we may see this harmless battle in the context of bloodless mock-battles attested for the spectacles of Caligula (Suet. *Calig.* 26.5) and fought by unarmed, decrepit gladiators or wild animals, or physically deformed citizens.

and killed, already distanced from the audience by the nature of the battle's presentation, disappear entirely.

The battle is in fact a farce.<sup>86</sup> The incongruity of the trembling Lemnian women donning their husbands' armour causes Pallas to blush and Mars to laugh (5.356f.) – the same reaction Statius attributes to Mars (and *cruenta Virtus*, “bloody Valour”) in response to the clearly farcical female gladiator matches in Domitian's arena (*Silv.* 1.6.62).<sup>87</sup> The Argonauts, for their part, are so beset by the combined assault of the fierce storm and feeble Lemnians (5.381; cf. 376-80) that Jason, the leader of these “demigod heroes” (373), proposes a truce with his less-than-worthy opponents (416-19) – presumably an embarrassing moment for him.<sup>88</sup> The battle ends, as good comedies should, in marriage, the birth of children balancing the death of children in the massacre (461f.). The women, reverting to their conventional roles as wives and mothers, cease to be murderesses and the men, now godlike Argonaut heroes (373 and 422-30) rather than helpless Lemnian men, cease to be victims. The tension of the Lemnian massacre, tied to the audience's inability to identify consistently with one point of view, dissolves along with those points of view.

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<sup>86</sup> Dominik (1997: 42) sees the Lemnian women's efforts as “comically pathetic and tragically reminiscent” of the original massacre. I agree with his judgement, except that I see the similarities between the massacre and the naval battle not as “tragic” but rather as Statius' attempt to obscure the ambiguities of the massacre by presenting a more overtly entertaining version of the massacre's “battle of the sexes”.

<sup>87</sup> Note that in the *Silvae* the Mars who laughs is not *Mars Gradivus*, but rather *Mars Pater*, the progenitor of the Roman race (who probably does not appear at the Lemnian massacre because it takes place well before the fall of Troy and the subsequent foundation of Rome). The female gladiators thus represent an amusing perversion of not only martial masculinity but also *Romanitas* itself.

<sup>88</sup> An apparent pun seems to imply that the Argonauts are as aware of their opponents' femininity as the Lemnians are of their opponents' heroic masculinity. As Hypsipyle describes the Argonauts, who have been illuminated by a lightning flash, she says that *attonito manifestus in agmine supra est | Amphitryoniades* (“the son of Amphitryon [Hercules] towers conspicuous above the ‘thunder-struck’ band”, 5.400f.). Shackleton Bailey (2003: 298) prints Menke's suggestion of *at toto* for the *attonito* of the manuscripts, but revision is unnecessary: the Argonauts are literally “thundered at” (as noted by Hill 1983: 121), but they may also be “shocked” (the more usual meaning of *attonitus*) to see that their opponents are women.

But this solution is artificial and ultimately impermanent. We may better understand this by turning once again to Ovid, looking briefly at a precedent that Polyxo cites as she exhorts the Lemnians to their crime (5.120-22): Procne's revenge upon Tereus (*Met.* 6.412-676).<sup>89</sup> Ovid's account of this myth shares many thematic features with the Lemnian massacre: sexualized violence, brutal and (from a modern perspective) disproportionate punishment for a crime, the perversion of conventional familial relationships and of conventional generic boundaries, the influence of infernal and Dionysian forces, the destruction of civilized by savage forces, and a difficulty with consistently distinguishing between assailant and victim.<sup>90</sup> This last feature is most pronounced at the moment of Philomela's mutilation (6.555-60):<sup>91</sup>

*ille indignantem et nomen patris usque vocantem*     555  
*luctantemque loqui comprehensam forcipe linguam*  
*abstulit ense fero. radix micat ultima linguae,*  
*ipsa iacet terraeque tremens immurmurat atrae,*  
*utque salire solet mutilatae cauda colubrae,*  
*palpitat et moriens dominae vestigia quaerit.*     560

“He [Tereus] seizes his victim, protesting, calling constantly for father, and struggling to speak, with pincers and severs it – her tongue – with his savage sword.<sup>92</sup> Her tongue's root quivers; the tongue itself lies vanquished, trembling as it mutters into the black earth, and, like a snake's

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<sup>89</sup> Like the Centauromachy, the story of Tereus, Procne, and Philomela was well-known. Although the myth does not appear in Homer, it is the subject of Sophocles' fragmentary *Tereus* (*TrGF* fr. 581-95b) and Tereus appears as a character in Aristophanes' *Birds* (Dobrov 1993 provides an extended analysis of the relationship between these two plays). Virgil mentions it twice (*Ecl.* 6.78-81 and *G.* 4.15) in brief, sketchy references that suggest that the myth was well-known in his day. Ovid's version is the most detailed treatment of the myth in Roman literature and, given the pervasive Ovidian influence we have seen in the Lemnian episode, we may reasonably turn to Ovid here.

<sup>90</sup> I have treated most of these themes, at least in passing, as they are found in the *Thebaid*, and will not go into further detail here. Goldenhard and Zissos (2007) provide a good overview of most of these themes as they occur in Ovid's tale.

<sup>91</sup> Anderson (1972: 223f.) gives an excellent account of Ovid's poetic technique in this scene. Of particular note is his argument that Ovid focuses on the grotesquery of the severed tongue not to increase the horror of the scene, but rather to mute it by distancing his audience from his actors (p. 224). Statius' grotesqueries have a similar effect, imbuing the human suffering of the Lemnian massacre with a flavour of the spectacles of the arena.

<sup>92</sup> I have tried in my translation to reproduce the surprise object (*lingua*) of the modifiers, *indignantem*, *vocantem*, *luctantem*, and *comprehensam*. The Latin, as usual, is much more effective.

severed tail will do, it twitches and throbs and dies seeking its mistress's feet.

Through a series of momentarily ambiguous feminine modifiers (*indignantem*, *vocantem*, *luctantem*, *compremsam*), Tereus' assault moves suddenly from his female victim (*Philomela*) to her grammatically feminine tongue (*lingua*), which, once severed, lies on the ground trembling – as Philomela trembled, lamb-like, after she was first raped (6.527). The tongue's subsequent (metaphorical<sup>93</sup>) transformation into a snake's severed tail looks forward to the (metaphorical) transformation of Philomela and her sister into Furies, the infernal deities that Tereus describes as the “snaky sisters” (*vipereas sorores*, 662).<sup>94</sup> Just as Hypsipyle begins the Lemnian massacre as a doe pursued by wolves and transforms, amidst personal tragedy (cf. *Theb.* 5.219), into a Lemnian murderess (239f.), so Philomela experiences her rape as rape's quintessential victims – a trembling, bloodied lamb or dove (*Met.* 6.527-30)<sup>95</sup> – but transforms at the height of its violence into a snake, the quintessence of deadly, chthonic femininity.<sup>96</sup> This sudden transformation from

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<sup>93</sup> Kaufhold (1997), discussing the reification of similes and figurative language in this episode, notes perceptively that “Similes seem to be a mental metamorphosis that allows the reader to ‘see’ the subject ‘as’ something else” (p. 68, n. 13). Although Kaufhold does not discuss the snake simile in this context, her concept seems to apply especially well: for an audience unused to seeing severed tongues on the ground, Philomela's tongue might just as well *be* a snake's tail. Then again, perhaps Statius' audience of urban arena-goers was more used to tongues.

<sup>94</sup> Gildenhard and Zissos (2007: 6-13, esp. 8-11) discuss the portrayal of Philomela and Procne as Furies and of the entire episode as a “hell on earth”. They see the snake-tail simile as a reference to the underworld and the Furies, and note further that the tongue's muttering as it lies on the earth (6.558) suggests an invocation to the underworld (p. 11, n. 35).

<sup>95</sup> Several victims of Ovidian rapes (actual or attempted) are described as doves attacked by eagles or lambs attacked by wolves, e.g., Daphne (*Met.* 1.505f.), Arethusa (5.626f.), and the Sabine women (*Ars am.* 1.117f.). The conceit, which may also be expressed as dogs hunting rabbits, or lions or wolves hunting deer, highlights the helplessness of the victims and the fierceness of the assailants, but it also makes the uncomfortable suggestion that sexual aggression is as natural as predator-prey relationships in the wild – merely an extension of the commonplace (to paraphrase Verg. *Ecl.* 2.64f.) that “the lion hunts the wolf, the wolf the goat, the goat the grass, the boy the girl, for each is led by his liking.”

<sup>96</sup> The snake stands in contrast to the eagle, as a symbol of Olympian masculinity (see the essay ‘The Serpent and the Eagle’ in Fagles (1984) for a good overview of this symbolic pair in the Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*). It is thus the appropriate symbol to mark Philomela's impending attack on Tereus, figured as an eagle during the rape (6.529f.). Ovid uses the snake and the eagle in the rape of Hermaphroditus by

victim to avenger marks the inception of female violence that ends with Procne killing her son with the help of her sister and feeding him to her husband, an act that is at once a surprisingly symmetrical retaliation and an escalation executed with such irrational, demonic force that the (androcentric) moral order of Ovid's poem is threatened.<sup>97</sup> The audience's sympathy, so closely tied to identification with certain characters, wavers as the narrative moves from the titillating fantasies of an adulterous husband (Tereus)<sup>98</sup> to the savage crime of a rapist (Tereus again), from the wounded fright of a rape victim and the grief of her sister (Philomela and Procne respectively) to the demonic revenge of two child-murderesses (still Philomela and Procne).<sup>99</sup>

Ovid resolves the difficulties of his tale in the same way as Statius, by re-enacting its events in a comedy that obscures the conflicting points of view and problematic actions of the original tragedy. Thus, Ovid follows the rape of Philomela by Tereus with the rape Oreithyia by Boreas (6.675-721). Both men are Thracians, both women Athenian

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Salmacis (*Met.* 4.361-64, see above, p. 78, n. 106) with the gender implication intact but with no obvious reference to the Olympian/chthonic dichotomy.

<sup>97</sup> Interpretation of this episode is quite complex and difficult to effect in the short space I have allowed myself. Richlin (1992: 162-65), Segal (1994), Kaufhold (1997), and Gildenhard and Zisson (2007) offer enlightening discussions, and my brief examination is much indebted to them.

<sup>98</sup> For Tereus' fantasies upon first meeting his sister-in-law, see above, p. 105, n. 80.

<sup>99</sup> Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (in which the two sons of Tamora, queen of the Goths, rape Lavinia, daughter of the Roman general Titus Andronicus, and cut off her tongue and hands; and in revenge, Titus slaughters the rapists and feeds them to their mother) is modelled upon Ovid's story, and shares many of its complexities. It is also, like the Lemnian massacre, a good illustration of the subtle distinction between horror, humour, repulsiveness, and allure where violence is concerned. And like Ovid's tale (and Statius'), the problematic nature of its violence demands an external resolution – in Shakespeare's story, the reciprocal killing of most of the main characters, the disposal of their bodies, and the installation of a new Roman emperor. Julie Taymor's *Titus* (Clear Blue Skies Productions, 1999), a cinematic adaptation of the play, provides an additional resolution: Titus' grandson, Lucius, takes the infant son of Aaron (a Moor responsible for much of the violence in the play) and carries him out of the Roman arena in which the action of the play began and ended, symbolically retreating from the cycle of revenge that characterizes Titus' world. In a staging of the play at the Stratford Festival of Canada (2000, starring James Blendick and directed by Richard Rose), Lucius brandished a knife at the same baby as the lights went down. Both of these additional resolutions are satisfying, once again because of differing audience identification: in Taymor's version, because Lucius has been presented as a surrogate for the viewer, his act of mercy and exit from the arena redeems and rescues his audience; in Rose's version, because the audience identified with Lucius in no such way, we were able to view his act of violence as a continuation of the cycle of revenge to which we were (only external) witnesses.

princesses, but the farcical tone and happy outcome of Boreas' actions improve significantly upon Tereus' crime.<sup>100</sup> Where Tereus was a brutal but almost silent rapist, Boreas delivers a comically overblown speech (687-701), full of threatening bluster, but performs almost no explicit violence.<sup>101</sup> His assault, like the battle of the Lemnians and Argonauts, widens the narrative focus: from the confines of a hut deep in an ancient wood (the scene of the rape, 521) and an obscure chamber deep in the palace (the scene of the child-murder, 638) to the plains, seas, and mountains that tremble under Boreas' advance (703-06). Although the wind-god's victim, Oreithyia, is frightened, her fear is confined to two words (*pavidam metu*, "trembling with fear", 706)<sup>102</sup> and is, in all likelihood, fear of the attractive sort.<sup>103</sup> And the outcome of the elided rape, as on Lemnos, is marriage and childbirth: Oreithyia produces two children, beautiful as their mother (713), who become bird-like – not in a sudden and destructive change,<sup>104</sup> but by

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<sup>100</sup> Ovid all but spells out the corrective function of this second rape narrative when he introduces his rapist as a victim of Tereus' actions and of his own Thracian heritage: *Boreae Tereus Thracesque nocebant* ("Tereus and Thrace were harming Boreas", 6.682). Read within the frame of the narrative, this means merely that the Thracian reputation for lechery (6.458-60), exacerbated by Tereus' actions, was hindering Boreas' attempts to woo Oreithyia. But, if one reads from outside this frame, there is a suggestion that Tereus has wounded all of Ovid's future rapists and the events in Thrace have threatened all his future rape scenes.

<sup>101</sup> Although Tereus is described as speaking quite frequently, his direct speech is limited to eight words, marking the moments of his triumph (513, "*vicimus!*" *exclamat*, "*mecum mea vota feruntur!*", "I have won!" he cries, "I carry with me what I have wished for!") and his peripety (652, *tantaque nox animi est*, "*Ityn huc accersite!*" *dixit*, "And such was the night of his mind that he commanded, "Bring Itys here!"). In contrast, Ovid gives Boreas a fifteen-line soliloquy (687-701), but elides the description of his sexual crime (instead, Oreithyia is merely "made a bride and mother", 711f.).

<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, she is denied the long and disturbing speeches granted to Philomela (6.533-48) and Procne (611-19, 621f., 631-35, and 655).

<sup>103</sup> See above, pp. 59, n. 38. Oreithyia, along with Procris, were the two of Erectheus' four daughters who were "equally beautiful" (*Met.* 6.679f.).

<sup>104</sup> The two sisters take two words to become avian: *corpora Cecropidum pennis pendere putares*: *pendebant pennis* ("you would have thought the Athenians' bodies were poised on wings [lit. "feathers"]: on wings they were poised", 6.667f.; note, incidentally, the insistent repetition of the syllable *PEN*: taking all four instances [*pennis*, *pendere*, *pendebant*, *pennis*] to signify the root of *penna* [*penn-*], we may hear the chant "wings, wings, WINGS, WINGS!" ). The transformation of Tereus, Procne, and Philomela destroys their human bodies (unlike the transformation of the two Boreads) and locks them forever in their symbolic states. Tereus, the aggressive rapist, becomes a hoopoe, whose elongated beak may recall the sword with which he pursues the Athenian sisters (666) – but in Ovid's actual words, the collocation of *prominet*, *immodicum*, and *longa*, combined with the somewhat mysterious transformation of Tereus'

acquiring wings as a natural progression into adulthood and their divine patrimony (714-18).<sup>105</sup> As with the arrival of the Argonauts to Lemnos, men and women revert to the comfortably familiar roles of energetic, godlike heroes and weak, passive wives and mothers. And, as on Lemnos, the tension created by the vacillation of audience sympathy between “assailant” and “victim” disappears along with those categories: Boreas, with his supernatural but harmless violence, is no real rapist (compared to Tereus) and Oreithyia, completely helpless but freed from any explicit injury, is neither a monstrous avenger nor a real victim.

This “resolution” to the difficulties of Philomela’s rape and revenge highlights the unsatisfactory nature of the similar resolution in the Lemnian episode. Both leave in the audience’s memory an easy, comic version of the preceding tale. But both merely obscure the tensions of the preceding tale by introducing, as if by a *deus ex machina*, a new plot to reset the *status quo*.<sup>106</sup> Nothing has been solved; the poets have merely

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sword into a more obviously phallic spear (*prominet immodicum pro longa cuspidē rostrum*, “his beak sticks out immoderately in place of a long spear”, 673), may point to a more sexual interpretation of the hoopoe’s beak. Thus, Tereus’ penis, like the penetration in the rape of Philomela, is displaced from the groin to the mouth. As for the two sisters, their transformation into a nightingale and barn swallow leave them forever stained with the blood of their crime (669f.), but in such a way as to recall the crime of Philomela’s rape, which left her like a dove stained with blood (note the similar phrases, *suo madefactis sanguine plumis*, 529, *signataque sanguine pluma est*, 670). The metamorphosis leaves victim and avenger as intertwined as in the initial rape. Incidentally, and in the general spirit of confused gender roles, we may note that in reality it is the *male* nightingale that sings the bird’s distinctive, “mournful” song, and that male barn swallows (at least in North America) possess throats significantly redder than females (Safran and McGraw 2004: 457).

<sup>105</sup> We may consider here the two sons of Hypsipyle and Jason, also the result of a forced marriage (*Theb.* 5.463). Like the Boreads, the sons of Jason do not come into their own until adulthood. In fact, they disappear from the *Thebaid* immediately after their birth, returning full-grown and, like the Boreads, marked by the insignia of their father (725f.).

<sup>106</sup> Burkert (1970) discusses the myths and rituals that surround the Lemnian massacre and argues for the existence of a local New Fire festival, whereby all fire on the island is extinguished for a period of time, along with other details of normal daily life (including the intermingling of men and women). The period of abnormal life ends with the kindling of a new fire, the resumption of normal daily activities, and a joyful, sexual reunion of men and women. The extinguishing of the old fire demands the kindling of new fire; the separation of the sexes (enacted in the myth by the massacre) demands their reunion (i.e., the arrival of the Argonauts). Thus, “Social order is turned upside down just to provoke a new reversal, which means the re-establishment of normal life” (p. 15). From the standpoint of ritual, then, the arrival of the Argonauts is a

replaced one plot with a second, magically stripped of all the tensions that made the first problematic.<sup>107</sup> Ovid lets things stand as such, but Statius has one final trick up his sleeve.

### **Combined viewpoints: the death of Opheltes**

Unlike Ovid's Thracian rapes, the Lemnian episode is an inset narrative and must therefore be understood in the context of the *Thebaid's* main narrative. We saw in the second chapter that the main narrative – specifically the death of Opheltes – resolved the problematized role of the gods on Lemnos. The death of Opheltes plays a similar role here, resolving the tension between a positive and negative emotional response to the massacre. The same features of Opheltes' death that were important in the second chapter are important here. His death is powerfully and uncomplicatedly tragic:<sup>108</sup> there are no titillating undertones nor any inversion of conventional gender roles,<sup>109</sup> and it is difficult to envisage a snake inadvertently killing an infant as a spectacle in the arena.<sup>110</sup>

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necessary and natural answer to the interruption of normal life caused by the massacre. But, as Burkert acknowledges, “one can look at flowers without caring much for roots” (p.14) – that is, Statius' Lemnian episode is far removed from the archaic ritual and, because the tensions created by his narrative constitute more than a simple interruption of normal life, they demand more than a simple return to normal life.

<sup>107</sup> Segal (1994: 277f.) makes a similar point in his discussion of the rape and revenge of Philomela, although the difficulties he identifies in the episode are somewhat different from those I have chosen to discuss.

<sup>108</sup> See above, pp. 35-37.

<sup>109</sup> Flower-picking, which is linked in Greek myth to sleep and death (see above p. 36f., n. 78), is also the usual context for rape (Richardson 1974: 140-42). There may thus be an erotic undertone to Opheltes' death after all. Nevertheless, the eroticism is so strained (a supernaturally huge snake accidentally killing a sleeping baby hardly belongs in the same category as, say, the erotically-charged murder of Epopeus) and so horrific that it may be seen as destroying the link between sex and violence created during the Lemnian massacre, or at least redefining it as something emphatically unpleasant.

<sup>110</sup> Instead, such a death seems to tap into an innate human fear, powerful and ancient. A “snake in the grass” was doubtless a real danger in rural settings, and features as a sort of cliché in Virgil's Arcadia (*Ecl.* 3.92f.) and as the agent in his description of Eurydice's tragic death (*G.* 4.458f.). The danger of snakes to babies was especially great: the infancies of the heroes Heracles and Iamos are all the more miraculous because snakes do *not* kill them (Heracles defeats the snakes sent to kill him, while in Pind. *Ol.* 6.46f. two snakes are sent by the gods to the baby Iamos, not to kill him with their own poison, but to feed him with “the blameless poison of bees”, ἐθρέψαντο δράκοντες ἀμεμφεῖ | ἰῶ μελισσῶν). The perception of an

Furthermore, Opheltes' death is closely linked to the Lemnian massacre, as a substitute for the patricide that Hypsipyle failed to commit (5.628). It is pertinent here, following our discussion of serpent imagery in the rape of Philomela, to recall that the snake is a symbol of dangerous and infernal femininity. Although snakes are not as prominent on Lemnos as they were in Ovid's Thrace, they do appear at the very beginning of the episode when Venus assumes an infernal aspect and "[fills] the secret places of the houses with twining serpents" (*implicitis arcana domorum | anguibus... replesset*, 5.67f.). There may thus be a special significance to the fact that Hypsipyle – who feigned mourning for her father "in the secret recesses of her dwelling" (*arcanis tecti in penetralibus*, 313) and prayed that this ominous lament would bring no real harm to him (318f.) – offers up a substitute victim to the infernal female violence of Lemnos (628) with the death of her charge, killed by an immense snake that is born from the ground (*terrigena*, 506) and disappears from the epic into the "dark shrine" (*opaca templa*, 577) of an infernal deity. The snakes of Lemnos return in force.

In the second chapter, I focussed on the divine agency of Opheltes' death. Here I note instead the culpability of Hypsipyle. As she admits to the dead Opheltes, "It was I myself who exposed you to the Fates" (*ipsa ego te... exposui fatis*, 5.623f.), and in doing so, she "paid the sin she owed" to Lemnos (*exsolvi tibi, Lemne, nefas*, 628). That is, by

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enmity between serpents and mankind seems to stretch back beyond Greco-Roman literature to at least the Indo-Europeans when, as Calvert Watkins (1995) argues, a dragon slaying myth became the foundational heroic myth of Indo-European poetry (examples from Greek myth are many: Apollo and Python, Cadmus and the snake at Thebes, Heracles and the Hydra, Perseus and the Medusa, and Jason and the snake guarding the Golden Fleece). Virgil perhaps sensed this antiquity when he wrote that poisonous snakes were the first evil to appear at the end of the Golden Age (*G.* 1.129) and the first evil to perish when the Golden Age returned (*Ecl.* 4.24). Turning from cultural memory to, as it were, "evolutionary memory", mankind's very distant ancestors, the small mammals that coexisted with dinosaurs in the Cretaceous period (see, e.g., Bininda-Emonds *et al.* 2007), would have had a healthy respect for giant lizards (Carl Sagan touches upon this idea in *The Dragons of Eden: Speculations on the Evolution of Human Intelligence*).

allowing Opheltes to die, she becomes in reality what on Lemnos she was only in fantasy: a Lemnian murderess. But Hypsipyle is also a *victim* of Lemnos, as her extended and tragic lament demonstrates (608-35).<sup>111</sup> The *inmania vulnera* – monstrous *psychological* wounds (29f.) – that she reopened in recalling the Lemnian massacre obtain reality as Opheltes’ body is consumed by an all-encompassing wound (*totum in vulnere corpus*, 558). Just as Lemnos-the-victim “lost in one moment all its people, orphaned and cut out from the world” (*perdidit una omnes orbata excisaque mundo | indigenas*, 308f.), so Hypsipyle renders payment to Lemnos-the-killer (628) and loses, with a single flick of the tail from an infernal serpent (5.538), all her life. For Opheltes was not simply the livelihood of a wet-nurse. As the “sweet semblance” (*dulcis imago*, 608) of her lost biological children, he was Hypsipyle’s only link to motherhood. Because her biological children “revived the name” of her lost father,<sup>112</sup> Opheltes was also her only link (however distant) to daughterhood. And, as the usual audience for her frequently repeated Lemnian tale (5.615f.), he was her primary link to her lost royalty and renown. Thus stripped bare of all that defines her,<sup>113</sup> she has become, like Lemnos on the eve of the

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<sup>111</sup> We may draw a general comparison between this lament and that of Ovid’s Philomela following her rape (*Met.* 6.533-48; cf. 553f.). Both beg for death (*Met.* 6.539f. and *Theb.* 5.628-35) and by the expectation of death both are tragically liberated – Philomela from shame (544f.), Hypsipyle from fear (623) – and are prepared to admit their involvement in a *nefas* (*Met.* 6.540f. and *Theb.* 5.628).

<sup>112</sup> 5.464f., *duroque sub hospite mater | nomen avi renovo* (“made a mother by my rough guest [Jason], I revive the name of [my children’s] grandfather”). That is, she names one of her two children Thoas. As Nugent (1996: 51) notes, this name was not predetermined by tradition. One of Hypsipyle’s children is consistently named Euneus (stretching back to Homer, *Il.* 7.468f.) but, although the other is named Thoas in Euripides’ *Hypsipyle* (e.g., fr. 1.i.7 Bond), Hyginus (15 and 273) names him Nebrophonus and Apollodorus (1.9.17.2) calls him Deipylus. See Nugent (1996) for the importance of Hypsipyle’s father to her self-identification and her understanding of the events on Lemnos.

<sup>113</sup> In fact, Hypsipyle’s first speech in the *Thebaid* defines her exactly in these terms (wet nurse, mother, daughter, and Lemnian royal): *altricem mandati cernitis orbam | pignoris; at nostris an quis sinus, uberaque ulla, | scit deus; et nobis regnum tamen et pater ingens* (“you see the bereaved wet-nurse of a child entrusted to me. But god knows whether mine have bosom and breast – and yet I had a kingdom and a mighty father”, 4.778-80 [771-73]).

massacre, “as good as dead” (*moritura*, 5.623; cf. 198).<sup>114</sup> But she realizes this fact in the midst of admitting her guilt – *ipsa ego te (quid enim timeam moritura fateri?) | exposui fatis* (“it was I myself (for what should I, soon to die, fear to admit?) who exposed you to the Fates”, 5.623f.) – and we may thus observe that Lemnian killers and Lemnian victims have progressed from separate but confused entities (in the massacre), to obfuscated non-entities (in the sea battle), to a single and unified contradiction, *orba* and *funesta*, *impia* and *infelix*,<sup>115</sup> merged in the grief and guilt of Hypsipyle.

In fusing the two aspects of Lemnos into one, Hypsipyle also resolves the tension that arose from their conflicting points of view. We recall that the massacre was a *dulce nefas* (5.162) – sweet to the killers, to the killed, a sin. But the bereaved Hypsipyle speaks from both viewpoints, and says that the death of Opheltes, a “sin” (*exsolvi tibi, Lemne, nefas*, 5.628), has deprived her of a child who is “sweet” (*o mihi desertae natorum dulcis imago*, 608). Killer and victim agree in recognizing that sin and sweetness cannot coexist, but are in fact opposed to one another. The audience has no choice but to agree with this judgement. In the end, Hypsipyle’s narration of the Lemnian massacre is not an erotic or exciting spectacle through which her audience may enjoy vicarious thrills. It is rather a dangerous *nefas*, a sin that begets further sin simply by being recounted.<sup>116</sup> And, because a well-narrated tale is in fact *seen* and *experienced* in the minds of both narrator and

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<sup>114</sup> Here I am noting that Statius’ Lemnos is a personified entity, capable of both criminal action and victimhood. Hypsipyle thus becomes partially identified not merely with the murderesses and victims of Lemnos, but with Lemnos itself.

<sup>115</sup> Bereaved and deadly, wicked and wretched. Hypsipyle calls herself *orba* (5.617), just as she calls Lemnos *orbata* (308). Statius calls her *infelix* (552 and 588), as were the doomed sons of Polyxo (98). Opheltes’ mother, Eurydice, calls Hypsipyle *impia* (6.154 and 164) and *funesta* (182), thus adopting the terminology applied to the Lemnian massacre (5.190, 281, 488, and 495).

<sup>116</sup> As Nugent (1996: 52, n. 15) observes in discussing *Theb.* 5.626, “killing and telling/narrating seem to be equated, for Hypsipyle.”

audience,<sup>117</sup> the danger extends from the one speaking to those listening. Statius' message to his audience is clear. The violence of the Lemnian episode, which is merely a prelude to the extended violence of the remainder of the *Thebaid*, is not intended to be purely or even primarily entertaining. If it is erotic, then it is a dangerous kind of eroticism. If it is a spectacle in the arena, then it is the sort where a spectator – as in Domitian's own arena<sup>118</sup> – might at any moment be thrown to the dogs himself.

### Conclusion

We end with a glance at our poet. As we saw in the second chapter,<sup>119</sup> Statius portrays himself as a helpless victim of poetic inspiration (*Theb.* 1.3f, 43f.) who is forced to narrate a fratricide he abhors, who fights to delay that narration, and who reacts to the inevitable killings with relief and a prayer for the sin to be forgotten by posterity. Statius' treatment of violence in the Lemnian episode is thus well in keeping with his attitude throughout the *Thebaid* – in fact, as we saw in chapter two, it is precisely during the Lemnian episode, in which he demonstrates the danger of describing sinful violence, that Statius fights hardest to delay the inevitable course of his epic's narrative.<sup>120</sup> For if Hypsipyle, a model of filial *pietas*, nearly destroys herself by narrating the Lemnian *nefas*,<sup>121</sup> what does Statius, a mere servant of Apollo and the Muses,<sup>122</sup> risk by narrating

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<sup>117</sup> At least according to Quintilian. See above, p. 105, n. 80.

<sup>118</sup> See above, pp. 105f., n. 83.

<sup>119</sup> Above, pp. 42f.

<sup>120</sup> Above, pp. 43-47.

<sup>121</sup> I say “nearly” because Hypsipyle's *pietas* is eventually rewarded with the return of her biological sons. The relationship between the death of Opheltes and the return of Hypsipyle's sons is a complex and difficult one, and the cumulative effect of the two on the import of the Lemnian massacre must remain the subject of some future investigation.

<sup>122</sup> In the Theban war, allegiance to a god offers no special protection. Eunaeus, a priest of Bacchus, is the first important character to die in the hostilities at Thebes (7.649-84) and Amphiaras, the priest of Apollo, is the first of the Seven to fall (7.771-823)

the larger *nefas* of the Theban war? I will not attempt to discuss what motivated Statius-the-person to create, as Statius-the-persona, such a strong undercurrent of authorial unease in the portrayal of the *Thebaid's* virtuoso violence. It may be the product of a sensitive, poet's soul, a reaction against the casual and comedic violence of Ovid, a Senecan expression of the uncivilizing effect of violence on its viewers,<sup>123</sup> or even an anticipation of the Christian hatred of the arena as expressed in second-century authors.<sup>124</sup> Here, I note simply that the violence of Statius' epic is *not* something that "need not be analysed in depth", nor simply "an inevitable part of ancient epic" and "a characteristic of Statius' art which, however repellent, has to be accepted."<sup>125</sup> Violence for Statius and his audience was seductive and dangerous, entertaining and tragic, something to be portrayed with not only unmatched skill, but also heavy reluctance. The nuances of this ought to be appreciated.

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<sup>123</sup> See above, p. 83, n. 10.

<sup>124</sup> After all, Statius makes it into Dante's Purgatory, while Ovid and Virgil remain honoured but damned inhabitants of Hell.

<sup>125</sup> Vessey (1973: 147). Although this seminal work has been successfully challenged in many of its interpretations, I do not quote it to attack a straw man. Despite the proliferation of Statian scholarship since Vessey, surprisingly little attention has been paid to Statian violence, and Vessey's page-long, summary dismissal (pp. 146f.) remains one of the more nuanced interpretations. Various scholars have been concerned with the causes, effects, and perpetrators of the *Thebaid's* violence, but have glossed over the violence itself. Henderson (1998: 213f.) seems to promise an analysis similar to the one I have offered: "Our focus will be the division of the narration between the dazzling gloss of Statius' most *finished* of epic poems, and its anxious struggle to repress the grotesque surfeit of damned violence bursting through all the textual relations involved in recounting the *Thebaid's*" (italics original). Unfortunately, the idiosyncratic style in which Henderson goes on to present his arguments remains, for me, impenetrable.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

“The epic [as a genre] strives for totality and completion, yet is at the same time driven obsessively to repetition and reworking.”<sup>1</sup> The epic that is this thesis – or rather the epyllion, a prelude to bigger and longer things<sup>2</sup> – is subject to the ineluctable force of an external deadline, and will thus end concisely and decisively, as Statius’ did not.<sup>3</sup>

Most people still do not like Statius, or know much about his *Thebaid*. This is usually for bad reasons: its language is difficult, its mythological allusions obscure, its tone supposedly “sombre and sanguinary”,<sup>4</sup> and, until recently, its commentaries few<sup>5</sup> and its English translations uninspired.<sup>6</sup> Critical work completed in the last few decades (to which I hope I have somehow contributed) will do much over time to remedy this problem. In particular, it is now readily apparent that, just as the *Thebaid* is not “an epic about nothing”,<sup>7</sup> neither is the Lemnian episode a meaningless digression. Instead, we

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<sup>1</sup> Hardie (1993: 1).

<sup>2</sup> I intend (as an author is capable of doing) to continue my study of the *Thebaid* during my doctoral work at the University of Otago, which should result in a commentary on the second book of the epic – for much of what I have discussed in this thesis is applicable to Statius’ work as a whole.

<sup>3</sup> A supposed “fault” that has enjoyed much criticism and, only recently, some understanding (see Braund 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Shackleton Bailey (2003: 8).

<sup>5</sup> The first English commentary on a book of the *Thebaid* appeared in 1968 (Snijder, book 3). Before this, only the theses of Heuvel (1932) on book 1 and Mulder (1954) on book 2 were available, both written in Latin. Since then, commentaries in English or Italian have been published for books 1 (Caviglia 1973), 7 (Smolenaars 1994), 9 (Dewar 1991), 10 (Williams 1972), 11 (Venini 1970), and 12 (Pollmann 2004). I understand that further commentaries are planned or in progress for books 2, 4, 5, and 8.

<sup>6</sup> Shackleton Bailey (2003) is a vast improvement over Mozley (1928), whose prose under-represents the brilliance and vigour of the original and whose opinion towards the *Thebaid*’s worth was ambivalent (he asserts, p. *xiv*, “To be the author of a great epic poem is to count as one of the few great poets of the world, and it need hardly be said that Statius can make no claim to that honour”), while Melville (1995) and Ross (2004) have begun to address the dearth of verse translations.

<sup>7</sup> Ogilvie (1980: 292) made the now infamous pronouncement that “The *Thebaid* cannot be said to be about anything.” This hardly seems fair.

may recognize immense complexity – intertextual, intratextual, thematic, theological, psychological, and emotional.

But, as has been recently observed about the *Rambo* trilogy, “recognizable art isn’t always valid art.”<sup>8</sup> That is, critical study can only accomplish so much. A true evaluation of the Lemnian episode’s artistic merit can only be obtained by reading Statius’ own words, listening for traces of his *vox iucunda*, and opening oneself to the sweetness of his *amica Thebais*.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Chambers (2002).

<sup>9</sup> It seems appropriate to the subject matter of much of this thesis to end, as I have, with an allusion to Juvenal’s mocking description of the *Thebaid* as a high-class prostitute (Juv. 7.82-86; cf. Markus 2003: 432).

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