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Longa Retro Series: Sacrifice and Repetition in Statius' Menoeceus Episode

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> The authority of narrative derives from its capacity to speak of origins in relation to endpoints.
>
> Peter Brooks, Reading for the Plot, p. 276

The narrative structure of the *Thebaid* was long subject to scholarly rebuke. In his early and influential study of the work, Leon Legras remarked, "Voilà, avec le manque d'unité, le défaut essentiel de la compo-sition dans la Thébaïde" (1905.152). For many years--no doubt under the influence of a normative critical tradition ultimately issuing from Aristotle's *Poetics*--scholars echoed Legras' judgment, reproaching Statius for his digressive technique, and hence for failing to live up to the *Poetics*' demand for a plot both "whole and complete." [1] Indeed, the gap between epic and tragic *muthoi* Aristotle himself posited, the former already marked by greater episodic distensions, would seem to rupture irredeemably in the *Thebaid*--now a *Phoenissae*, *Suppliants,* or *Antigone*; at other times a Senecan *Oedipus*, an *Argonautica*, or a Pindaric aetiology on the Nemean Games. [2] More recently, Statius has found readers who answer such charges of artistic disunity by appealing to the thematic parallels that link the epic's digressive elements to the main narrative. [3] But such attempts to domesticate **[End Page 165]** the epic's challenges to traditional narrative form obscure the fact that narrative is not an innocent artistic vehicle. Narrative is fundamentally a "cognitive instrument," a tool for rendering experience meaningful and "readable." [4] The "closed and legible wholes" it presents provide a model for understanding the world. The *Thebaid*'s active resistance to formal unity and coherence is symptomatic of its distrust of narrative intelligibility itself. The world projected by the *Thebaid* is a world whose violence challenges our understanding and our capacity to model this understanding through narrative.

In this study, I examine Statius' treatment of Menoeceus' self-sacrifice in Book 10 of the epic. The problems raised in this episode high-light the epic's challenge to narrative form, for Menoeceus' death is essen-tially "denarrativized" through the course of Statius' treatment: the episode begins as if it will form an integral unit of the plot, only to end as yet another digression, stripped of its relevance to the main sequence of events. In the course of the episode, repetition emerges as the primary site of resistance to narrative integrity and legibility. Repetition haunts the episode: Menoeceus' heroics are pre-empted by the grim, self-destructive logic of Theban history, as altruistic patriotism is displaced by an impotent and regressive spectacle of passion for death. Like the incestuous union for which Thebes is famed, the story of Menoeceus turns back upon itself, to its own troubled and violent origins.

Peter Brooks' work on narrative repetition will help bring the **[End Page 166]** problems raised by the episode into focus. In *Reading for the Plot*, Brooks focuses his attention on the dynamics of Aristotle's , the narrative middle, whose dual movement he models by way of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. On the one hand, he finds a certain "*thanatos* urge" in narrative, a teleological orientation towards its own quiescence. On the other hand, not only does narrative resist, as in Freud, all but its own "proper" (and circuitous) demise, it is simultaneously subject to an *eros* principle that makes of the middle an "arabesque in the dilatory space of the text"; together, we have "a struggle toward the end under the compulsion of imposed delay." Repetition, Brooks argues as he turns to a different Freudian text, subserves both these movements. Elicited through the course of psychoanalysis and at the heart of the phenomenon of projection, repetition may lead to mastery, contributing to the "struggle toward the

end" by "binding" the narrative excitations standing in the way of quies-cence (see Freud's "Repetition and Working Through"). Through psychoanalytically-induced repetition, the past may be conquered and laid finally to rest. As Brooks writes (1984.134), "[t]he past needs to be incorporated *as past* within the present, mastered through the play of repetition in order for there to be an escape from repetition and in order for there to be difference, change, progress." At the same time, however, repetition can also be regres-sive, representing not a "return to" the repressed but rather marking the "return of" the repressed, a return that threatens endless dilation. Thus, repetition is inherently unstable, and "hovers ambiguously between the idea of reproduction and that of change, forward and backward movement" (1984.100).

But the *Thebaid* is an epic that presents no clear boundary that would mark off *eros* from *thanatos*: death is a frequent object of desire, and desire is ghastly. In this contaminated state, love and death defeat narrative limit; like Oedipus' deadly *eros*, they produce confusion and regression. (Indeed, as we shall see, the Menoeceus episode is problematic precisely because of Menoeceus' passion for death, *amor mortis*.) In such an epic, repetition fails to operate as a "binding force" for narrative, constituting instead a fundamental challenge to narrative integrity and understanding, signifying a disruptive "return of" Thebes' violent origins. If, as Brooks writes, "the authority of narrative derives from its capacity to speak of origins in relation to endpoints," then a story in which origins remain both unmastered and implicated in the present threatens the authority of narrative understanding itself.

At Thebes, origins are desired and destructive. The challenge to **[End Page 167]** narrative form thus posed by origins is provided a programmatic statement in the epic's prologue. Later in Book 1, we find that an ominous theodicy embodies the prologue's problematization of narrative form: origins are ineluctable in part because of the limitless memory of a malevolent Jupiter. This symbiotic relationship between disturbed theodicy and narrative disturbance, worked out in Book 1 of the epic, forms the core of Statius' Menoeceus episode.

In Search of a *Limes*

According to Andrew Ford (1992.18-23), the opening invocation of the archaic epic tradition marked the effacement of the poet's own voice by the Muses--the apotheosis, as it were, of epic's characteristic stance of "objectivity." The injunction to the Muses to "sing" represents the absorption of the telling within the story told, coding the epic narrative as a neutral window upon the heroic events, which seem thus to "tell themselves." In traditional narrative terminology, the invocation would advertise the submersion of the "narrative discourse"--the *sjuzhet*--in the epic subject-matter or "story"--the *fabula*. [5] Such a perfect fit between *fabula* and *sjuzhet* (as if the *fabula* itself were responsible for its own telling) is on display in the opening lines of the *Iliad*. [6] There, the poet instructs his Muse as to the precise point from which to start the tale of the wrath of Achilles, painlessly abstracted from the poetic tradition on the Trojan war (*Il.* 1.6-7):

> [Sing, goddess . . .] from the time when Atreus' son, the leader of men, and shining Achilles first stood apart in strife. **[End Page 168]**

As the phrase *ta prôta* suggests, the present story, despite being embedded in the epic cycle--conjoined to and implicated in so many other stories--would seem to have its own proper beginning. As Genette noted, the poet works back from here, from cause to cause, in an "evenly retrograde move-ment," first moving back to the plague (the cause of the *eris* between Agamemnon and Achilles) and then to the affront to Chryses (the cause of the plague). We have an almost perfect fit between *fabula* and *sjuzhet*: the events to be narrated are contained within a neatly delimited causal net-work, pre-formed, as it were, for narrative treatment. The world projected by this epic, at least as far as its opening is concerned, is an eminently narratable one. [7]

The difference here between the Iliadic poet and the narrator of the *Thebaid* is marked. Eschewing such claims for a conjunction between story and discourse, the latter expresses considerable anxiety over the proposition of beginning his epic *in medias res* (1.1-14):

> Fraternas acies alternaque regna profanis

> decertata odiis sontesque evolvere Thebas,
> Pierius menti calor incidit. unde iubetis
> ire, deae? gentisne canam primordia dirae,
> Sidonios raptus et inexorabile pactum
> legis Agenoreae scrutantemque aequora Cadmum?
> longa retro series, trepidum si Martis operti
> agricolam infandis condentem proelia sulcis
> expediam penitusque sequar, quo carmine muris
> iusserit Amphion Tyrios accedere montes,
> unde graves irae cognata in moenia Baccho,
> quod saevae Iunonis opus, cui sumpserit arcus
> infelix Athamas, cur non expaverit ingens
> Ionium socio casura Palaemone mater.
>
> Pierian fire lights upon my mind to unwind a tale of fraternal battle lines, alternating kingship fought out with impious hate, and guilty Thebes. Where do you bid me to **[End Page 169]** go from, goddesses? Am I to sing the origins of the cursed race, the Sidonian rapes and the inexorable provision of Agenor's law and Cadmus scanning the seas? Far back goes the causal chain if I am to recount the fearful farmer of hidden war, sowing battles in cursed furrows and follow up with what song Amphion ordered the Tyrian mountains to form a city's walls, whence came Bacchus' grievous wrath against his kindred city, what was the work of savage Juno, against whom wretched Athamas took up his bow, why, about to plunge with Palaemon at her side, his mother didn't fear the vast Ionian.

There is a significant shift of mood from Homer, as we move from the Iliadic imperative (*aeide . . . ex hou*) to the interrogative, *unde . . . ire?* If the traditional imperative marks the submergence of the poet's "I" in the omniscience figured by the Muse, then Statius' interrogative *unde iubetis ire* signals the poet's (hence the *sjuzhet's*) on-going alienation from the *fabula* to be told, advertising an epic in which there will be no easy inte-gration of the two. The story of the house of Oedipus does not readily present its own self-contained unity separable from the general context of Theban myth; it offers the ill-guided poet no "natural" beginning corresponding to the *Iliad's ta prôta*. The causal network of Theban history extends into the distant past and recedes from view (*longa retro series*), calling immediately into question, in a move precisely opposite that which we find at the beginning of the *Iliad*, the very narratability of the *Thebaid*.

After Statius surveys a number of possible beginning-points for his epic, we finally do reach an imperative. But rather than being addressed to the *deae*, it is a vague, third-person imperative (1.15-17):

> atque adeo iam nunc gemitus et prospera Cadmi
> praeteriisse sinam: limes mihi carminis esto
> Oedipodae confusa domus . . .
>
> And so, now, I'll allow the tears and joys of Cadmus to have passed us by: let the confused house of Oedipus be the boundary of my song . . . **[End Page 170]**

Here, "motive force" is ascribed to the *fabula*. [8] We begin with a recognition of the tenuous hold of the *sjuzhet* over the *fabula*, with a *plea* that the Theban *fabulae* preceding our story stay out, remain in the past tense. But the *limes* of the epic--the delimited area of its plot--is the result of an act of fiat, an act whose locus of authority lies in the ambiguous hands of a third-person imperative: *limes mihi carminis* ***esto***. This is nothing less than a request made of the *fabula* itself by an alienated *sjuzhet*, a request it will ultimately refuse to grant. This epic on the confused house of Oedipus is haunted by the Theban past, whose many stories break through its *limes*.

It will be noted that my use of the term *fabula* here--virtually as a synonym for "story" in its non-technical sense--is not entirely consistent with its properly narratological meaning--namely, a construct projected through the operation of the *sjuzhet*, a function of the plot. [9] The reason for such a shift in terminology, I have suggested, should be attributed to the narrative configuration of the *Thebaid* itself: the epic's own opening marks the disjunction between these two constituents of narrative. The fact that the *fabula* of the *Thebaid* is drawn from traditional mythological and literary material, and hence could

be identified with antecedent texts, no doubt promotes such a sense of alienation between discourse and material. Thus can *fabula* appear as something imposed and imposing, standing outside the text, subjecting it to an excess that defeats the plot's imposition of limits. Such resistance of the *fabula* to the *sjuzhet* will be on display as the story of Thebes' foundation reaches out, under the auspices of malevolent gods, to infect and disturb Menoeceus' attempts to win salvation for his city.

Narrative and Theodicy

The narrator pleads that his song stay within the limits of the *Oedipodae confusa domus*. And, indeed, from the perspective of the *sjuzhet*, **[End Page 171]** we begin propitiously enough: from the very depths of this *domus*, with Oedipus himself (1.49-52):

> illum indulgentem tenebris imaeque recessu
> sedis inaspectos caelo radiisque penates
> servantem tamen adsiduis circumvolat alis
> saeva dies animi . . .
>
> Though he delights in the darkness and the lonely depths of his abode, keeping his household gods concealed from heaven and sun, a savage day of his own devising flutters around him with beating wings . . .

If the proem had prompted concerns regarding the possibility of isolating a single story from the tangles of Theban myth, the epic's first scene might allay them. Oedipus lives a life of deathly solitude, the *penates* of his house far removed from the light of day. So, too, the curse he utters, like his own existence, like the narrative itself, would appear to be safely delimited. His prayer to Tisiphone is for neither more nor less than fratricide. The confused house of Oedipus would be the boundary of his curse as well as the *carmen* (1.83-87):

> . . . votisque instincta paternis
> i media in fratres, generis consortia ferro
> dissiliant. da, Tartarei regina barathri,
> quod cupiam vidisse nefas, nec tarda sequetur
> mens iuvenum; modo, digna, veni, mea pignora nosces.
>
> . . . stirred by their father's vows, go between the brothers, let them cut their ties of kinship with the sword. O Queen of vast Tartarus, let me behold the crime (nefas) I crave, let the young men's intentions be quick to follow: now come, worthy goddess; you will recognize my children.

Oedipus has in mind a thoroughly family affair. In fact, he desires a tragedy: fearful acts against kin, the (final) fall of a great house, a spectacle (*vidisse*) with an expeditious resolution (*nec tarda sequetur*). It is left to Jupiter to distend the narrative to epic proportions and beyond. **[End Page 172]**

Although Oedipus had directed his prayer to Tisiphone, explicitly deriding Jupiter (1.79-80: *et videt ista deorum ignavus genitor*), the father of gods and men, oddly enough, believes that Oedipus had requested his own intervention (1.239-41): *iam, iam rata vota tulisti, / dire senex! meruere tuae, meruere tenebrae / ultorem sperare Iovem*, "Your prayers are even now fulfilled, dreadful old man: your blindness justifies your hope to have Jove as your avenger." [10] But in the process of intercepting a prayer made to a Fury, Jupiter expands upon the content of Oedipus' *vota*: though the *poena* for which Oedipus asked (1.81) was fraternal strife between his sons, the punishment Jupiter has in mind is considerably inflated (1.241-47):

> nova sontibus arma
> iniciam regnis, totumque a stirpe revellam
> exitiale genus. belli mihi semina sunto
> Adrastus socer et superis adiuncta sinistris
> conubia. hanc etiam poenis incessere gentem
> decretum; neque enim arcano de pectore fallax
> Tantalus et saevae periit iniuria mensae.

> I will hurl strange warfare against guilty kingdoms, and tear out by the root a deadly race. Let me have for the seeds of warfare Adrastus as father-in-law, marriages presided over by hostile gods. For it has been decreed to attack this people, too, with punishment--lying Tantalus and the crime of that savage dinner have not slipped from the secret depths of my heart.

Jupiter does not merely duplicate Tisiphone's role; he escalates the conflict so that the fratricidal *poena* for which Oedipus prayed will include *nova arma* engulfing *all* of Thebes--and Argos along with it. Thanks to Jupiter, the epic *de domo Oedipodae* must leave home: Theban fratricide knows no bounds.

William Dominik has recently documented the "use and abuse of supernatural power" in the *Thebaid*, depicting an epic universe subject to a thoroughly perverse brand of divine justice. [11] Such perverse theodicy is the **[End Page 173]** mirror image, at a thematic level, of the epic's problematization of narrative form.

Jupiter makes his entry into the *Thebaid* complaining of the wickedness of the human race: human nature, he claims, is marred by a certain genetic defect, *mens cunctis imposta manet*, "the mind implanted in all abides" (1.227). He proceeds with a brief survey of Theban crime, from the fratricide of the sown men (*funera Cadmi*, 1.227) to the sons of Oedipus (1.227-39). Yet his intention is to punish Argos as well as Thebes (1.224). Why drag Argos down with Thebes? His explanation is curt: he himself simply hasn't forgotten the crimes of Tantalus. This explanation makes Jupiter's argument of genetic defect at 227 appear particularly specious. [12] Argos will be punished not because the Argives fatally re-enact the crimes of their ancestors, but because Jupiter himself has not forgotten sins long since committed. [13] Juno cuts to the heart of the matter when she objects (1.266-70):

> quod si prisca luunt auctorum crimina gentes
> subvenitque tuis sera haec sententia curis,
> percensere aevi senium, quo tempore tandem
> terrarum furias abolere et saecula retro
> emendare sat est?
>
> But if nations pay for the ancient crimes of their progenitors and this tardy intention now attends your cares--to scan through time's old age--from what point in time, finally, is it enough to wipe out earthly fury and emend the backward-flowing ages?

Juno's question here has narrative as well as moral/theological ramifications: it returns us to the epic's proem and to the narrative dilemma the poet faced in trying to determine a proper starting point for his story. [14] The theodicy of the *Thebaid*, figured by Jupiter's problematic memory that disengages punishment from responsibility, implies a disturbed narrative structure **[End Page 174]** always in danger of an infinite regress (*retro*, 1.269, recalling *longa retro series*, 1.7). The *ultio* of Jupiter, with its limitless memory, destabilizes all beginning points and causes: from what point in time does it suffice to begin a tale of human misery?

Nimirum Martius Anguis: Origins and Sacrifice

Jupiter is not the only character who links the present violence afflicting Thebes to Thebes' primordial violence, the *funera Cadmi*. Not long after the narrator lodges his request to exclude the wider Theban tradi-tion from his epic, we are introduced to an anonymous Theban who com-plains that the current strife adheres to a long-familiar pattern (1.180-85):

> an inde vetus Thebis extenditur omen,
> ex quo Sidonii nequiquam blanda iuvenci
> pondera Carpathio iussus sale quaerere Cadmus
> exsul Hyanteos invenit regna per agros,
> fraternasque acies fetae telluris hiatu
> augurium seros dimisit ad usque nepotes?
>
> Doesn't Thebes' ancient omen reach out from the past, from the time when exiled Cadmus, ordered to search over the Carpathian sea for the Sidonian bull's alluring

> burden--but for naught--found a realm in the Hyantean lands, and sent forth fraternal battle-lines from the gaping of the pregnant earth as an ever-living omen of ill for his descendants?

The epic's opening words, *fraternas acies*, are repeated here. But we are now told that the fraternal battle-lines of the house of Oedipus are nothing but a replay of the civil strife of the sown men at Thebes' foundation. In spite of the narrator's promised *limes*, the story of Cadmus remains implicated in the fratricide of Polynices and Eteocles, for the latter is simply the most recent incarnation of a principle embedded within the very fabric of Theban history. [15] Likewise in Book 3, as the Thebans mourn the **[End Page 175]** deaths of those killed by Tydeus, the aged Aletes traces Thebes' many woes back to the city's foundation (3.179-83):

> saepe quidem infelix varioque exercita ludo
> fatorum gens nostra fuit, Sidonius ex quo
> hospes in Aonios iecit sata ferrea sulcos,
> unde novi fetus et formidata colonis
> arva suis.[16]
>
> Often indeed has our unhappy people been a plaything of the fates, ever since the Sidonian traveler sowed seeds of iron in Aonian soil, whence came a strange new crop, and fields feared by their own settlers.

Not just a *Septem,* the epic remains, stubbornly, a *Thebais*. [17] Repetition appears as both a transgressive and regressive principle, effecting the unwelcome insertion, across the *limes carminis*, of Thebes' fratricidal origin into the narrative present. Such is the role played by repetition in the Menoeceus episode, as well.

As in Euripides' *Phoenissae*, Statius' primary source for his Menoeceus episode, the Statian Tiresias declares that Thebes' only hope for salvation is contingent upon the sacrifice of a descendant of the sown men to atone for Cadmus' slaying of the serpent of Mars. Despite his father's appeals, Menoeceus accepts the prophecy and gives his life for his country, an act praised by the people of Thebes, the narrator, and the goddess Virtus herself. [18] At the same time, included in the episode is a strong "centrifugal" voice that explicitly reconfigures Menoeceus' heroism as just the latest instance of the *amor mortis* underlying Theban history, yet another attesta-tion of the *vetus omen* of the city's foundation, leaving us uncertain as to what extent Menoeceus' suicidal *virtus* is actually free from the taint of **[End Page 176]** fratricide and origins. [19] Turning to a consideration of the episode's significance for the subsequent action, we will determine whether its repetitious nature tends to the mastery of the Theban past, representing progress and change, or rather to a regression to this past.

While the narrator had pleaded that the story of Thebes' foundation stay out of his narrative, the Menoeceus episode is introduced as yet another return to origins, a breaching of the *limes carminis* by the very first sacrificial killing at Thebes, Cadmus' slaying of the serpent of Mars. Tiresias proclaims (10.610-15):

> audite, o sontes, extrema litamina divum,
> Labdacidae: venit alma salus, sed limite duro.
> Martius inferias et saeva efflagitat anguis
> sacra: cadat generis quicumque novissimus exstat
> viperei, datur hoc tantum victoria pacto.
> felix, qui tanta lucem mercede relinquet.
>
> Behold, guilty descendants of Labdacus, your last chance to appease the gods: harsh is the route to safety. The snake of Mars demands an offering, a savage sacrifice: the latest-born of the serpent's line must die: these are the sole terms for victory. Happy is he who cashes in his life at this rate.

The present remains under the power of the past: the last-born (*novissimus*) of the sown men must be sacrificed to atone for Cadmus' first sacrifice. Statius has already groomed Menoeceus for taking up the mantle of Thebes' Cadmean past: earlier in the text, we found Menoeceus exhorting his fellow soldiers

(8.600-02):

> "pudeat, Cadmea iuventus
> terrigenas mentita patres! quo tenditis," inquit,
> "degeneres?"
>
> "Shame on you, Cadmean troops. Your fathers were the earth-born? You lie about your lineage. Where are you heading," he said, "reproaches to your race?" **[End Page 177]**

Given what we have already heard from the anonymous critic in Book 1 and Aletes in Book 3, this insult to Menoeceus' fellow Thebans is bitterly ironic. The very war is proof enough of the legitimacy of the present generation of Thebans. [20]

Menoeceus' mother is especially certain of her son's paternal line. She complains (10.804-09, 811-14):

> unde hic mortis amor? quae sacra insania menti?
> quosve ego conceptus aut quae male pignora fudi
> tam diversa mihi? nimirum Martius anguis,
> quaeque novis proavum tellus effloruit armis--
> hinc animi tristes nimiusque in pectore Mavors,
> et de matre nihil . . .
> ast egomet Danaos Capaneaque tela verebar:
> haec erat, hac metuenda manus ferrumque, quod amens
> ipsa dedi. viden ut iugulo consumpserit ensem?
> altius haud quisquam Danaum mucrone subisset.
>
> Whence comes this passion for death? What awful madness has struck? What have I given birth to, what misbegotten child, so different from myself, did I bear? Truly, it was the snake of Mars, and the earth that sprouted with the strange arms of his ancestors--this is the source of his self-destructive courage, the excessive violence of his spirit; nothing from his mother's side. . . . I was afraid of the Greeks, the weapons of Capaneus: but this was the hand I should have feared, this the sword, which I myself gave him in my blindness. Do you see how he buried his sword in his throat? No thrust from the Greeks could have driven deeper.

From his fratricidal forefathers, his mother declares, Menoeceus inherited self-destructive courage, *animi tristes*. The Lucanian vocabulary is instructive: like the Caesarian Scaeva in *Bellum Civile* 6 (6.246), and like the *devota iuventus* of Vulteius in *Bellum Civile* 4 (cf. 4.520), Menoeceus is motivated **[End Page 178]** by a passion for death, *mortis amor*. The second of these Lucanian references is particularly interesting, for Lucan had himself invoked Theban myth to describe the grim correspondence between civil war and suicide as exhibited by Vulteius' men in their *extrema* (*BC* 4.549-51):

> sic semine Cadmi
> emicuit Dircaea cohors ceciditque suorum
> vulneribus, dirum Thebanis fratribus omen;
>
> Just as from Cadmus' seed the Dircaean legion sprang forth and fell by each other's stroke, a deadly omen for the Theban brothers.

Menoeceus' mother recalls another Lucanian image at the end of her speech, one that likewise equates suicide and civil war. [21] At the beginning of the *Bellum Civile,* Lucan says of Rome's self-inflicted violence (1.30-32):

> non tu, Pyrrhe ferox, nec tantis cladibus auctor
> Poenus erit: nulli penitus descendere ferro
> contigit; **alta sedent civilis vulnera dextrae**.
>
> Not you, fierce Pyrrhus, nor the Carthaginian will be the author of such destruction. No one else is permitted to thrust home the sword: the wounds from a citizen's hand are driven deep.

The sword-thrust of Rome's violent turn *in sua viscera* (*BC* 1.3) penetrates deepest. Similarly, Menoeceus' own sword-thrust penetrates deeper than that of any enemy. For Menoeceus' mother, at least, her son's suicidal *virtus* is nothing less than the incarnation of the same *amor mortis* that has been at work in the fratricidal history of Thebes from the beginning. [22] **[End Page 179]**

Statian *Devotio* and the Failure of "Generative Violence"

If Menoeceus' suicide signals another insertion of Thebes' first fratricide into the narrative present, centripetal voices of the text claim that Menoeceus' suicide repeats such mythic violence *with a difference*. As Menoeceus prepares for his sacrifice, he is hailed by the people of Thebes (10.683-85):

> tum vulgus euntem
> auctorem pacis servatoremque deumque
> conclamat gaudens atque ignibus implet honestis.
>
> Then as he goes the people joyfully hail him as author of peace, savior, and god and fill him with righteous passions.

It is tempting to resolve the paradox of Menoeceus' suicide--of a piece with the Theban past, yet finally to be differentiated from this past by its presumed effects (i.e., *pax*)--by appealing to René Girard's notion of the surrogate victim. [23] The surrogate victim mechanism arises from what Girard terms a "sacrificial crisis," a period of engulfing and destructive violence of a reciprocal, symmetrical, and rigorously undifferentiated char-acter--much like the situation confronting Thebes. At the very point when the violence becomes most acute, a single, arbitrarily selected individual from within the community becomes the target of all the others' aggressions. The rivalry and violence of which all had a share now appear as the sole responsibility of the victim: the surrogate victim becomes a substitute for the community itself, an object upon which the community is able to polarize *its own* violence. The death of the surrogate victim, because of its unanimous character (all minus one), has a cathartic effect, purging the **[End Page 180]** community of its self-consuming violence and initiating a period of calm and order. Girard notes that the surrogate victim appears in myth and mythic literature sometimes as a monster (because upon him is projected the community's own destructive urges) and, at other times, as a savior (because it is through his death that the community itself is saved, *unus pro omnibus*). The central duality of Girard's surrogate victim mechanism is of considerable interest here: the death of the surrogate victim is, from a perspective within the sacrificial crisis itself, no different from any of the other violent acts infecting the community; but from the perspective of its effects, it is quite different, for this act of violence re-establishes social order. It is an act of *generative* violence. Similarly, Menoeceus' death is marked by the same symmetrical violence engulfing all of Thebes, with one critical exception. Though it is assimilated into Theban history as a repeti-tion of the reciprocal violence of his autochthonous forefathers, his suicide is advertised as a form of *terminal* violence. The violence of his death is to be transformed by virtue of its specifically narrative significance: in a word, closure. At a theoretical level, the study of Statian narrative and Statian vio-lence converge here: to interrogate the adequacy of these proclamations of terminal violence--Menoeceus' claims upon the title of *pacis auctor*--is at the same time to examine the modality of the repetitions of Theban myth in the *Thebaid*.

Such a conception of generative violence, the *unus pro omnibus* effect, can hardly be regarded as alien to Roman society. In fact, it is presupposed in the Roman ritual of *devotio* that forms an important subtext for this very episode. As David Vessey has shown, Statius "deliberately modeled" his scene on Livy's account of the *devotio* of P. Decius Mus in Book 8 of his history. [24] In the *devotio*, a Roman general consecrated both himself and the enemy troops to the gods of the underworld, the *di manes*, then rushed headlong into the enemy ranks to meet his death. He voluntarily became a propitiation to these gods on behalf of the Roman people, a sacrificial offering that turned the gods' anger, the *ira deorum*, from the Roman troops onto the troops of their enemy. [25] The ritual was highly valued among the Romans, and the exemplary devotions of the **[End Page 181]** Decius Mus clan are referred to frequently throughout Roman literature. However, as we shall see, there are a number of fundamental departures from the Roman ritual in Statius' treatment that cut to the heart of the mutually implicated issues of generative violence and narrative integrity. Menoeceus' suicide represents a failed *devotio*, one distorted into a pure spectacle of self-destruction, a microcosm of Thebes itself.

Let us begin with Livy's account of the elder Decius' *devotio* (8.9.9ff.):

> armatus in equum insiluit ac se in medios hostes immisit, conspectus ab utraque acie, aliquanto augustior humano visu, sicut caelo missus piaculum omnis deorum irae, qui pestem ab suis aversam in hostes ferret. Ita omnis terror pavorque cum illo latus signa prima Latinorum turbavit, deinde in totam penitus aciem pervasit. Evidentissimum id fuit, quod quacumque equo invectus est, ibi haud secus quam pestifero sidero icti pavebant; ubi vero corruit obrutus telis, inde iam haud dubie consternatae cohortes Latinorum fugam ac vastitatem late fecerunt.
>
> He leapt upon his horse armed and hurled himself into the enemy's midst, visible to both sides; his majesty was more than human, as if he were sent from heaven as an expiation for all the anger of the gods, to turn destruction away from his own people and bring it upon the enemy. Thus all the terror and dread attending him threw the first ranks of the Latins into confusion, and then swept through the entire army. It was most clear that wherever his horse conveyed him, there the Latins were in a state of panic, as if struck by some pestilential star; wherever he rushed, beset by their weapons, the dazed cohorts of the Latins faced certain rout and utter destruction.

The consul rides into enemy ranks where he translates the anger of the gods to the opposing army, producing immediate terror among the Latins and hence allowing the Roman army to put them to flight. H. S. Versnel notes the care with which the ritual is described by Livy, who emphasizes "the essential distinction between *consecratio* and *mactatio*" that Versnel locates at the heart of Roman devotions: while the consul consecrates himself **[End Page 182]** (along with the enemy troops) to the infernal gods, the actual killing of the consul, the *mactatio*, is reserved for the enemy, "death by his own hand apparently being impossible." [26] The regularity in the language of other ancient testimonia concerning the Decii bears out Versnel's point. Despite the brevity of the following passing references to the ritual, each author emphasizes the consul's foray into enemy ranks.

> Seneca Ep. 67.9: Decius se pro re publica devovit et **in medios hostes concitato equo mortem petens irruit**. Alter post hunc, paternae virtutis aemulus, conceptis sollemnibus ac iam familiaribus verbis **in aciem confertissimam incucurrit**.
>
> Decius dedicated himself to the state and spurring his horse rushed headlong into the enemy's midst seeking death. The other [Decius] after him . . . charged into the thickest ranks of the enemy.
>
> Cicero De Fin. II.61: [P. Decius] . . . se devoverat et equo admisso **in mediam aciem Latinorum irruebat**.
>
> Decius had dedicated himself and . . . rushed into the Latins' mid-most ranks.
>
> Florus I.14.3: alter quasi monitu deorum capite velato primam ante aciem diis manibus se devoverit, ut **in confertissima se hostium tela iaculatus** novum ad victoriam iter sanguinis sui limite aperiret.
>
> The other . . . devoted himself to the gods of the underworld, so that, having hurled himself into the enemy's thickest hail of arms, he might open up a new route to victory by his bloody trail. **[End Page 183]**
>
> Orosius III.9.3: **in confertissimos hostes** sponte prolapsu occubuit.
>
> He fell with a sudden rush into the enemy's thickest ranks.

Having become a lightning-rod for the *ira deorum*, the *devotus* communicates this contagion (*pestis)* to the enemy troops at the moment of his immolation. The persistence in the ancient depictions of Decian *devotiones* suggests that the generative function of the ritual is a product of the consul's transference of the *ira deorum* to the enemy as he charges into its ranks.

Significantly, Statius' Menoeceus episode breaks down such a distinction between *consecratio* and

mactatio. Of course, Menoeceus' *suicide* was already inscribed in Statius' Euripidean model. Yet Statius' two primary departures from this model--the less cowardly counsel he has Creon give to his son, and his postponement of Menoeceus' suicide until the latter stages of the battle--call attention to the ultimate contrast between Menoeceus' suicide and Roman *devotio*.

In Euripides, Creon advises desertion, providing Menoeceus a stark contrast between patriotism and cowardice (970ff.). In Statius, the choice before Menoeceus is less clear. Creon appeals to him (10.713-18):

> nec timidus te flecto parens: i, proelia misce,
> i Danaas acies mediosque per obvius enses;
> non teneo . . .
> hoc malunt Thebae.
>
> It's not from fear that your father turns you aside: go, join the fray, rush into the ranks of the Greeks, meet their swords where they are thickest, I don't hold you back. . . . This is what Thebes prefers.

The choice now before Menoeceus is between service to Thebes in battle and self-immolation. Which of these choices most closely approximates the Roman ritual of *devotio*? Creon's injunction, *i Danaas acies mediosque per obvius enses*, recalls the consistent language applied to *devotio* in the Roman tradition reviewed above, language that assimilates the ritual to a form of military engagement. [27] Statius tempts us with an even clearer **[End Page 184]** reference to the traditional communicative aspect of Roman devotions in the death scene. Menoeceus thrusts home his sword, and then (10.778-79):

> seque super medias acies, nondum ense remisso,
> iecit et in saevos cadere est conatus Achivos.
>
> He hurled himself down upon the mid-most ranks, still clutching his sword, and tried to fall upon the savage Argives.

But his attempts are foiled: Pietas and Virtus insure that his suicide will be deprived of any military relevance (10.780-81):

> ast illum amplexae Pietas Virtusque ferebant
> leniter ad terras corpus;
>
> But Pietas and Virtus embraced him and bore his body gently to earth.

The ritually prescribed rush by the devoted *in* (or *super*) *medias acies* is displaced, rendering Menoeceus' act one of pure self-immolation. Statius does not simply retail Menoeceus' Euripidean suicide: he calls attention to it, representing *mactatio* as a replacement of *devotio*. [28]

Such an emphasis on the suicidal, non-communicative nature of Menoeceus' heroics goes far, I would contend, in explaining the primary difficulty of the episode: the apparent irrelevance, in both authors, of Menoeceus' death for Thebes' "salvation." His death seems positively inconsequential for the subsequent action.

In Euripides, Menoeceus' death, which is credited with Thebes' victory in the messenger's report to Jocasta, comes just before the commencement of hostilities between Argos and Thebes (*Phoenissae* 1090). But the actual turning point in the battle does not come until Zeus **[End Page 185]** strikes down Capaneus for his *hybris*, dismaying the Argives and inspiring the Thebans to rush against their enemies and put them to rout (*Phoenissae* 1187-95). Menoeceus' sacrifice is not mentioned again in the play; Euripides offers us no clue that might help us relate it to Jupiter's destruc-tion of Capaneus: the causal mechanism underlying Menoeceus' salvation is left strangely undefined. Statius' alteration of the episode's narrative position appears to be in response to this Euripidean dilemma: Statius has transposed Menoeceus' *devotio* from its initial position to one immediately preceding the critical Capaneus episode, thus teasing the reader into connecting the two passages based upon their mere

contiguity. [29] As has been often noted, Menoeceus and Capaneus are intentionally paired in Statius. [30] But this juxtaposition has the effect of highlighting all the more the futility of Menoeceus' *amor mortis*.

As he stood ready to immolate himself, Menoeceus uttered this prayer to Apollo (10.765-72):

> ferte retro bellum captaeque impingite Lernae
> relliquias turpes, confixaque terga foventes
> Inachus indecores pater aversetur alumnos.
> at Tyriis templa, arva, domos, conubia, natos
> reddite morte mea: si vos placita hostia iuvi,
> si non attonitis vatis consulta recepi
> auribus et Thebis nondum credentibus hausi
> haec Amhpioniis pro me persolvite tectis . . .
>
> Reverse the war and dash its foul remnants against captive Lerna; let father Inachus turn his face from his ignoble nurslings as they nurse their wounded backs. But by my death return to the Tyrians their temples, fields, homes, wives, and children: if I, your chosen offering, **[End Page 186]** have pleased you, if I listened to the prophet's responses with steady ears, and took them to heart though Thebes did not yet believe--make good on these debts to Amphion's town in exchange for me . . .

"Reverse the war," *ferte retro bellum*, Menoeceus requests. Such reversal was, in fact, the central product of the *devotio*. In Statius' Livian model, the battle's turn is instantaneous and manifest: "It was *most clear* that wherever his horse conveyed him, there the Latins were in a state of panic . . . the dazed cohorts of the Latins faced *certain rout* and utter destruction." But in Statius, the aftermath of Menoeceus' death is much different (10.783-88):

> Iamque intra muros nullo sudore receptum
> gaudentes heroa ferunt: abscesserat ultro
> Tantalidum venerata cohors.
>
> [The Thebans] joyfully recover the hero without a fight, and bear him within the walls: the sons of Tantalus respectfully and willingly retire.

In fact, the Argives retire only to resume their assault through Capaneus.

Statius' Capaneus appears to be an alert reader of Euripides. As he begins his ethereal ascent, he remarks (10.845-47):

> "hac" ait, "in Thebas, hac me iubet ardua virtus
> ire, Meneoceo qua lubrica sanguine turris.
> experiar, quid sacra iuvent, an falsus Apollo."
>
> "My sheer *virtus* bids me to attack Thebes by this route," he says, "where the tower is slippery from Menoeceus' blood. I'll find out what good sacrifice does, and whether Apollo is false."

quid sacra iuvent, Capaneus asks, as if in response to the puzzle posed by Euripides: what (narrative) good does Menoeceus' sacrifice perform? Statius represents Capaneus' *aristeia* as an explicit test of the efficacy of Menoeceus' sacrifice, a test that further undercuts the terminal possibilities of the young Theban's *devotio*. **[End Page 187]**

Menoeceus' final act is a ritual lustration of the walls of Thebes with his own blood: *sanguine tunc spargit turres et moenia lustrat* (10.777). Capaneus begins his attack against these very same walls: *alterno captiva in moenia gressu / surgit ovans* ("With alternating step, he rises up exultant against the captive walls" 10.848-49). Despite Menoeceus' lustration, the walls of Thebes are already as good as *captiva*. Capaneus' assault is a virtual inversion of Menoeceus' prayer (10.879-82):

> absiliunt pontes, tectique prementis
> saxea frena labant, dissaeptoque aggere rursus

> utitur et truncas rupes in templa domosque
> praecipitat frangitque suis iam moenibus urbem.
>
> Bridges cave; the stone stays of the covering roof fall, and again he uses the broken-off mass and hurls down rock fragments against temples and homes and crushes the city with its own walls.

Menoeceus' lustration was not enough to save the walls of Thebes; his prayers on behalf of the *templa* and *domi* of his city fail to spare them from Capaneus' destruction. Capaneus is struck down at last, but at the hands of a Jupiter who doesn't seem to have noticed Menoeceus' heroics in the least. His death is transformed from an episode integral to the course of the narrative to a digression. Devoid of actual narrative efficacy, Menoeceus' death becomes mere spectacle, an ecphrasis of extravagant self-destruction. Deprived of the terminal significance we were led to expect for it, Menoeceus' suicide becomes just another site of the *return of* the self-destructive violence manifest at the very foundation of the city.

If Statius' pairing of the Menoeceus and Capaneus scenes serves to reaffirm the ultimate failure of the former to provide an example of a terminal violence through which the narrative might escape from the violent repetitions plaguing it, it also underlines the fact that to the latter episode is ascribed the terminal violence that we had anticipated would follow in the wake of Menoeceus' death. While Menoeceus' *devotio* is transformed into a self-immolation devoid of narrative significance, generative of spectacle alone, it is Capaneus' death that vividly recalls the aftermath of *devotio* as described by Livy (11.21-26): **[End Page 188]**

> At vaga palantes campo fuga volvit Achivos.
> nec iam hostes turmae aut ferrum mortale timetur:
> omnibus ante oculos irae Iovis, omnibus ardent
> arma metu galeaeque tonant, visusque paventes
> ipse sequi et profugis opponere Iuppiter ignis.
> instat Agenoreus miles caelique tumultu
> utitur.
>
> Disorderly rout unravels the Argives wandering over the field, no longer feared are the enemy ranks or mortal arms: before the eyes of all is the anger of Jove, their arms burn, their helmets thunder: in their fear, Jupiter himself seems to pursue them and hurl his lightning against them in their flight. The Thebans attack and put the heaven-sprung confusion to good use.

Menoeceus performs a failed *devotio*; Capaneus, a reverse *devotio*: the effects of Capaneus' death match those of Decius' death as recorded by Livy, except Capaneus brings the *irae deorum* against his own people. At the beginning of the episode, Statius described Capaneus' fury through an *unus pro omnibus* image (10.748-51):

> nec iam aut Oeniden aut Hippomedonta peremptos
> aut vatem Pelopea phalanx aut Arcada credunt:
> quin socium coiisse animas et **corpore in uno**
> **stare omnes** . . .
>
> No more does Pelops' army believe Tydeus, Hippomedon, the prophet, or Arcadian dead: but that the spirits of their comrades have converged and stand, all of them, in a single body . . .

Capaneus is a substitute for the Argive army: the death of one leads to the rout of many. As with Menoeceus himself, generative violence inverts to self-destruction.

Menoeceus' memory is recalled at key moments in the subsequent narrative, but again it only serves to extend Thebes' *vetus omen* of reciprocal violence into the present, referring us to an originary *fabula* compromising the integrity and unity of the text's *sjuzhet*. Now through his **[End Page 189]** tyrannical father Creon, whose turn it is to take up the mantle of Theban violence, Menoeceus becomes an agent for the *return of* mythic Theban fratricide. [31] It is with Menoeceus in mind, for example, that Creon con-

vinces Eteocles to engage his brother in battle. Eteocles' advisors would have prevented the fratricidal *nefas*, recommending to the Theban king to "stay put," *resiste* (11.260). But then Creon shows up, and Eteocles goes out to meet his brother (11.263-65):

> ecce aderat luctu dicturusque omnia belli
> libertate Creon: urit fera corda Menoeceus;
> nulla patri requies, illum quaeritque tenetque.
>
> Look: here, in all his grief, is Creon, ready to speak his mind--the war brings freedom. Menoeceus flames his feral heart; the father has no respite: he seeks him, his mind grips him.

Next, Menoeceus' death becomes implicated in Creon's rise to the throne Eteocles has just left vacant--the throne "fatal to tyrants," as Statius describes it, recalling the violent repetition haunting Theban rule. Tellingly, it is both Creon's descent from the sown men as well as his son's *pulchra mors* that wins the Thebans over to him (11.652-54). The originary violence of Thebes' foundation now comes to life through Creon, as his decree to refuse the fallen Argives burial results in another invasion of the Theban state. It is with Menoeceus on his mind that Creon makes his fatal decree, capping his proclamation by swearing an oath *per superos magnumque Menoecea* (12.103).

Despite the eager words of the Theban populace as they encouraged Menoeceus to self-immolation, Statius' narrative presents Menoeceus' *devotio* as entirely outside the causal chain resulting in Thebes' defeat of the Argives. Where we do see Menoeceus' legacy in operation, it does not effect *pax* or *salus*, but rather initiates fratricide and leads to yet another foreign assault upon the city. The *virtus* Menoeceus displays is fully implicated in the repetitious extension of Thebes' *vetus omen* into the *Thebaid*'s story of the house of Oedipus. **[End Page 190]**

Conclusions: From Thebes to Rome

The *devotus* was an expiatory offering made to re-establish peace with the gods, the *pax deorum*. Yet, as Cicero's Cotta recognizes in *de Natura Deorum*, the ritual raised disturbing questions regarding theodicy. Cotta, an Academic, disputed the theological basis for the ritual act, ascribing it instead to military expediency. Addressing the Stoic Balbus, Cotta remarks (*de Natura Deorum* 3.15):

> But you even think that the gods were appeased by the devotions of the Decii. What great injustice (iniquitas) was theirs that they couldn't be reconciled to the Roman people unless men such as these perished? That was military strategy . . . For (the gods) thought that the army would follow close behind the commander who spurred his horse and hurled himself against the enemy, which is what happened.

Statius' presentation of Menoeceus' devotion reads as an exact inversion of Cotta's assessment of the ritual. In Statius, *devotio* becomes a strategically *irrelevant* act that underlines the inequity of the epic's pantheon. Autochthonous forces--morally indistinct from the Olympians--demand, like Jupiter himself, payment from the living for the deeds of their ancestors. Such vengeance-ridden theodicy was the product of Rome's own recurrent experience of civil war, an experience that, for many Romans, revealed the essential malevolence of their gods. [32] Such sentiments are summed up nicely by Tacitus, who declared at the opening of his account of the civil wars of 69 a.d., "the gods care nothing for our safety--only for our punishment" (*Histories* 1.3.3).

Statius' use of repetition as a force that essentially disrupts the cognitive resources of narrative is likewise the product of the Roman experience of civil war. [33] The repetitious nature of the Roman civil wars had long exercised the imagination of the poetic and historiographical traditions. At the start of his *Histories*, Tacitus writes (*Hist*. 1.2): *iam vero Italia* **[End Page 191]** *novis cladibus vel post longam saeculorum seriem repetitis adflicta* ("Italy was now hit with new disasters, or disasters that returned after a long cycle of time"). In some ways new, the events of this chaotic year were in other ways but a replay of Rome's dark days of intermittent civil strife from the previous century. *rursus eo*, "here [we] go again," cries Lucan's inspired matron, as if speaking for an entire nation whose violence formed a history that pushed against the very limits of the narratable, a history remembered as a repetitious, homogeneous chain of violence whose causes long since threatened to become subject to the endless

deferrals of myth. [34] This tendency was apparent even in the "Golden Age": eschewing the explanatory narratives popular in the historiographical tradition, Horace turns to Rome's legendary past for an aetiology of Roman self-destruction (*Ep.* 7.18-21):

> sic est: acerba fata Romanos agunt
> scelusque fraternae necis,
> ut immerentis fluxit in terram Remi
> sacer nepotibus cruor.
>
> So it is: harsh fates drive the Romans,
> and the crime of a brother's murder,
> since Remus' guiltless blood flowed upon the earth
> a curse on his descendants.

Rome is cursed: it has *always* been cursed, from its legendary foundation to the present. Vergil outmatches Horace by taking this mythic move a further step back, to Rome's Trojan origins (*Georg.* 1.501-02): *satis iam pridem sanguine nostro / Laomedonteae luimus periuria Troiae*, "we have long since made sufficient payment, in blood, for Trojan Laomedon's deceit." [35]

Statius, I would argue, takes this cultural tendency to its logical conclusion. His Thebes, the mythic displacement of Roman fratricide, stages the limitations of narrative form itself: narrative is ever haunted by origins that elude mastery. Thus Menoeceus' *devotio* is transformed from **[End Page 192]** an act of terminal violence heralding the Thebans' victory, into a repetition of the self-destructive urges underlying Thebes' troubled history. Such a repetitious turn, representing yet another incursion by the past into the *limes carminis*, takes Menoeceus' heroics out of the causal sequence of the plot and converts them into a mere spectacle of self-immolation. As I said at the beginning of this paper, narrative is a tool for rendering experience meaningful. But the violence of the *Thebaid*, and of the Menoeceus episode in particular, defies the imposition of meaning and eludes a proper name: it is a form of heroism that mirrors the self-destruction condemned by the epic, a devotion devoid of the proper effects of *devotio*, patriotism that can only be expressed through suicide. In a world of violence that exceeds the narratable, *virtus* stands ever in the shadow of a *vetus omen*. [36]

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Notes

1. See, with references, Ahl 1986.2804-07, and the citations collected by Dominik 1994.55, n. 78 (for Book 5).

2. For Statian *bricolage*, see, in particular, Legras 1905, Part I: *Le sujet et les sources*; Vessey 1973.ch.2; Brown 1995 *passim*.

3. E.g., for Book 5, Krumbholz 1955.125ff., Vessey 1973.170-82, Dominik 1994.54-63. Note the persistence of aesthetic-normative vocabulary in Dominik, who writes of Statius' mini-Argonautica in Book 5, "The significance of the metadiegetic narrative of Hypsipyle is in its close thematic connexion to other sections of the *Thebaid*, a relationship perhaps best described as organic. Essential to the meaning of the epic, the episode connects with other sections through the paralleling of episodes, foreshadowing of events, evocation of reminiscences and repetition of motifs in the main narrative." Cf. Vessey 1973.170, Williams 1978.252.

4. To begin with, see the introduction and the first two chapters of White 1987 and the useful survey of narrative theory in Brooks 1984.ch.1. In his exploration of the significance of narrative form for historiography, White is preceded by the seminal essay of Louis Mink (1978). Ricoeur 1984-88 is a magisterial study of the relationship between phenomenology, literature, and historiography and argues for a central role for narrative in our experience and reconfiguration of time. Along the way, Riceour provides lucid overviews of various subfields of narrative theory: his summary and critique of structural narratology (v. 2, chs. 2-3) are particularly useful. Kermode 1966 remains a classic statement of the fundamental need for, and yet periodic resistance to, narrative meaning on the part of "man in the middest." Closer to home is Quint 1993, who contends that a particular political orientation underlies an

epicist's choice of narrative form. Particularly in his Vergil chapter, Quint draws on Brooks 1984, whom I discuss below.

5. An overview of the traditional *fabula-sjuzhet* distinction (otherwise rendered "story-discourse" or "histoire-récit") can be found in Brooks 1984.ch. 1, esp. 12-13. The distinction is at the heart of Genette's conception of "anachrony" (see Genette 1980.ch. 1: "Order").

6. Reference here to the *Iliad* is not arbitrary. As Henderson 1993 discusses, Thebes and Troy were ancient epic's "twin cities" as far back as the cyclic poets. All translations are my own.

7. Of course, in the invocation preceding the Catalogue in Book 2, we are alerted to the possibility of non-narratability, but this possibility is defeated by a renewed burst of inspiration from the Muses. Nevertheless, I do not suggest that the *Iliad* is without its own ambiguities regarding the relationship between Muse, narrator, and poem.

8. Vessey 1986.2972 translates "And from now on I shall count myself as having already to some degree passed in review the *gemitus et prospera* Cadmi," taking the 1st person subject of *sinam* as the subject of the infinitive *praeteriisse*, and hence as Statius' assertion of control over his *fabula*--the *praeteritio* being the rhetorical figure of the speaker's control *par excellence*. But the narrator has already confessed his confusion in the face of so many Theban stories.

9. Brooks notes (1984.13) that it is by virtue of a simple mimetic allusion that the *fabula* appears to stand prior to, and independently of, the *sjuzhet*. But perhaps the full force of this observation should be moderated for a poet such as Statius, who relies on traditional materials.

10. Ahl 1986.2837-39.

11. Dominik 1994.ch. 1. See also Schubert 1984.71-105. Feeney 1993 contains an important discussion of Statian theology, considerably different from Dominik's, but this is not the place to directly engage such broader issues regarding the epic's theology.

12. Dominik 1994.8ff., Davis 1993.471ff.

13. Contrast the peculiar arguments of Vessey 1973.83 (contradicted on p. 106) and Neri 1986.2010 (with n. 197).

14. Ahl 1986.2839.

15. See Davis 1993 for a discussion of Statius' "genetic determinism." Cf. Henderson 1991.42: "Thebes is a Moëbius strip. Thebans can only play roles in a re-make"; cf. p. 35.

16. Aletes draws a distinction between the heaven-sent disasters of the past and the human-spawned ills of the present (*tum superi*), but for the reader, privy to the council of the gods scene in Book 1, this distinction cannot hold up: the Theban past repeats itself even more that Aletes recognizes.

17. We may also note that after the first day of battle, the entire Theban population celebrates by reviewing their ancestral history from its inception: *nunc facta revolvunt / maiorum veteresque canunt ab origine Thebas* (8.227ff.).

18. And by Vessey 1973.117-31, who reads the episode in accordance with his general thesis that the *Thebaid* leaves "little room for ambivalence or ambiguity" (58).

19. For the troubling connotations of a number of Flavian epic suicides, with their intimations of civil war, see McGuire 1990.

20. Not surprisingly, the issue of legitimacy is prominent in Statius' tale of the confused house of Oedipus: see Davis 1993 *passim*.

21. Grisé 1982 is the standard work on Roman suicide; however, her insistence on its fundamentally rational basis, and her primary goal of dismissing the notion of a Roman *libido moriendi*, causes her to

neglect the troubling connection between suicide and civil war drawn by early imperial authors. Barton 1989 and 1993 offer a more psychologically nuanced reading of early imperial *amor mortis*. The civil war-suicide connection in Flavian epic is traced out nicely in McGuire 1990.

22. We should note in addition that the Statian personification Virtus that inspires Menoeceus is, as Denis Feeney has shown, herself decidedly ambivalent (Feeney 1993.383-85). Her poetic pedigree can be traced back to Vergil's Fama and Dirae; her *modus operandi* is *fraus*; in this passage, she is strangely non-martial: she checks Menoeceus' military valor, she is even personified as a woman (despite the *vir* in *virtus*). The rhetoric Virtus employs to entice Menoeceus into a "glorious death" (*pulchra mors*) recalls the conflict within the house of Oedipus: *i, precor, adcelera, ne proximus occupet Haemon*. Menoeceus is stirred to self-sacrifice out of a spirit of fraternal rivalry dangerously similar to that prompting the war itself.

23. Outlined in Girard 1977. Girardian approaches to Roman epic can be found in Bandera 1981 and 1994, Hardie 1993.

24. Vessey 1971.239, citing the verbal reminiscences of Livy 8.9.10 we find at *Theb*. 10.757-59, and describing Menoeceus' final speech as "virtually a literary version" of the *devotio* formula of P. Decius Mus the elder.

25. For *devotio* generally, see Versnel 1981 and the works cited there; see also Barton 1993.40ff.

26. Versnel 1981.150. The one exception to this noted by Versnel is, in fact, the episode in question: Statius' treatment of Menoeceus' Romanized *devotio*.

27. Livy's extended discussion of the customary procedures used when the *devotus* survives his foray merely reinforces the distinction between *mactatio* and *consecratio* in the ritual.

28. We may compare Menoeceus to his Lucanian model, Cato, under whom, in Book 9, the Republican cause turns into a suicidal death march at the very time it appeared that we were entering a new stage of the conflict, one in which civil war might be purified and justified (cf. 9.293: *iusti . . . Martis*). Although civil conflict now (with Pompey out of the way) seems to be waged over stark principles--*Libertas et Caesar*--Cato turns away from such conflict and leads his men on an *irreducem viam*. He is an angel of death, spreading his own suicidal impulses wherever he goes.

29. Vessey, on the other hand, argues that Statius juxtaposes the two episodes merely so that Menoeceus and his *pietas* might present a "counterbalance" to Capanean *furor* (1973.118). Venini argues that Statius wished to defer such a clear signal of the inevitability of Theban victory to the last possible moment (1961.394). But it was the nature of the causal mechanism that linked Menoeceus' *devotio* to the Theban victory which was left unresolved in Euripides, which remains unresolved in Statius, and whose lack of resolution the Statian Capaneus explicitly notes.

30. Fantham 1995 suggests that the pairing actually serves to undercut Menoeceus' *virtus*, contaminating it with Capanean *virtus egressa modum.*

31. Even Vessey is forced to admit that "the death of Menoeceus, instead of providing a stimulus to resignation and virtue, was for Creon the turning-point on a road to madness" (1973.131).

32. See Jal 1962.177ff.

33. See O'Gorman 1995 for some interesting reflections on Roman civil war discourse that fit in nicely with the issues I raise here.

34. In particular, Vergil at the end of *Georgic* 1 (490-92): *Romanas acies iterum videre Philippi; / nec fuit indignum superis, bis sanguine nostro / Emathiam et latos Haemi pinguescere campos*. Lucan's matron shouts: *nova da mihi cernere litora ponti / telluremque novam: vidi iam, Phoebe, Philippos* (1.693-94). Cf. Ovid *Metamorphoses* 15.824.

35. See Thomas 1988 *ad loc*.

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