PATTERNS OF MADNESS IN STATIUS' *THEBAID**

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The traditional problem of Silver Latin poetry, and Silver Latin epic especially, has been its attraction to the extravagant, the grotesque, the infinite, the absurd, in other words, its propensity for excess.[1] Statius' *Thebaid*[2] in particular has been considered guilty of this offence.[3] Recent criticism, however, has tended to see Silver Latin poetry not simply as being excessive, but as being deeply concerned with excess — cultural, ideological, and poetic.[4] In this paper I hope to demonstrate that such a concern is a prominent characteristic of Statius' *Thebaid*, by exploring perhaps the most important manifestation of excess in the poem, madness.[5] I will argue that the *Thebaid*'s excessiveness is fundamental and necessary, rather than detrimental, to its overall effect. But this paper, like the *Thebaid*, will not concentrate exclusively on excess, for it will prove to be only the starting-point for a specific interpretation of the patterns of action and madness in the *Thebaid*.

Near the conclusion of *Thebaid* VII, the prophet Amphiaraus goes on a rampage in battle.[6] He has entered the war against Thebes knowing that he is destined to die, and, as the war breaks out, that his end is swiftly nearing. During the battle his patron god Apollo replaces his charioteer and helps along his *aristeia*. As the pair move through the fray, Statius makes the following simile:

> sic ubi nubiferum montis latus aut noua uentis
> soluit hiemps, aut uicta situ non pertulit aetas,
> desilit horrendus campo timor, arua uirosque
> limite non uno longaeuaque robora secum
> praecipitans, tandemque exhaustus turbine fesso
> aut uallem cauat aut medios intercipit amnes.
> non secus ingentique uiro magnoque grauatus
> temo deo nunc hoc, nunc illo in sanguine feruet.

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[1] Perhaps most vehemently presented in recent times by G. Williams, *Change and Decline. Roman Literature in the Early Empire* (1978), esp. ch. 5; cf. the recuperative yet still conservative approach of G. O. Hutchinson, *Latin Literature from Seneca to Juvenal* (1993).

[2] Although the *Thebaid* has been neglected by post-renaissance scholarship, more recently there has been a resurgence of interest in the poem. Pioneering treatments of the epic are W. Schetter, *Untersuchungen zur epischen Kunst des Statius* (1960) and D. Vessey, *Statius and the Thebaid* (1973), both of which contain bibliography of earlier work; more recently, see e.g. D. Vessey, '*Pierius menti calor incidit*: Statius' Epic Style,' *ANRW* II.32.5 (1986), 2965–3019, F. Ahl, 'Statius' "Thebaid": A Reconsideration,' *ANRW* II.32.5 (1986), 2803–2912, W. J. Dominik, 'Monarchical Power and Imperial Politics in Statius' Thebaid', in A. J. Boyle (ed.), *The Imperial Muse: Ramus Essays on Roman Literature of the Empire. Flavian Epicist to Claudian* (1990), 74–97, D. E. Hill, 'Statius' Thebaid: A Glimmer of Light in a Sea of Darkness,' in Boyle (1990), 98–118, J. Henderson, 'Statius' *Thebaid* / form premade,' *PCPhS* n.s. 37 (1991), 30–80, and 'Form Remade / Statius' *Thebaid*,' in A. J. Boyle (ed.), *Roman Epic* (1993), 162–91, A.-M. Taisne, *L'esthétique de Stace: la peinture des correspondances* (1994), W. J. Dominik, *Speech and Rhetoric in Statius' Thebaid* (1994) and *The Mythic Voice of Statius. Power and Politics in the Thebaid* (1994); see also the chapters on Statius in E. Burck (ed.), *Das römische Epos* (1979), 300–51, D. C. Feeney, *The Gods in Epic* (1991), 337–91. Commentaries are still sparse, but see especially J. J. L. Smolenaars (ed.), *Statius Thebaid VII: A Commentary* (1994), M. Dewar (ed.), *Statius Thebaid IX* (1991), R. D. Williams (ed.), *P. Papini Stati Thebaidos Liber Decimus* (1972), P. Venini (ed.), *P. Papini Stati Thebaidos Liber XI* (1970).

[3] e.g. by Williams, op. cit. (n. 1), and in 'Statius and Vergil: Defensive Imitation', in J. D. Bernard (ed.), *Vergil at 2000* (1986), 207–24, who, for example, sees Statius' practice of imitation as a mannerist penchant for the over-the-top expansion of antecedents; Ahl, op. cit. (n. 2), 2805–6, compiles a bibliography of negative Statian criticism in n. 2; cf. the more positive but still qualified remarks of Schetter, op. cit. (n. 2), 122–5, Vessey (1973), op. cit. (n. 2), 9–14 on Silver mannerism, and now Dewar, op. cit. (n. 2), xxxi-xxxiv.

[4] See e.g. Henderson (1991), op. cit. (n. 2), who positively revels in Statius' excessive poetics, and cf. his discussion of Lucan, 'Lucan / The Word at War,' in A. J. Boyle (ed.), *The Imperial Muse: Ramus Essays on Roman Literature of the Empire. To Juvenal through Ovid* (1988), 122–64, as well as that of his Polynices/Oedipus? J. Masters, *Poetry and Civil War in Lucan's 'Bellum Civile'* (1992); cf. more generally Feeney, op. cit. (n. 2), and P. Hardie, *The Epic Successors of Virgil* (1993).

[5] There are a number of treatments of madness in Statius, none of which touch directly on the concerns of this paper; see esp. Schetter, op. cit. (n. 2), 5–21, 122–3, P. Venini, '*Furor* e psicolgia nella Tebaide di Stazio,' *Athenaeum* 52 (1964), 201–13, D. Hershkowitz, 'Sexuality and madness in Statius' *Thebaid*,' *MD* (forthcoming).

[6] On Amphiaraus in the *Thebaid* see Vessey (1973), op. cit. (n. 2), 259–2, Ahl, op. cit. (n. 2), 2858–63.

> So when a cloud-capped mountainside is loosened by the fresh storms of winter, or age, conquered by decay, does not sustain it, it falls onto the plain, an awesome terror, driving headlong with it fields and men and aged oaks, not in one path, and finally, exhausted, its violence wearied, it hollows out a valley or intercepts a river in mid-course. No differently did the chariot, burdened by the mighty man and the great god, now here, now there, seethe in blood. (VII.744–51)

The power of Amphiaraus' divinely-assisted onrush is compared to the unstoppable destructive power of a collapsing mountainside. The uncertainty about the cause of the avalanche points to Apollo's presence, unperceived by the other human warriors and apparently, at this stage, by Amphiaraus himself, thus causing uncertainty about Amphiaraus' source of strength and ferocity. Moreover, just as it is difficult to tell whether it is the storm or the onset of age which has caused the avalanche, so it is not possible for the reader to distinguish whether the addition of Apollo is entirely responsible for Amphiaraus' strength, or if it is Amphiaraus' awareness of his approaching death (he has already been said to be *certus necis* at VII.699). But there is more going on. The obvious points of correspondence within the simile do not treat all the information given in the simile. Extra details often appear at the end of Statius' similes which initially seem superfluous, but which on closer consideration tell the reader something more about the object of the simile, expanding its meaning. In this case, the added information is given that the collapse of the mountainside, after causing widespread fear and destruction, eventually grinds to a halt. The force of the avalanche exhausts itself, and the dissipation of its energy results in its stagnation: the avalanche finally is either contained in a valley which it has carved out or contains rivers by the dam it forms. Amphiaraus' onrush will also eventually cease, even though now, with the god at his side, he seems unstoppable. The energy required by and produced by Amphiaraus during his *aristeia*, like that of the collapsing mountainside, is extreme, even excessive, as the normally level-headed hero rages in battle.[7] Amphiaraus' extreme energy, again like that of the avalanche, will soon be dissipated, first by Apollo's necessary abandonment of his doomed prophet, and then, permanently, by the prophet's mysterious disappearance into the Underworld through a valley (of sorts) suddenly carved out of the earth.[8]

Statius' epic is very interested in things tiring out and losing energy, and the interrelated concepts of excessive energy and enervation are fundamental to an understanding of the patterns of action in the *Thebaid*. Another simile will help bear this point out. In Book X, Amphiaraus' successor Thiodamas, inspired to a state of frenzy by some deity (160ff.) and by the vision of Amphiaraus' shade (202ff.), leads a night raid against the enemy camp.[9] The Argive band slaughters many of the sleeping Thebans, and Thiodamas is particularly successful; but just as Thiodamas is feeling overjoyed by his progress, he begins to weaken:

> iam tarda manus, iam debile ferrum
> et caligantes nimiis successibus irae.
> Caspia non aliter magnorum in strage iuuencum
> tigris, ubi inmenso rabies placata cruore
> lassauitque genas et crasso sordida tabo
> confudit maculas, spectat sua facta doletque
> defecisse famem: uictus sic augur inerrat
> caedibus Aoniis...

[7] For evidence of his excessiveness see e.g. 703ff. where he is described as burning with an insatiable love of Mars and being completely changed from his role of peaceful prophet, 709–10 where, recalling the raging Aeneas, he is likened to pestilence and sacrifices men to his own shade, and 768 where he is finally called *furens*, a term reserved for those afflicted by madness in the *Thebaid* — and therefore applied to just about everyone in the poem at one time or another.

[8] The simile recalls *Iliad* XIII.137–42 (cited by H. Juhnke, *Homerisches in römischer Epik flavischer Zeit* (1972)), in which Hector's onrush in battle is compared to the onrush of a boulder, freed by winter rain, whose motion comes to a halt on reaching flat land. Unlike in the Statian passage, which hints at Amphiaraus' halt, Hector's own halt (when he reaches the wall of Achaean warriors) is immediately described; a more striking difference is that in the Homeric simile the boulder's impetus is lost on reaching level ground although the boulder is still 'eager' to move (ἐσσύμενός (*Il.* XIII.142)), while in the Statian simile the mountainside is said to be *exhaustus turbine fesso*. The Statian simile also recalls *Aeneid* XII.684–9 (itself recalling *Iliad* XIII.137ff.), in which Turnus' onrush in battle is compared to the force of a collapsing mountainside. The ultimate cessation of the power of the falling rock — and therefore of the power of Turnus — is not described in the Vergilian simile, but is implied by the recollection of the Homeric antecedent.

[9] On Thiodamas in the *Thebaid* see Vessey (1973), op. cit. (n. 2), 266–8, Williams, op. cit. (n. 2), ad X.156–218, 262–325.

...now his hand is slow, now his sword is weak and his anger is fogged by too much success. No differently does a Caspian tigress among the slaughter of great bulls, when her madness, placated by immense blood, has weakened her jaws and, foul with thick gore, has disfigured her stripes, look over her deeds and is sad that her hunger fails her: thus conquered the augur wanders through the Aonian slaughter... (x.286–93)

Thiodamas' anger — the source of his energy and the signifier of his madness — flags after and because of an excessive initial output. Although the sleeping bodies of the Thebans provide sufficient material for slaughter, the prophet's desire to continue operating at the same high energy level is not matched by his own enervated resources. Likewise in the simile, the tigress' energy does not match her desire. Her fury has been abated physically but not mentally. She gets no satisfaction from the satisfaction of hunger. Thiodamas, by contrast, is unable to be satisfied in the first place. Like the tigress, Thiodamas' madness drives him to slaughter, but unlike the tigress, whose goal is the devouring of her victims, for Thiodamas the slaughtering is the end in itself (as it is for all human beings, with the exception of Tydeus). While the tigress looks over the slaughter she has accomplished, Thiodamas looks over the slaughter he could accomplish. When the tigress gluts herself on her prey, her fury decreases, but Thiodamas' actions only increase the demands of his fury, while decreasing his ability to meet those demands.

In both similes and in the actions corresponding to them, the same elements appear: an extreme amount of energy, the subsequent dissipation of that energy, and final stagnation or destruction. These elements form a pattern of action which is manifested repeatedly throughout the poem. Also, significantly, in both examples the objects of the similes display an extreme amount not simply of energy, but of madness. Excessive energy and madness are closely related concepts in the *Thebaid*, so closely related that they are, in fact, inseparable. The pattern of action is, in its essence, a pattern of madness.[10]

The figure of Tydeus provides a good example of how this pattern can be traced from excessiveness to destruction through the career of an individual in the poem.[11] Tydeus is a man of extreme emotions, and is characterized, as might be expected of someone called *immodicus irae* (I.41), by a rashness of temper. Tydeus first appears in the action of the *Thebaid* at I.401ff. when, seeking temporary shelter beneath the roof of Adrastus' palace during a storm, he encounters another exile, Polynices. Neither is able to endure the other's presence, and their rage (*rabiem cruentam* (408)) swiftly escalates, culminating in physical combat: 'mox ut iactis sermonibus irae / intumuere satis, tum uero erectus uterque / exertare umeros nudamque lacessere pugnam' (411–13). They are on the point of drawing swords ('forsan et accinctos lateri — sic ira ferebat — / nudassent enses...' (428–9)) when the old king intervenes, demanding in his first words 'quae causa furoris...?' (438). But Tydeus' and Polynices' fury, rapidly defused by Adrastus and forgotten in their subsequent close friendship, has no cause.[12] An excessive amount of frenzied energy is produced only to be dissipated in the empty air. Literally and figuratively, Tydeus' and Polynices' initial conflict is an overblown fight over nothing, but it is not completely without purpose, since it illustrates the profound consequences of such excessiveness by being a moment which could have ended the poem before it started — and here in passing it might be noted that the larger, poem-motivating conflict of Polynices and Eteocles is described early on by Statius with similar overtones: 'loca dira arcesque nefandae / suffecere odio, furiisque immanibus emptum / Oedipodae sedisse loco' (I.162–4).

Tydeus, then, is notable from the start for his immoderate anger. Seneca observed of anger 'nulla celerior ad insaniam uia est' (*De ira* II.36.5), and no individual in the *Thebaid* exemplifies this aphorism more vividly than Tydeus, whose propensity for anger and whose

[10] This pattern suggests the sexual pattern of excitement, orgasm, and detumescence, an idea which perhaps gains added significance when considered in the light of the importance of sexuality in Theban madness (on which see Hershkowitz, op. cit. (n. 5)). I have not tried in this paper to compare Statius' pattern of madness with the use of madness made by the other epicists, or, more generally, to compare it with the ancient cultural discourse of madness and psychological disorder. Both the other epic poets' (as well as Statius') treatment of madness and the wider cultural aspects of their treatments are the subject of my D. Phil dissertation, *Madness in Greek and Latin Epic*.

[11] On Tydeus in the *Thebaid* see e.g. Vessey (1973), op. cit. (n. 2), 141–52, 283–94, Vessey (1986), op. cit. (n. 2), 2984–8, Henderson (1993), op. cit. (n. 2), 176–9.

[12] Except chance: 'hic uero ambobus rabiem fortuna cruentam / adtulit' (408–9).

quickness to act on it lead inexorably to the pattern of madness, and ultimately — but not immediately — to his self-inflicted destruction.

In Book II, following Tydeus' and Polynices' marriages to Adrastus' two daughters, it is decided that an envoy must be sent to Eteocles requesting the exchange of the Theban throne with Polynices. At 370ff. Tydeus volunteers for this mission and goes to Thebes, where he demands Polynices' rightful accession, but Eteocles rejects his request, and Tydeus storms off from Thebes hurling threats. Angered, Eteocles sends out fifty men to ambush Tydeus (481ff.), but the ambush fails. Tydeus not only defends himself but manages to kill forty nine of his attackers, once again displaying his inclination for extreme / excessive behaviour. One man fighting an army is, of course, an epic topos, the most important antecedent here being Turnus' exploits at the end of *Aeneid* IX.[13] After his lone success in the Trojan camp, Turnus is suddenly abandoned by Juno and, with her, his strength:

> ergo nec clipeo iuuenis subsistere tantum
> nec dextra ualet, iniectis sic undique telis
> obruitur. strepit adsiduo caua tempora circum
> tinnitu galea et saxis aera fatiscunt
> discussaeque iubae capiti nec sufficit umbo
> ictibus; ingeminant hastis et Troes et ipse
> fulmineus Mnestheus. tum toto corpore sudor
> liquitur et piceum (nec respirare potestas)
> flumen agit, fessos quatit aeger anhelitus artus.

> Then the young man is not able to stand firm with his shield or right hand; from all sides he is crushed by the thrown missiles. Continuously his helmet clangs around his hollow temples, its bronze fatigued by rocks and its crest shaken from his head, nor can the boss of his shield stand up to the blows. The Trojans and lightning-like Mnestheus himself redouble their attack with their spears. Then sweat pours from his whole body in a black stream, nor is he able to breathe, and sick panting shakes his weary limbs. (*Aen.* IX.806–14)

Far out-numbered, Turnus narrowly escapes the camp with his life. Tydeus has defeated nearly all his opponents, but his energy, like Turnus', dwindles at the very moment when he appears to be at the height of his strength and fury. He has just declared that his attackers, accustomed to the unwarlike Bacchic orgies of Thebes, are now faced with real war and with madness far more dangerous than Bacchic frenzy ('hic aliae caedes, alius furor' (667)), but as he finishes his vaunt by boasting that his attackers are cowards and too few, suddenly:

> ast tamen illi
> membra negant, lassusque ferit praecordia sanguis.
> iam sublata manus cassos defertur in ictus,
> tardatique gradus, clipeum nec sustinet umbo
> mutatum spoliis, gelidus cadit imber anhelo
> pectore, tum crines ardentiaque ora cruentis
> roribus et taetra morientum aspargine manant:
> ut leo, qui campis longe custode fugato
> Massylas depastus oues, ubi sanguine multo
> luxuriata fames ceruixque et tabe grauatae
> consedere iubae, mediis in caedibus adstat
> aeger, hians uictusque cibis; nec iam amplius irae
> crudescunt: tantum uacuis ferit aera malis
> molliaque eiecta delambit uellera lingua.

> . . .then his limbs fail him, and his weary blood strikes his heart. Now his raised hand is brought down in empty blows, his steps are slowed, nor can the boss sustain the shield, changed by its spoils; a cold stream of sweat falls from his panting chest; his hair and burning face drip with the gory spray and foul spattering of the dying. Just so a lion, who has gorged himself on Massylian sheep with their shepherd driven far from the field, when his hunger is indulged with much blood and his neck and mane sink, weighed down by gore, stands in the middle of the slaughter, sick, gaping, and

[13] cf. also Scaeva's battle against Pompey's forces in the sixth book of Lucan's *Bellum Ciuile*.

conquered by his feasting; no longer is his anger fierce; he does no more than strike at the air with his empty jaws and lick the soft wool with his projecting tongue. (II.668–81)

Following the general pattern of actions in the *Thebaid*, after an initial period of excess, enervation follows, as Tydeus experiences a discrepancy between his desire to fight and his resources which would enable him to do so. It is worth noting how Tydeus' own achievements hasten this outcome: not only has he exhausted his body by fighting, but he is also impeded in his movements by the destruction he has wrought, by corpses and enemy spears. This is reinforced by the image of post-carnage exhaustion in the simile: the lion, who has sated his hunger immoderately (*luxuriata fames*), now stands among the slaughter, sickened and defeated by it (*aeger, hians uictusque cibis*). Thus the next stage of the poem's pattern of action sets in, that of stagnation, the complete loss of energy, and the inability to act. For human beings, this state frequently results in death, but in the episode under discussion, something occurs which prevents this final outcome.

Tydeus enjoys the favour of the goddess Pallas. When (at 682ff.), exhausted though he is, he audaciously resolves to march against Thebes itself — a move which doubtless would have led to his death — the goddess intervenes, telling him to set a limit to his actions (*pone modum* (687) — recalling Tydeus' initial epithet *immodicus*) and to return to Argos. Tydeus takes her advice, and after dispatching the sole survivor as a messenger to Thebes, and dedicating the spoils of victory to his patroness, he returns to Argos. Pallas' appearance here, or to be more accurate, her lack of appearance,[14] can be read as an allegorical representation of the onset of reason:[15] Tydeus, who has been raging in his madness, comes to his senses. By restoring a level head to the furious hero and preventing a self-dooming action, Pallas (or reason, or, better, both) is able to alter the pattern of action/madness for Tydeus and prevent its final outcome — this time.

In Book VIII, the war between Thebes and Argos is in full swing, with one of the Magnificent Seven down (Amphiaraus), five to go (all but Adrastus), and Tydeus on screen for his *aristeia* and death. Following the disruption of Amphiaraus' earth-shattering disappearance, the fighting has broken out again in earnest, with each side boasting a strong — and frenzied — hero:

Danaos Cadmeius Haemon
sternit agitque, furens sequitur Tyria agmina Tydeus;
Pallas huic praesens, illum Tirynthius inplet.
qualiter hiberni summis duo montibus amnes
franguntur geminaque cadunt in plana ruina:
contendisse putes, uter arua arbustaque tollat
altius aut superet pontes; ecce una receptas
confundit iam uallis aquas; sibi quisque superbus
ire cupit, pontoque negant descendere mixti.

Cadmeian Haemon strews and drives forward the Danai; raging Tydeus pursues the Tyrian ranks; Pallas is present for this one, the Tirynthian fills that one. So two wintery rivers burst down from the high mountains and fall on the plain in twin ruin: you would think they were contending which of the two could lift the fields and trees higher or overwhelm the bridges more deeply; look, now one valley mixes the received waters: each, proud, wishes to go on for itself, and they refuse to descend combined to the sea. (VIII.456–65)

In this simile the emphasis is on the equal destructive forces of the two flooding rivers, reflecting the balanced destruction being wrought by the two divinely-inspired warriors.[16] But the final portion of the simile (463–5), in addition to anticipating the imminent confrontation between the warriors, neither of whom seems likely to yield, also contains the idea of enervation. Like the avalanche in the first simile discussed above, the flooding rivers here are at last contained together in a valley, a low topographical point from which they cannot, and will

[14] On Pallas' unexpected intervention see Feeney, op. cit. (n. 2), 365–7.

[15] For discussions of allegory in the *Thebaid* see C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (1936), 48–56, Vessey (1973), op. cit. (n. 2), 75–6 and 86–7, Feeney, op. cit. (n. 2), 364–91.

[16] On Haemon and Tydeus see Vessey (1973), op. cit. (n. 2), 226, 288–9.

not escape (*negant descendere mixti*). All the extreme energy which characterized their destructive, seemingly competitive, onrush over the plain has now come to nothing: excess has resulted in stagnation (the rivers, trapped in a hollow, no longer flow) and, in a sense, in self-destruction (the rivers' individual identities are lost by their forced mingling). The implication is that the extreme energy being produced by Haemon and Tydeus in their destructive onslaughts will ultimately result in nothing more than their own stagnation or destruction.

As it happens, the confrontation between Haemon and Tydeus itself comes to nothing. The patron deities of the warriors meet, and Hercules, in deference to Pallas and the assistance she lent him when he was mortal, bows out, abandoning his hero. Haemon feels the god's absence ('sensit abisse deum' (519)) and the strength, which had been a product of his possession by Hercules, weakens rapidly ('tunc magis atque magis uires animusque recedunt' (521)). Enervated, he retreats (522ff.), and only escapes sure death from Tydeus' spear by Pallas' intervention for the sake of her half-brother. The two warriors at equal extreme strength, like the two rivers in the simile, could not have met with any outcome, but this situation has not occurred. Nevertheless, the extra ideas of stagnation and self-destruction in the simile still come into play, stagnation in the case of Haemon's retreat (in that he is unable, at this point, to continue fighting), and self-destruction in the case of Tydeus' subsequent *aristeia* and its consequences.

As *Thebaid* VIII nears its conclusion, Tydeus is dominating the battle. At 666–71, he taunts the fleeing enemy with a reminder of his past achievements ('ille ego inexpletis solus qui caedibus hausi / quinquaginta animas'), regrets that he did not march on Thebes that night ('quam pudet Inachias contentum abiisse Mycenas'), and claims, again, that there are too few challengers for him in this battle ('hinc super Thebis?'). By these references to the *monomachia* of Book II, it becomes apparent that the same excessiveness and madness that took hold of Tydeus there takes hold of him in Book VIII. It should not be surprising, then, to find the same kind of enervation which resulted from his actions on that fateful night becoming a factor now as he moves violently through the Theban ranks:

> et iam corporibus sese spoliisque cadentum
> clauserat; unum acies circum consumitur, unum
> omnia tela uouent: summis haec ossibus haerent,
> pars frustrata cadunt, partem Tritonia uellit,
> multa rigent clipeo. densis iam consitus hastis
> ferratum quatit umbo nemus, tergoque fatiscit
> atque umeris gentilis aper; nusquam ardua coni
> gloria, quique apicem toruae Gradiuus habebat
> cassidis, haut laetum domino ruit omen: inusta
> temporibus nuda aera sedent, circumque sonori
> uertice percusso uoluuntur in arma molares.
> iam cruor in galea, iam saucia proluit ater
> pectora permixtus sudore et sanguine torrens.
> respicit hortantes socios et Pallada fidam,
> longius opposita celantem lumina parma:
> ibat enim magnum lacrimis inflectere patrem.

> And now he had enclosed himself in the bodies and spoils of the fallen men. The battleline is consumed around one man, all the weapons devote themselves to the one; some cling deep in his bones, some, failing, fall, some Tritonia plucks out, many stand rigid on his shield. The boss, now thickly covered with spears, shakes its iron grove, and his native boarskin splits open on his back and shoulders. The lofty glory of his crest is gone, and the Gradivus that held the peak of the helmet tumbles down, hardly a good omen to its master. The naked bronze sits burned in on his temples, and rocks noisily strike his head and roll onto his armour. Now there is gore in his helmet, now a black stream mixed with sweat and blood flows over his wounded chest. He looks back at his encouraging comrades and at faithful Pallas, who, far off, hides her eyes behind her shield: even then she was leaving to bend her great father with her tears. (VIII.700–15)

During the ambush Tydeus, in spite of — or rather, because of — his extreme energy did eventually fatigue, but only after the completion of his incredible feat. In the battle, no such

completion is possible. The numbers he faced in Book II were finite, but in Book VIII they are seemingly infinite: Tydeus keeps on killing but the Thebans keep on coming. The spears and gore of his fifty would-be assassins were a hindrance to Tydeus, but during the battle this kind of hindrance becomes fatal. The destruction he causes becomes, in effect, self-destructive as he is contained by the bodies and spoils of the men he has slaughtered. He becomes a fixed target for the full firepower of the enemy, and as he grows exhausted he can no longer adequately defend himself (or be defended by his *socii*, who cannot reach him but can only encourage him). The spears which were lodged only in his shield in Book II are now lodged in his limbs, and the gore of his ambush attackers that covered his face is replaced by his own blood pouring forth from his head and chest. It soon becomes apparent to Pallas that Tydeus the mortal warrior is a lost cause, and she hurries off to Jupiter to seek immortality for her hero even before his death is completely assured.

The moment Pallas leaves the fatal blow is dealt to Tydeus by Melanippus. He in turn is killed by Tydeus, who hurls a spear at him 'totis animae. . .reliquiis' (725–6). Dying but still fired by the desire to fight, Tydeus is dragged off the battle-field by his comrades. In his fury he calls for the head of his killer, which is duly brought to him, and as he gazes on it contentedly the reader is now told what has long been obvious, that he is completely mad: 'amens laetitiaque iraque' (751–2). On the night of the foiled ambush Pallas was able to restore reason to the insane Tydeus, but now, in her absence, the Fury Tisiphone steps in (at 757) and prompts Tydeus to even greater heights of insanity, the cannibalism which clinches his demise. Or, to look at it in a more allegorical vein, Tydeus was able to forestall (by the surfacing of his suppressed reason) but not escape (by his final submission to his insanity) the *Thebaid*'s inherent pattern of madness which has shaped his career and which culminates in his passive but self-inflicted destruction. Pallas, returning to the battlefield with the gift of immortality having been granted for her favourite, is disgusted by the sight of Tydeus devouring Melanippus' brains, and flees, taking Tydeus' apotheosis with her. The *rabiem cruentam* which marked his entrance into the poem (I.408) also marks his exit ('rabies. . .cruenti / Tydeos' (IX.I–2)) as Tydeus dies, doomed to be renowned not for immortality but for immorality.

Far from being confined to single moments and individual figures in the poem, the pattern of madness can be detected in larger scale processes and events, in which it both reflects and shapes the composition of the universe of the *Thebaid*. The action of the epic begins with Oedipus praying to Tisiphone[17] to avenge his sons' maltreatment of him. Tisiphone immediately responds to Oedipus' plea, and her response occasions a vivid description of her horrifying appearance and infernal powers (I.88–113): she has snake-hair, fiery eyes, festering skin, famine-, disease-, and death-causing exhalations, and in her hands, shaking with anger, she brandishes a flaming torch and a whip made from a live snake; the shades flee before her as she moves through the Underworld, and the upper world, when she enters it, feels her presence. The scene is set for the Fury to inflame Polynices and Eteocles with madness in as spectacular a manner as that in which Tisiphone's mythological and intertextual sister Allecto drove Turnus mad in *Aeneid* VII after a similar, if slightly lower key, build-up. But what happens is something quite different. After the massive preparation of Tisiphone the infernal avenger, the actual maddening of the brothers occurs rather off-handedly (at 123ff.). Absent are the shattering pyrotechnics of Turnus' possession: the Theban brothers are driven mad easily, as *furor* slips subtly into their spirits, along with hatred, fear, ambition, and discord. The ease of the brothers' possession provides an anticlimax to the episode, and makes the development of the figure of Tisiphone seem too horrifying for the situation, gratuitous: much less would have driven Oedipus' sons mad.

The action of the poem, then, begins with a burst of excess energy, only to have that energy undercut, almost wasted, by an anticlimax. Tisiphone thus establishes and shapes the poem's pattern of madness as she initiates and guides the *Thebaid*'s action. Moreover, her continuing presence in the poem after the completion of her allotted task is gratuitous, when compared to the *Aeneid*: following the paradigm of Allecto, Tisiphone should have retired gracefully to the Underworld after finishing her work, but she does not. Allecto sets the stage

[17] On Tisiphone in the *Thebaid* see e.g. Vessey (1973), op. cit. (n. 2), 75–6, 161–4, Venini, op. cit. (n. 2), ad XI.58, Feeney, op. cit. (n. 2), 377–8, 386–9, Hardie, op. cit. (n. 4), 76–80.

on which others (Juno, but also, ultimately, Jupiter) provide structure: in contrast, Tisiphone provides structure by setting the stage and staying on it. That she is the dominant motivating force of the action serves to reinforce the excessiveness inherent in her character and invested, in large part through her character, in the poem.

Tisiphone can remain a major figure, while Allecto could not, because Allecto was subject to the control of Juno, but there is no equivalent control on Tisiphone,[18] a point vividly made in the first analogy in the poem, when Tisiphone leaps up in response to Oedipus' prayer 'ilicet igne Iouis lapsisque citatior astris' (I.92). The fact that Jupiter's lightning is singled out in the comparison is significant, if bluntly so. Jupiter's activity — or rather, inactivity — is set in apposition to Tisiphone's activity throughout the poem.[19] The point is made from the offset that in spite of Jupiter's function as the supreme exactor of justice, a role symbolized by lightning, the instrument of divine punishment, it is the Fury rather than the heavenly father who orchestrates the punishment of the Theban house, and it is the Fury to whom Oedipus addresses his prayer while querulously questioning Jupiter's inactivity: 'et uidet ista deorum / ignauus genitor?' (I.79–80).

When Jupiter does enter the action, it is in a completely gratuitous fashion.[20] At I.197ff., a great council of the gods is convened at his command, at which Jupiter announces his intention to punish the house of Cadmus and the Argive house of Perseus. He begins:

> terrarum delicta nec exsaturabile Diris
> ingenium mortale queror. quonam usque nocentum
> exigar in poenas? taedet saeuire corusco
> fulmine, iam pridem Cyclopum operosa fatiscunt
> bracchia et Aeoliis desunt incudibus ignes.

> I complain of the offences of the earth and of the mortal mind not capable of being satiated by Dirae. How much time must I waste punishing evil men? I am tired of raging with gleaming lightning, and for a long time now the busy arms of the Cyclopes grow weary and the fires fail the Aeolian anvils. (I.214–18)

Jupiter claims that he is repeatedly forced to act because of the insatiable excessiveness of mortal misbehaviour. Interestingly, his complaint is couched in terms of enervation, and specifically enervation which is associated with madness. Jupiter is tired of raging with his thunderbolt, although how effective he is in raging with his thunderbolt has already been thrown into question. Moreover, it is striking that Jupiter's activity is presented — by Jupiter himself — with the word *saeuire*, meaning 'to rage' but having an association with the fury of madness.[21] Although his connection with madness is not as intimate or explicit as Tisiphone's, Jupiter nevertheless uses it to achieve his aims, making it a fundamental companion of the laws of the universe which it is his role to ensure. In the passage, not only is Jupiter weary but his thunderbolt factory is in a state of exhaustion: the Cyclopes' arms are tired and the forge fires have receded. The use of *fatiscere*, 'to be enervated', is particularly notable, since the word is generally used in the poem in madness-related contexts, following periods of excess.[22] One example comes from a passage discussed above: the self-destructive force of Tydeus' madness is reflected in the fatigue of his boarskin, a simultaneous symbol of his manliness, beastliness, and (hearkening back to Hercules' lionskin) potential godliness, as it splits across his back: 'tergoque fatiscit / atque umeris gentilis aper' (VIII.705–6).

After making his initial complaints, Jupiter declares that he will now exact punishment (I.225), remarking 'quis funera Cadmi / nesciat et totiens excitam a sedibus imis / Eumenidum bellasse aciem...?' (227–9). The remark (unwittingly) answers in the positive both aspects of Oedipus' question 'uidet ista deorum / ignauus genitor?': yes, he has seen what goes on in Thebes, and yes, he has been *ignauus* — not only in the sense of 'indolent', apparently the

[18] Except Tisiphone herself (see below).

[19] On Jupiter and Tisiphone in the *Thebaid* see Feeney, op. cit (n. 2), 346–8.

[20] On Jupiter's entrance in the *Thebaid* see Vessey (1973), op. cit. (n. 2), 82–5, W. Schubert, *Jupiter in den Epen der Flavierzeit* (1984), 71–101 (*passim* on the role of Jupiter in the *Thebaid*), Ahl, op. cit. (n. 2), 2834–45, Feeney, op. cit. (n. 2), 354.

[21] cf. e.g. Vergil, *Aen.* IV.300ff.: '[Dido] saeuit inops animi totamque incensa per urbem / bacchatur...'.

[22] *fatiscere* can mean 'to break down' or have the more abstract meaning 'to exhaust, tire out' (see *TLL* VI.352.68 - 353.79): both ideas are present in Statius' uses cited above (and cf. *Aen.* IX.809 (quoted above)).

meaning of the outraged Oedipus referring to Jupiter's lack of response, but also in the sense of 'lacking physical energy', as Jupiter himself has indicated, due to enervation.[23] Jupiter's reference to fighting Furies here does not necessarily indicate that he has any awareness of Tisiphone's recent actions: in the same sentence he goes on to say that the stories of frenzied Bacchants and various crimes of divinities (including — or rather occluding — his own Theban misdemeanour, the death of Semele) are also well known (229–31). Jupiter brings up numerous sins occurring in the histories of Thebes and Argos, not simply those of the current generation, for the purpose of legitimating the actions he proposes to undertake. Oedipus, Jupiter claims, has atoned adequately for his sins by his self-blinding and reclusion, that is, by removing his sight from himself, and himself from Jupiter's sight: 'nec iam amplius aethere nostro / uescitur' (237–8).[24] Jupiter, however, does emphasize Polynices' and Eteocles' maltreatment of their father, since through the fulfilment of Oedipus' desire for vengeance against the brothers, he is able to punish the entire house.[25] But by heaping past and present reason on reason why he should punish Thebes and Argos, and by styling himself as Oedipus' avenger, Jupiter makes us increasingly aware that he has not actually done anything, that he has not punished what has happened in Thebes and Argos, but only that he finds these events distasteful. 'meruere tuae, meruere tenebrae / ultorem sperare Iouem' (240–1), Jupiter self-righteously declares, unaware that Tisiphone the ultimate *ultrix* — a function contained in the Fury's very name (τίσις)[26] — has already been set in action by Oedipus. Jupiter talks, but Tisiphone acts, or rather, has already acted (and more than once); Jupiter complains of enervation, Tisiphone, in a blast of excess energy, has already eagerly taken the road she knows and loves so well to Thebes and has got things going. When Jupiter orders Mercury to rouse Oedipus' father Laius from the Underworld to drive Eteocles mad, produce discord, and thereby provide *causae irarum* which will start the proper action of the poem which he himself will then guide ('certo reliqua ordine ducam' (302)), he is two hundred lines too late. Nevertheless Laius is duly roused (at II.89ff.) and, in another scene recalling the possession of Turnus by Allecto (such repetition in itself is excessive), drives the already mad Eteocles mad again (an excessive action). Jupiter notes that Eteocles already seems to desire a fracturing of the Theban revolving kingship system ('quod sponte cupit' (I.300)), but Jupiter's actions in hastening this fracture are not simply what might be described reductively as an overdetermination of human actions — they are an overdetermination of an overdetermination. Completely gratuitous, Jupiter's actions are indicative of the supreme deity's lack of supremacy over the universe and of his own inscription within the *Thebaid*'s pattern of action, in spite of his pretensions to transcendence of that pattern.

Jupiter's subjection to the overriding force of dissipation and stagnation becomes apparent at the start of Book VII.[27] Following the monumental, gratuitous delays of Books IV (beginning with a three-year gap before the mustering of the forces for the war and ending with an action-paralysing drought), V (the Lemnos narrative of Hypsipyle), and VI (the funeral games of the infant Opheltes), Book VII begins 'atque ea cunctantes Tyrii primordia belli / Iuppiter haud aequo respexit corde Pelasgos...'(1–2). The *primordia belli* proclaimed by Jupiter in Book III have come to nothing — the action is stalled in the same place it was four books ago, and the energy he unleashed has been dissipated by the inactivity (with respect to the impending war) of the human realm.[28] Jupiter's subsequent speech (VII.6–33) can be paraphrased, 'Who's running this poem? I am, so let's get moving!' The madness, death, and destruction which Jupiter so desires and has commanded has yet to materialize. Jupiter sends Mercury to rouse Mars to start the war, an action which repeats his action in Book I of sending Mercury to rouse Laius to start the war. This kind of multiple repetition is a symptom of excess

[23] *OLD* 'ignauus' 1 and 2; contrast *TLL* VII.1.55–66.

[24] Sophocles' Oedipus begs the chorus ὅπως τάχιστα πρὸς θεῶν ἔξω μέ που / καλύψατ' ... / ... ἔνθα μήποτ' εἰσόψεσθ' ἔτι (Sophocles, *OT* 1410–12), exactly the behaviour that Statius' Jupiter condones, but Statius' Oedipus, resentful that the gods have been overlooking him, forces them to see him by seeking help from the Underworld.

[25] This is an ironic justification for punishment since Jupiter gained power by maltreating his father who still, as Dis hints at VIII.42–4, potentially poses a threat to him.

[26] cf. Vergil's etymologizing 'ultrix...Tisiphone' (*Aen.* VI.570–1), repeated by Statius at VIII.758.

[27] On Jupiter's interventions in Books III and VII see Vessey (1973), op. cit. (n. 2), 85–7, Ahl, op. cit (n. 2), 2845–9.

[28] On delay in the *Thebaid* see Feeney, op. cit. (n. 2), 339; cf. Vessey (1973), op. cit. (n. 2), 66–7.

and is indicative of the wasteful dispersal of that excess.[29] Jupiter's energy is dissipating. He may think he is running the poem, but, as the beginning of Book VII shows, things have already slipped from his grasp (if, indeed, they were ever there) and are running away with him, an idea further reinforced by the fact that while Mars, yet again, follows Jupiter's orders by spreading panic and lust for battle (105ff.), it is Tisiphone's actions which finally get the war truly under way (by stirring up Polynices and Eteocles again at 466ff., and maddening two sacred Theban tigers at 564ff. to produce a parallel of Ascanius' shooting of the deer in *Aeneid* VII). Further evidence for this Jovian slippage appears at the end of Book X, when Jupiter seems at the height of his powers, blasting Capaneus with a thunderbolt as the human launches a Giant-like attack on the heavens. Capaneus' mad assault, though rooted in his own impiety and audacity, ultimately has an infernal impetus. When Amphiaraus descends alive into the Underworld at the start of Book VIII, Dis sees the disruption of his realm as an attack by the upper gods, and in order to retaliate, commands Tisiphone to cause a similar, Gigantomachy-like disruption of the heavens (VIII.75–9), as well as ordering the duel of the sons of Oedipus, Tydeus' cannibalism, and Creon's denial of burial for the Argive corpses. Jupiter's victory over Capaneus, then, and the control and power it represents, is undermined by the fact that Capaneus' assault was part of the programmatic scheme laid out by Jupiter's brother which guides, through Tisiphone, the majority of the action of the remainder of the poem.

Of Polynices' and Eteocles' duel Dis remarks 'iuuet ista ferum spectare Tonantem' (VIII.74), but seeing these things is exactly what Jupiter does not do. In Book XI, when Jupiter sees that the confrontation between Polynices and Eteocles is imminent, he completely relinquishes any claim to control he once made. He is unable to stop the impious duel, so in a move reminiscent of his satisfaction at the removal of sight from Oedipus and of Oedipus from his sight, Jupiter's solution to the atrocity is to remove it from his (and the other gods') sight:

> auferte oculos! absentibus ausint
> ista deis lateantque Iouem; sat funera mensae
> Tantaleae et sontes uidisse Lycaonis aras
> et festina polo ducentes astra Mycenas.

> Turn away your eyes! Let them dare these things with the gods absent and let them be hidden from Jupiter. It was enough to see the death of the Tantalean table and the guilty altars of Lycaon and Mycenae drawing on the swift stars in the vault of heaven. (XI.126–29)

With these words, which turn the sins cited as the reason for the gods to act into an excuse for the gods not to act, Jupiter withdraws from the poem.[30] He has been pushed into complete inactivity, into a state of stagnation, the great anticlimax sealing the poem's divine action. Unlike human beings, for whom stagnation is fatal, for Jupiter it is affordable, since in this situation he ultimately has nothing to lose which, it might be said, he has not lost already. Jupiter's gratuitous actions have got him nowhere; his excessive energy is wasted on nothing, because other forces (primarily, Tisiphone) have shaped events (and apparently would have done so without his intervention), and even if Jupiter's had been the guiding hand, he is unwilling or unable to cope with the unavoidable outcome of the events. His desire for action is not met by sufficient resources for dealing with that action. Jupiter's stagnation is a sign of his ultimate indifference towards humanity and of the lack of necessity on him or the rest of the gods to feel otherwise.

Tisiphone herself, though a boundless source of energy in the first ten books of the poem, experiences enervation and stagnation in Book XI. As she prepares the final fraternal conflict, she feels her own strength weakening:

[29] This sort of repetition is, of course, a traditional feature of epic, but it arguably takes on a new meaning within the context of the *Thebaid*. For wider aspects of the concept of repetition in epic see Hardie, op. cit. (n. 4), 14–18, D. Quint, *Epic and Empire* (1993), 50–96. On the repetition of the past as an important aspect of the Theban saga, see F. I. Zeitlin, 'Thebes: Theater of Self and Society in Athenian Drama,' in J. J. Winkler and F. I. Zeitlin (eds), *Nothing to Do with Dionysos? Athenian Drama in its Social Context* (1990), 130–67. On Statius' use of Theban repetition see Henderson (1991), op. cit. (n. 2), 41, Hardie, op. cit. (n. 4), 63.

[30] On Jupiter's withdrawal see Vessey (1973), op. cit. (n. 2), 162, Henderson (1991), op. cit. (n. 2), 59, Feeney, op. cit. (n. 2), 355–6.

iamque potens scelerum geminaeque exercita gentis
sanguine Tisiphone fraterna cludere quaerit
bella tuba†: nec se tanta in certamina fidit
sufficere, inferna comitem ni sede Megaeram
et consanguineos in proelia suscitet angues.

And now Tisiphone, having power over evil and weary of the blood of the twin races, seeks to end the war with the trumpets (?) of fraternal combat. But she does not trust her own strength to be sufficient for such a great contest unless she rouses as a companion Megaera from the infernal seat and her kindred snakes into battle. (XI.57–61)

Having summoned her sister, she reports all the deeds she has accomplished, and then:

sed iam — effabor enim — longo sudore fatiscunt
corda, soror, tardaeque manus; hebet infera caelo
taxus, et insuetos angues nimia astra soporant.
tu, cui totus adhuc furor exultantque recentes
Cocyti de fonte comae, da iungere uires.

But now — I shall confess it — my heart is wearied by its long labour, sister, and my hands are slow. The infernal yew is blunted by the air, and the too-strong stars stupefy my unaccustomed snakes. You, for whom madness is as yet whole and your hair exults fresh from the fountain of the Cocytus, join your strength to mine. (XI.92–6)

Tisiphone's frenzied activities in the upper world have exhausted her (note the use of *fatiscunt*), but unlike other figures enervated by excess, Tisiphone is able to recharge herself by the arrival of Megaera. Megaera's very presence is indicative of the over-the-top nature of the confrontation which is to follow. Fresh from the Cocytus river (where Tisiphone was at the opening of the poem) Megaera is filled to the brim with madness which, combined with Tisiphone's supply, will be used to drive the brothers to their fatal combat, but which also drives the Furies themselves.

Together Tisiphone and Megaera prepare and shape the coming climactic moment, the twin fratricide. But as the combat between brothers finally comes to fruition, the Furies' presence — and their madness — becomes superfluous:

nec iam opus est Furiis; tantum mirantur et adstant
laudentes, hominumque dolent plus posse furores.
fratris uterque furens cupit adfectatque cruorem
et nescit manare suum...

The Furies are no longer necessary. They only marvel and, praising, stand back, and are sad that the fury of men is able to be more than their own. Each brother, raging, desires and seeks the blood of the other, and does not know that his own flows... (XI.537–40)

The brothers' excessive behaviour becomes the check on the Furies. Tisiphone and Megaera do not participate in the remainder of the poem, not because, like Jupiter, they refuse to act, but because they have been too effective and have become redundant. In this way, the pattern of action and madness which Tisiphone initiated finally overtakes even her.

Not surprisingly — and in fact necessarily — the pattern of madness which is so pervasive within the poem, profoundly shapes the poetics of the *Thebaid* into a poetics of madness.[31] In the first simile discussed above, the pattern of extreme energy, enervation, and stagnation was

[31] For the relationship between madness and the motive force of a text see e.g. Hershkowitz, op. cit. (n. 5), Masters, op. cit. (n. 4), A. Schiesaro, 'Seneca's *Thyestes* and the morality of tragic *furor*,' in J. Elsner and J. Masters (eds), *Reflections of Nero: Culture, History and Representation* (1994), 196–210, Hardie, op. cit (n. 4), 57–87. This builds on the common use of madness terminology applied to poetic inspiration in antiquity, especially in relationship to epic (cf. Petronius 118: 'furentis animi uaticinatio'), a phenomenom often commented on in treatments of the subject, e.g. P. Murray, 'Poetic inspiration in early Greece', *JHS* 101 (1981), 87–100. In Statius this idea is most developed in the poet's invocation to the Muse preceding his account of Capaneus' mad assault on the heavens (X.827–36). On the passage, see Williams, op. cit. (n. 2), ad loc., Vessey (1973), op. cit. (n. 2), 222; cf. Schetter, op. cit. (n. 2), 19–21. On Statius' language of poetic inspiration cf. also H.-J. Van Dam (ed.), *Siluae Book II* (1984), ad II.7.1–4 and 76 ('docti furor arduus Lucreti').

encapsulated in the image of a collapsing mountainside. The simile described Amphiaraus' frenzied and doomed actions on the battlefield, but it can also be read as a description of Statius' own actions as a poet. In the programmatic preliminaries of the *Thebaid*, Statius endeavours to set a limit for his subject matter by defining a boundary for the work — 'limes mihi carminis esto / Oedipodae confusa domus' (I.16–17) — but like the widespread destruction caused by the avalanche, his epic spreads in all directions, *limite non uno*. The avalanche carries away with it *arua uirosque*, resounding with the paradigmatic expression of epic subjects, *arma uirumque*, which are swept by Statius beyond the *limes* of Vergil, and are being swept, by Statius' poetic activity, beyond the epic *limes* to which Statius attempts to adhere.[32] The difficult task of writing such an expansive and expanding epic, however, is, in a sense, as doomed to dissipation as the rampaging prophet or the collapsing mountainside. The huge poetic enterprise necessary for the composition of an epic like the *Thebaid* (especially one continually aiming towards, and at the same time trying to avoid, the precedents of the *Aeneid* and many other epic antecedents) will, due to its own extremity, exhaust itself. Thus at the conclusion of Book XII, as the previously-denied funerals for the Argives are about to begin, the poet of the *Thebaid* can go no further:

> non ego, centena si quis mea pectora laxet
> uoce deus, tot busta simul uulgique ducumque,
> tot pariter gemitus dignis conatibus aequem...
>
> uix nouus ista furor ueniensque inplesset Apollo,
> et mea iam longo meruit ratis aequore portum.

Not if some god opened my breast with a hundred-fold voice could I equal in worthy strains such a funeral of the common men and the leaders alike, such united lamentation... Scarcely could a new madness and Apollo being present perform this task, and already my ship, with its long sea-faring, has merited a port. (XII.797–99; 808–9)

The projected conclusion of the poem has been reached, but the closure is in many ways imposed upon rather than by the poet. *Furor* and the furious poetics necessary to write about it, which have driven the *Thebaid,* have now exhausted it and destroyed the potential for any more progress. Even new divine inspiration would be insufficient to re-energize the poet and the poem (an idea reinforced by the recollection of the gods' withdrawal from the action). In the *Thebaid*'s final discrepancy between desire and resources, the poet enters a state of stagnation, unable to provide a more fulfilling — or perhaps more suitable — conclusion.

It might be worthwhile to examine finally two similes which appear late in Book XII. Viewed as a pair, these similes provide a succinct expression of the interrelationship between energy and madness. In the first simile, Theseus has been angered by the plight of the Argive widows whose husbands have been denied burial by the new Theban ruler, Creon. Theseus sets off to Thebes:

> qualis Hyperboreos ubi nubilus institit axes
> Iuppiter et prima tremefecit sidera bruma,
> rumpitur Aeolia et longam indignata quietem
> tollit hiemps animos uentosaque sibilat Arctos;
> tunc montes undaeque fremunt, tunc proelia caecis
> nubibus et tonitrus insanaque fulmina gaudent.

Just as when cloud-bringing Jupiter sets foot on the Hyperborean pole and makes the stars tremble with the first frost, Aeolia is broken and winter, indignant at the long peace, rouses its anger and windy Arctos hisses; then the mountains and the waves roar, then there is battle among the blind clouds and thunder and insane lightning rejoice. (XII.650–5)

Theseus (the restorer of order) is being compared to Jupiter (the establisher of cosmic order), and the powerful image of the storm is analogous to Theseus' powerful march on Thebes. The

[32] Perhaps *longaeua robora* refers to older, venerable poetry; cf. Quintilian: 'Ennium sicut sacros uestustate lucos adoremus, in quibus grandia et antiqua robora iam non tantum habent speciem quantum religionem' (X.1.88).

development of the storm is also reflective of the development of madness and self-reflective of the excessive poetics necessary to illustrate it. The thunder and lightning bursts out, shattering peace and quiet, just as madness bursts into the poem through the figure of Tisiphone (who is compared to lightning at I.92). As the storm's force increases, it engulfs everything ('tunc montes undaeque fremunt') and rages, its excessive energy being characterized by blind violence and joyous insanity; similarly, Tisiphone's madness does not remain exclusive to Polynices and Eteocles, but engulfs everyone and everything in the poem, including the poem itself.

The second simile occurs when Theseus' army takes the field for battle; the war-weary Thebans who move to face them are no match for the Athenians.

> iam nec Cecropiis idem ductoribus ardor,
> languescuntque minae et uirtus secura residit:
> uentorum uelut ira minor, nisi silua furentes
> inpedit, insanique tacent sine litore fluctus.

> No longer is there the same fire in the Cecropian leaders, and their threats wane and their confident valour subsides: just so the anger of winds is less, if a forest does not impede the raging breezes, and raging waves grow quiet without a shore. (XII.726–9)

Whereas the first simile provided, in addition to an illustration of Theseus' strength, a picture of the development of madness, this simile provides, in addition to illustrating the diminution of the Athenian army when faced with an unworthy opponent (recalling Thiodamas' diminished anger when attacking sleeping enemies), a picture of the dissipation of madness, explicitly applying its vocabulary (*ira*, *furentes*, *insani*) to random forces of nature. When violent winds or waves meet no resistance, their vigour lessens; so when the energy of madness is loosed against nothing, it wanes, its source enervated by the gratuitous expenditure of energy. The same thing is happening in poetic terms as the *Thebaid* winds down to a close: its frenzy-fuelled excessiveness cannot be sustained but instead diminishes and finally disappears. The epic plunged in madness, seemingly *sine limite*, will soon, like the waves raging *sine litore*, grow quiet.

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