

# STATIUS' *THEBAID* AND THE REALIZATION OF ROMAN MANHOOD

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Into a thousand parts divide one man,  
And make imaginary puissance.  
(Shakespeare, *Henry V* Prol. 24–25)

Death sits so naturally on you! Death becomes the Mannons! You were always like the statue of an eminent dead man—sitting on a chair in a park or straddling a horse in a town square—looking over the head of life without a sign of recognition—cutting it dead for the impropriety of living!

... Before I'd gotten back I had to kill another in the same way. It was like murdering the same man twice. I had a queer feeling that war meant murdering the same man over and over, and that in the end I would discover the man was myself! Their faces keep coming back in dreams—and they change to Father's face—or to mine—what does that mean, Vinnie?

... Do you remember me telling you how the faces of the men I killed came back and changed to Father's face and finally became my own? (*He smiles grimly.*) He looks like me, too! Maybe I've committed suicide!

(O'Neill, *Mourning Becomes Electra: The Hunted*, 345; 347; 366)

THE *THEBAID* OF STATIUS tells a story of heroes in conflict set in mythical times. Reading this epic poem that Statius explicitly styles at 12.816–817 a successor to the exemplary *Aeneid*,<sup>1</sup> the reader naturally thinks of the costs and benefits of keeping men in arms. As such questions do not remain academic but have contemporary force in the case of the *Aeneid*, so it is with the *Thebaid*. It is undeniable that the heroic man under arms constituted an ideal of Roman manhood at all times, literally in the Republic and metaphorically in the principate. A reader need only recall Quintilian's suggestion to the advocate that he not speak precipitously but rather wait, as still and intent as Ulysses, who would then pour forth a storm of eloquence (*Inst.* 11.3.157–158). The numerous, lovingly rehearsed versions of republican soldier-leaders in late republican and early

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<sup>1</sup>Unless otherwise designated, all references are to Statius' *Thebaid*. The text, altered slightly in matters of punctuation and capitalization, is Klotz and Klinnert 1973 (Teubner). All translations are my own unless otherwise credited.

imperial literature<sup>2</sup> likewise attest to the enduring importance of the military man to the realization of Roman manhood.<sup>3</sup> It is not only the content of the *Thebaid* and its relation to prior and contemporary texts, however, that will direct a reader of this poem to think of Roman manhood. As part of the curriculum for young elite males and performed in *recitationes*, the *Thebaid* played a part in institutions inflected by strongly-marked gender expectations.<sup>4</sup> It is reasonable to suppose that the effect of the *Thebaid* in these spaces would have been complex; although formative of manhood through providing exemplary heroes as models, this epic nonetheless would have posed questions about Flavian manhood's ultimate manliness.

In the late first century CE, manhood was not something demonstrated with heroic extroversion. Flavian men would not serve in the army and they surely lacked the opportunities for combat (rhetorical and otherwise) that were available to the "lucky" Pompey, Caesar, or Cicero.<sup>5</sup> Construction of manhood in this time was instead a matter of inter-personal competition and self-cultivation that, while metaphorized as martial and not completely lacking in extroverted aspects, was for the most part an interior affair. In a discussion of Quintilian's approach to the training of the orator's body, Erik Gunderson describes a competitive milieu wherein the *vir* "brandish[ing] his body in the social field" asserted his social worthiness "via constant aggression" (2000: 73, 84). And that aggression was not only directed at others when studying rhetoric (which, in Rome, meant studying to become a man),<sup>6</sup> the Roman *vir* played the soldier, as it were, in regard to his own body as he endeavored to accommodate himself to the ideals of manhood (Gunderson 2000: 73; cf. Connolly 1998):

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Livy *passim*; Sil. *Pun.* 6.62–551 and *passim*; Hor. *Carm.* 3.5; Cic. *Off.* 1.39, 3.99–115.

<sup>3</sup> For the soldier as a model for Roman manhood, see, for example, Quint. *Inst.* 1.11.18 or 11.3.26–27; see, too, Gunderson 2000: 60, 80 and Gleason 1995: 120.

<sup>4</sup> Statius mentions that the *Thebaid* was already a school text at 12.815. For discussion of epic's presence in the schools and the importance of epic to masculine acculturation, see Keith 2000: 8–18; Gunderson 2000: 35–41; and Ripoll 1998: 1–2. For the presence of epic at *recitationes* in the early empire and connections between the recitation of epic and Roman manhood, see the fine discussion of Donka Markus (2000).

<sup>5</sup> Carlin Barton comments (2001: 40): "As the initiatory function of warfare and public speaking that had provided a sharp clear test of manhood in the Republic became attenuated (especially for the elite) in the Empire, manhood came to require of males a more violent and constant psychological and emotional rejection of femininity. Without a strenuous and decisive initiatory ordeal, women would have to be more other than same." I draw the reader's attention to the increasing solipsism that marks manhood here. Barton's comments about the ever-increasing need to draw a sharp boundary between men and women are well taken too, although this particular boundary will not play a pronounced role in the analyses to come in this paper. I will explore the way the dynamic of the contest inflects and provides the means to symbolize both self-cultivation and ostensibly civilized behavior of *vir*i toward one another.

<sup>6</sup> For discussions of the fundamental connections between rhetorical training and the making of men out of boys, see Richlin 1997; Gunderson 2000; and Gleason 1995.

The student has been taught to look at the body for the indecorous and the illegitimate, to force the body to answer up in all of its details and divisions to the demand to not be inappropriate. This establishes a relationship to knowledge that produces a specific relationship to one's own body. And this relationship is a suspicious and hostile one.

Over a century into the principate, then, the battles that will define manhood turn on questions of social worthiness and on the ability to discover and eradicate personal deviance. An air of unreality hangs over the proceedings as a Flavian man can be "an" Odysseus or "like" a soldier; there will ever be a shortfall and lack of authenticity. Maintaining multiple images of sovereign warriors in its verses and, on the basis of the glorious freedom of these warriors to demonstrate their manhood, calling to mind the relatively untrammelled pre-principate manhood, the *Thebaid* was potentially available to be read as calling into question the masculinity of contemporary Roman men. The *Thebaid* functioned both as a treasure house of exemplars and as a provocation.

In arguments to come I will draw connections between the redirected and sublimated Flavian manhood and the extroverted heroic manhood on display in Statius' epic. The Roman man reading or hearing this poem could not have taken the aggressive displays therein as literally applicable to himself and yet he could not have dismissed them either; he would have understood them, I argue, as somehow metaphoric of his efforts to make himself a *vir*. To speak in greater detail, I will first show how the progress of Amphiaraus from a seer resisting the war to a warrior in an *aristeia* can be read as an allegory of the realization of Roman manhood. I look in particular at the conflict between pacific and martial impulses on display in Amphiaraus' transformation. Second, I will detail how the reader of the poem can see in Amphiaraus a representation of the poet.<sup>7</sup> Such a demonstration is worthwhile to my argument because it gives the allegory of manhood in the poem a correlate in the real world outside the poem. Third, I will discuss how, at the beginning of Book 8, the reader is able to discern not only the continuing presence of the poet in Amphiaraus but also his presence in Pluto,<sup>8</sup> as character and god confront one another. The conclusion that I draw from the

<sup>7</sup> The reader can correlate the reluctance of Amphiaraus to fight with the wish offered in the poet's voice that the war be avoided (6.513–517). This reluctance finds another counterpart in the poet's curse of both the brothers and the war at 11.574–579. Indeed, John Henderson (1991: 69) has sensibly called Amphiaraus a "hypostasis" of the poet (cf. Delarue 2000: 338–339 and Pagán 2000: 443–444). I should add here that I hardly innovate when I associate an epic poet with his heroic characters. Homer does so in the *Iliad* at 9.186–191, making Achilles into a singer of the heroes' glories (189: αἶδε δ' ἄρα κλέα ἀνδρῶν). For discussion of coincidence of character and poet in Homer, see Goldhill 1991: 56–68; and for discussion down through the Flavian epics, see Hardie 1993: 99–116.

<sup>8</sup> Sylvie Franchet d'Espèrey (1999: 202, 335–336) and François Ripoll (1998: 347) note that a reader may wish to associate the poet with Jove. The words and attitude of Jove (just as he is about to incinerate Capaneus) can profitably be seen as representing the poet's attitude toward this character (10.907–910). This perceived coincidence between the poet and Jove strengthens the force of the arguments I will make below; Statius has a fondness for expressing himself through his gods.

presence of the poet in both Amphiaraus and Pluto at the same time is that this simultaneity makes the confrontation between seer and god legible as a dynamic interior to one man. This dynamic features a mind/body split with Pluto playing the part of the controlling intellect and Amphiaraus playing the part of the body. An important finding of this investigation is that a functional goal of Roman manhood (as represented in the *Thebaid*) is death. In the end, the arguments in this paper amount to an explication of how the metapoetics articulated through the poet, Amphiaraus, and Pluto constitute and are constituted by a particular story of an aggressive and hostile Roman manhood. This paper documents their interrelationship.

# I. AMPHIARAUS: RESISTANCE AND TRANSFORMATION

As Statius initially presents him, the *vates* Amphiaraus has none of the eagerness for conflict that others of the Seven display. After learning from augury what the future will bring, he attempts to prevent the campaign. Closing himself up in his house he refuses to share what he knows with Adrastus, the other warriors, and the people of Argos (3.570–572). He later makes sure all know that the expedition is not blessed by the gods (3.629–630, 3.643–644).

Addressing this intransigence, Capaneus (the blasphemous foil to the pious Amphiaraus) frames the issue baldly as a matter of righteously militaristic manhood opposed by soft contemptible pacifism (3.661–669):

...et tibi tuto  
nunc eat iste furor; sed prima ad classica cum iam  
hostilem Ismenon galeis Dircenque bibemus,  
ne mihi tunc, moneo, lituos atque arma volenti  
obvius ire pares venisque aut alite visa  
bellorum proferre diem: procul haec tibi mollis  
infula terrificique aberit dementia Phoebi:  
illic augur ego et mecum quicumque parati  
insanire manu.

... in perfect safety, then, let this frenzy of yours have free rein; but at the first trumpet blasts, when we shall drink enemy Ismenus and Dirce from our helmets, do not endeavor then, I warn you, to get in my way when I want bugles and arms, or through entrails or some bird you have seen try to put off my battle-day. Far, far away from you will be this, your soft fillet, and the madness of terror-making Phoebus; there in battle I shall be the augur and whoever is ready with me to go mad with his sword hand.

Capaneus depicts Amphiaraus as maddened thrall to the prophet Apollo and declares him less than manly when he terms the prophetic fillet (*infula*) *mollis*. Capaneus styles himself, by contrast, as the ready warrior, scornful of delay to battle and drinking water from his helmet while on campaign. The impious claim that Capaneus characteristically makes about equivalence between his skill in arms

and augury<sup>9</sup> further undermines Amphiaraus' masculine credentials. Capaneus maintains that a warrior male's intention to use his well-trained right hand on the battlefield provides truer prognostication than passive observation of the sky: the bones and sinew of this warrior man will make the future.

Later, however, Amphiaraus ceases trying to delay the inevitable and heads into battle. The reader encounters him just before his *aristeia*, impressive in his chariot and endowed with help from Apollo and Mars (7.690–698):

*eminet ante alios iam formidantibus arva  
Amphiaraus equis ac multo pulvere vertit  
campum indignantem: famulo decus addit inane  
maestus et extremos obitus inlustrat Apollo.  
ille etiam clipeum galeamque incendit honoro  
sidere; nec tarde fratri, Gradive, dedisti,  
ne qua manus vatem, ne quid mortalia bello  
laedere tela queant: sanctum et venerabile Diti  
funus eat . . .*

Amphiaraus stands out before the others on horses that already fear the ground. With much dust he furrows the indignant plain. Apollo, melancholy, gives his servant empty glory and floods his final sunset with light. He even sets aflame Amphiaraus' shield and helmet with an honor-bearing star. Nor were you, Mars, slow to grant your brother Apollo his request that neither hand nor mortal weapons would have the power to harm the *vates* in battle; you granted that he should go below, a death sacred and commanding of Dis' respect . . .

Amphiaraus has now embraced his masculine destiny. Apollo has granted him inviolability and divinely sponsored spectacularity (the *decus*<sup>10</sup> and the *sidus*) that recall Athena's sponsorship of Diomedes in Book 5 of the *Iliad*.<sup>11</sup> The divine sanction and inviolability (and their Homeric associations) underscore the distance Amphiaraus has traveled from his prior vulnerability to Capaneus' insults.

As the passage continues, we focus on the state of Amphiaraus' mind and body as he prepares to join the battle (7.698–704):

<sup>9</sup> Cf. 9.547–551 and 10.485–486.

<sup>10</sup> That this *decus* is *inane* is worth reflection. D. C. Feeney (1991: 371–377) has read the phrase as part of the means whereby Statius demonstrates the ineffectuality of the gods in the universe of the *Thebaid*. While keeping Feeney's notion of divine ineffectuality as one meaning (and this reading is sensible: Apollo will not be able to rescue his favorite from death, after all), a look forward in the poem suggests that the phrase hints at divine effectuality at the same time. In the opening scene of Book 8, Pluto complains to Amphiaraus that he has traveled to hell by means of a disallowed path *through the void* (85: *per inane*). Reading back to the *decus inane* and taking the adjective *inane* substantively and in apposition with *decus*, the reader discovers Apollo bestowing a glory that is the void and vehicle, as it were, for Amphiaraus' miraculous arrival in hell alive.

<sup>11</sup> See Juhnke 1972: 120–124 for parallels between the *aristeiai* of Amphiaraus and Diomedes and for other connections to the *Iliad*. See, too, Smolenaars 1994: 416–423 for a chart correlating the final moments in Amphiaraus' life (above ground) with similar moments in the epics of Valerius Flaccus, Virgil, and Homer.

... *talis medios aufertur in hostis  
certus et ipse necis, vires fiducia leti  
suggerit; inde viro maioraque membra diesque  
laetior et numquam tanta experientia caeli,  
si vacet: avertit morti contermina Virtus.  
ardet inexploto saevi Mavortis amore  
et fruitur dextra atque anima flagrante superbit.*

... outfitted thus [with the divine sponsorship of Apollo and Mars] Amphiaraus bears himself off into the midst of the enemy. He is certain of violent death. Confidence in death brings strength to bear. As a result, this man's limbs are greater; the day more auspicious; never would his practiced skill with the sky be so great if he were at leisure. *Virtus*, death's neighbor, turns him away from augury. He burns with insatiable love for Mars. He delights in his right hand and glories in his flaming spirit!

Amphiaraus now dedicates himself to *virtus*, whose primary meaning in the *Thebaid* is warlike accomplishment.<sup>12</sup> He leaves behind Apollo for Mars, who now will command his passion. The reassignment of devotion to the god of war from the god of prophecy (whose masculinity Capaneus had implicitly questioned) emphasizes that the picture of manhood emerging from the transformation of Amphiaraus has the warrior for a model.

Later in the book and after he has killed a number of men, we see Amphiaraus' gore-soaked chariot crushing the dead and the almost dead (7.760–768). I draw our attention to a particular detail in this scene. As Amphiaraus' chariot is crushing these bodies, its axle is termed *impius* (7.763).<sup>13</sup> Terming the axle *impius* marks Amphiaraus' present behavior as a degradation from his prior standards, for elsewhere in the poem Amphiaraus is called *pious* (see, e.g., 5.731, 6.374, and 6.378). Indeed, an axle that is *impius* makes a telling contrast with the *infula* that Capaneus called *mollis* earlier. Through these adjectives applied to accoutrements that mark Amphiaraus' role as warrior and *vates* respectively, the reader sees how

<sup>12</sup> So, for example, Dominik 1994: 52 and Ripoll 1998: 318. Indeed, at 4.661–662 Statius associates *Virtus* with *Ira*, *Furor*, and *Metus* (when it is in the company of Bacchus), and at 7.47–53 with *Impetus*, *Nefas*, *Irae*, *Metus*, *Insidiae*, *Discordia*, *Minae*, *Furor*, and *Mors* (when it is with Mars). The more positive associations of *virtus* with abilities outside the arena of war (e.g., moral excellence, strength in mind and/or body, excellence in an artwork, *inter alia* [Eisenhut 1973]) are not present in the *Thebaid*. Within the *Thebaid*, Statius seems more concerned to call to mind *improbitas* than manhood when he uses *virtus* (Eisenhut 1973: 163–172, esp. 171). The lack in the poem of this word's positive meanings (which has an enduring association with manhood) both suggests that this word points to the problematization of manhood in the *Thebaid* and implies at the same time that *virtus* in the poem misses encompassing it. There are arguments to be made on both sides. In the end I opted not to make *virtus* a centerpiece of my investigation because while *Virtus* appears as a divine personification (10.632–681), it is rarely used of the gods (Venus' attribution of *virtus* to Diana at 9.829 is an exception), and I will be elaborating connections between Pluto and Roman manhood later in the paper.

<sup>13</sup> 7.761–763: *omnisque per artus / sulcus et incisus altum rubet orbita membris. / hos iam ignorantes terit impius axis* . . . (“and every track is through bodies and the wheel reddens deeply from the limbs it is cutting up. The *unholy* axle now crushes those no longer conscious . . .”).

acceptance and refusal of warrior manhood can be criticized; a charge of impiety can dog the warrior (though he will have the comfort of being gender conformist), while the man who would refuse to be a warrior can be called soft and find his manhood impugned. In any case, Amphiaraus is criticized, slurred with a charge of impiety, at just the moment when he most fully embodies a dominant conception of manhood both within the world of the poem and within the world of its Roman readership.

Statius' question and reflections upon Amphiaraus' transformation into a warrior in *aristeia* (in an intervention fifty lines earlier) prefigure this censure (7.705–711):

*hicne hominum casus lenire et demere Fatis  
iura frequens? quantum subito diversus ab illo,  
qui tripodas laurusque sequi, qui doctus in omni  
nube salutato volucrem cognoscere Phoebol  
innumeram ferro plebem, ceu letifer annus  
aut iubar adversi grave sideris, immolat umbris  
ipse suis . . .*

Is this the one who frequently soothed men in misfortune and took authority away from the fates? Suddenly, how different he was from the one taught to follow the tripods and the laurel, the one taught to recognize a bird in every possible part of the sky when he hailed Phoebus! Like the death-bearing season or the oppressive gleam of the adverse star, he himself sacrifices innumerable men to his own shades with his blade . . .

Critics have been liable to see stability in the moral evaluation of Amphiaraus' new status as a warrior. Some have seen an indictment of divine malignity (e.g., Dominik 1994: 114) or of the power of *nefas* and *furor* to compromise a formerly moral character (e.g., Schetter 1960: 9). Elsewhere, approbation of Amphiaraus' transformation has been discerned because Amphiaraus, shedding his reluctance to kill, seemingly realizes himself as a complete epic hero (Vessey 1973: 262).<sup>14</sup> I will argue that consideration of the metaphor of sacrifice concluding this passage and its connections to the *Aeneid* and *Iliad* destabilizes any discovery of univocality and suggests that ambivalence is a proper reaction to Amphiaraus' realization of himself as a warrior. The reader ponders the moral costs and benefits of Amphiaraus' capitulation to warrior manhood and the realities attending the establishment of Roman manhood more generally.

## II. SACRIFICE/IMMOLARE

When Amphiaraus "himself sacrifices to his own shades" (7.710–711: *immolat umbris/ipse suis*), a question as to what Amphiaraus has become naturally arises, for Amphiaraus has been split into actor and beneficiary of his action. A paradoxical

<sup>14</sup> See Smolenaars 1994: 331–332 for summary of critical reactions in the secondary literature to Amphiaraus' surrender to killing.

simultaneity has emerged and it provokes interpretation.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, *immolare* appears here for the only time in Statius' oeuvre. Because of its isolation in Statius' works, *immolare* directs a reader to other texts to gauge its possible significance. This verb occurs three times in the *Aeneid*, each time in scenes where Aeneas, like Amphiarus, plays the unforgiving warrior. Close reading of these passages from the *Aeneid* reveals connections between Aeneas and the savage, grief-stricken Achilles of the *Iliad* and poses insistent questions about Aeneas' identity and the ultimate significance of his actions. Reading Statius' *immolare* with Virgil's, a reader gains access to the stories of these two heroes to make sense of Amphiarus at the moment of his embrace of warrior manhood. Furthermore, Statius' use of *immolare* not only calls to mind situations in the *Aeneid* where it occurs but also functions as encouragement to the audience to be the sort of reader he or she is when reading the *Aeneid*.<sup>16</sup>

Virgil features *immolare* in the final lines of the *Aeneid*. Seeing Turnus wearing Pallas' sword-belt, Aeneas, enflamed by passion and anger (12.946–947: *furiis accensus et ira / terribilis*; 12.951: *fervidus*), terms the sword thrust to come a sacrifice performed by Pallas (12.948–949):

... *Pallas te hoc vulnere, Pallas*  
*immolat et poenam scelerato ex sanguine sumit.*

Pallas *sacrifices* you with this wound! Pallas does it! He takes his penalty from your guilty blood!

The reader coming from the *Thebaid* will also note that the last word of the poem, close by in line 952, is *umbras* (... *cum gemitu fugit indignata sub umbras* [... he flees with a groan down to the *shades*]). Philip Hardie's discussions of this passage (1993: 19–23, 33–35) lays out what is essential for our purposes here. Perceiving Virgil "end[ing] his epic in a hall of mirrors where identity is split" (34), Hardie sees extensive impersonation complicating and undermining a reader's understanding of both Turnus and Aeneas. Turnus, dressed as Pallas, is not merely himself, but is in some sense Pallas too. Aeneas likewise takes on Pallas' identity as he kills Turnus in Pallas' name. Hardie further notes (33–34) echoes of the *Iliad* (22.270–272), which have the effect of associating Achilles and Hector with Aeneas and Turnus respectively. And so it turns out that at just the moment when Aeneas ensures the success "of his mission in Italy, and when

<sup>15</sup> My interpretation here (and to come) stands in this precise form only if the reader understands *suis umbris* as referring to Amphiarus himself and as a poetic plural. If the reader takes *suis umbris* as referring to others and a true plural, such an understanding would perhaps make Amphiarus equivalent to Pluto (for which see Ahl 1986: 2863–66). Reading *suis umbris* in this way will yield an argument with different contours but questions about what Amphiarus has become will still arise.

<sup>16</sup> I write here with Gian Biagio Conte's discussions of his Code and Exemplary Models in mind (1994: 135–141; 1986: 31). My emphasis is different from his, however. His analysis emphasizes authorial control while I am interested in a reader's perceptions of relationships between texts and the way that these perceptions enable interpretation.



he should be most true to himself," the epic concludes "by placing his identity in doubt" (Hardie 1993: 34). Indeed the uncertainty that a reader may feel at the end of the poem about Aeneas' identity has a correlate in the tension arising from the perception that Turnus' killing is both necessary for the creation of Rome and motivated by personal rage.

Relating Aeneas' sacrifice of Turnus to the intensely reflexive metaphor employed to describe Amphiaraus' killings (7.710–711: *immolat umbris / ipse suis*) makes the question posed about what Amphiaraus has become more urgent. The reference to Aeneas (and to Achilles), in an iconic moment of killing through passionate need, makes this passionate need available to the reader as he or she evaluates Amphiaraus' actions. Indeed, it would be perverse not to think in terms of this passion, given the exemplary power of both the *Aeneid* and *Iliad*. Also, the presence of *immolare* at this key moment thematizing of Aeneas' identity suggests that the occurrence of it in the *Thebaid* ought to have something to say about Amphiaraus' identity—a suggestion whose relevance is redoubled through Amphiaraus' split here into both actor and beneficiary of his murderous violence. I will further detail how analysis of the *immolare* metaphor reveals information about Amphiaraus' identity after considering the remaining two instances of this verb in the *Aeneid*.

*Immolare* occurs twice in Book 10. In the first instance, Aeneas, tortured by memory and raging to avenge Pallas' death, captures eight young Italian men for the purpose of sacrificing them to the shades (*Aen.* 10.515–520). Virgil's phraseology is nearly duplicated in the *Thebaid* (including line position and the accompanying dative plural of *umbra*: *immolet umbris*, *Aen.* 10.519). Complexity of emotion and action marks this scene: sharp sorrow over the death of Pallas, the son of his sworn ally, coexists with the savagery to be committed in his name (which in turn recalls Achilles' act of human sacrifice, also accompanied by searing grief, for Patroclus).<sup>17</sup> Thinking back to the *Thebaid*, the reader is again invited to import the savagery and grief of Aeneas (and Achilles) to understand the change in Amphiaraus as something passionately motivated and disturbing, and perhaps even repugnant on account of the human sacrifice involved.

A few lines later, *immolare* (with *umbra* nearby once more) appears again as Aeneas "sacrifices" a priest (*sacerdos*) of Apollo and Diana (*Virg. Aen.* 10.537–541):

*nec procul Haemonides, Phoebi Triviaeque sacerdos,  
infula cui sacra redimibat tempora vitta,  
totus conluens veste atque insignibus albis.  
quem congressus agit campo, lapsumque superstans  
immolat ingentique umbra tegit . . .*

Not far off was Haemon's son, a priest to Apollo and Diana. The fillet, the sacred band, was wreathed around his temples. All shining was he in his dress and white insignia.

<sup>17</sup> *Il.* 21.26–32 and 23.175–182.

Having encountered him, Aeneas chases him from the field and, looming, *sacrifices* him after he slipped. He covers him with an immense *shadow* . . .

Relating this passage to the *Thebaid*, a reader will find additional ways (over and beyond the presence of *immolare* and *umbra*) to connect it to Amphiaraus through focusing on Aeneas' victim, the *sacerdos*. In the first place, *sacerdos* is a title applied to Amphiaraus in the poem (3.567, 3.616, and 3.647). Furthermore, like the son of Haemon, Amphiaraus possesses a white fillet (4.218: *alba . . . infula*) and for the horse race at Opheltes' funeral games in Book 6, he appears all in white (including *infula*) with white horses (6.330–331):

*ipse habitu niveus, nivei dant colla iugales,  
concolor est albis et cassis et infula cristis.*

Amphiaraus is snowy-white in dress. The snow-white horses are yoked. The helmet and fillet match the white plumes.

The perception of a resemblance between Amphiaraus and the son of Haemon adds an additional reflexivity to the scene of Amphiaraus' sacrifice to his own shades. Amphiaraus is not only the killer and the one for whom he kills, he is now the victim too; Amphiaraus commits virtual suicide, as it were (and the human sacrifice noted above resonates all the more). And so we yet again circle around to identity, as paradoxical simultaneity emerges once more. What does it mean that Amphiaraus kills himself for himself, which attention to the *Aeneid* suggests (and it might even be said that the monumentality of the epic tradition demands)? I propose that we understand this virtual suicide as an allegory of the action needed to create Amphiaraus the killing warrior and, by extension, a virile man; as a pacific seer must be killed to enable the murderous hero's manifestation, so the emergence of a virile man, according to the story of Roman manhood told above, requires the extermination of pacific impulses.

Reading the *immolare* metaphor in the *Thebaid* through the *Aeneid*, then, the reader can associate Amphiaraus with Aeneas, Pallas, and the son of Haemon. These multiple associations emerge when Amphiaraus is no longer associated with *mollitia* and has embraced warrior manhood. Accordingly, interpretation of this metaphor suggests a number of things about Roman manhood (for, as noted above, the epic warrior is a premier model for Roman manhood). In the first place, it suggests that the making of a man involves self-alienation, the taking of oneself as an object. When Amphiaraus kills (and reading with the *Aeneid* has suggested that the victim is Amphiaraus himself), the reflexivity of this action performed in the service of a dematerialized notion of his own identity (i.e., *suis umbris*) adumbrates the training of the body to conform to an ideal. Second, analysis of this metaphor suggests that becoming a man is an operation marked by the passion of an Achilles or an Aeneas. These heroic passions can be seen as representations of the attachment of the *vir* to his identity (which he can only refuse at considerable cost [Butler 1993: 14–15]). Third, the air

of futility inflecting Amphiarus' actions here (Pallas and Patroclus remain dead and inaccessible) gestures in the direction of the melancholic need for repetition (Gunderson 2000: 19–20) that will never succeed in giving substance to that which is permanently inaccessible; the unbridgeable distance between the living and dead stands for the similarly unbridgeable distance between living man and the ideal which he desires and to which he must conform. Lastly, perception of the relation between the *Thebaid* and the exemplary *Aeneid* and *Iliad*, insofar as they impart a necessity to Amphiarus' actions, allows the reader to see figured in Amphiarus' intertextually rich self-constitution the irresistible allure of the warrior as *telos* for manhood: the *vir* will commit savage acts—a passionate necessity is upon him.

The connections just elaborated between Amphiarus' surrender to the work of killing and Roman manhood gain further persuasiveness if the reader notes that Amphiarus is not only an object in the poet's discourse but constitutes a point of identification for the poet. Indeed, the poet, in writing Amphiarus, writes himself. Appreciating this reflexive dynamic, the reader can tie the seer (and poem) more closely to Roman manhood because he or she will now be associating Amphiarus explicitly with a voice that breaks out of the frame of the poem, as it were, to advertise its connection to the real world.<sup>18</sup>

### III. POET AS AMPHIARAUS

Throughout much of the *Thebaid*, Amphiarus provides a point of identification for the poet. A reader will note that they both share the title *vates*, which is the proper title for a Roman epic poet and a Latin poet in general.<sup>19</sup> Amphiarus is called *vates* fifteen times and receives this appellation more frequently than any other character in the *Thebaid*.<sup>20</sup> Statius also uses *vates* of poets often outside the *Thebaid*, including twice of Lucan in *Silvae* 2.7.<sup>21</sup> He refers to himself as a *vates* only once in the *Thebaid* but it is, significantly, in the proem to the narration of Capaneus' dramatic storming of heaven (10.827–830):

... nunc  
comminus astrigeros Capaneus tollendus in axis.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Statius' address to Domitian at 1.17–33 and his reference to his emperor at 12.814; both most assuredly situate the poem in the real world.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Newman 1967a: 99–206 and 1967b or Conte 1994: 1–34.

<sup>20</sup> Characters receiving the appellation of *vates* in the *Thebaid* include Amphiarus at 1.42, 2.299, 3.466, 3.549, 4.192, 4.216, 6.222, 6.530, 7.696, 7.786, 7.815, 8.1, 8.341, 10.749, 12.123; Tiresias at 4.407, 4.443, 4.491, 4.610, 10.616, 10.624, 10.696, 10.723, 10.770; Laius at 2.95 (disguised as Tiresias), 4.635; Maeon at 3.82; Melampus at 3.466, 3.501, 3.549; Thamyris at 4.181; Thiodamas at 10.249, 10.322; soothsayers at 2.348, 3.450; poets in general at 4.60, 10.829; a priest of Zeus Ammon at 8.201; and the personification *Virtus*, who possesses the paraphernalia of a *vates* as part of her disguise, at 10.643.

<sup>21</sup> Statius uses *vates* over twenty times in the *Silvae* to refer to poets; the references in *Silvae* 2.7 are lines 42 and 51. When Statius attributes excellence in poetry to Domitian, *vates* is the term used (*Achil.* 1.15–16: *cui geminae florent vatūque ducūque / certatim laurus*).

*non mihi iam solito vatū de more canendum;  
maior ab Aoniis poscenda amentia lucis.*

Now Capaneus has to be raised hard up against the starry heavens. I must not sing in the usual way of the *vates*—I must demand a greater madness from Aonian groves!

Here a reader may connect Amphiarus to the poet not only through the title of *vates* but also through the requested *amentia*. This *amentia* surely recalls the *dementia Phoebe* for which Capaneus criticizes Amphiarus at 3.667.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the verb *cano* denotes both the epic poet's performance (e.g., 1.4, 1.33) and Amphiarus' speech (3.646). Amphiarus and the poet, however, share more than a title, a propensity for prophetic madness, and a verb. Both character and poet display a critical stance toward the action (cf. 3.629–30 [Amphiarus] and 1.150–156 [poet]). They also both show an interest in delaying (*mora*) the plot of the poem—a shared feature that deserves some discussion.

As the soldiers grieve over Amphiarus' disappearance from the battlefield, a nameless soldier particularly bemoans the loss of Amphiarus' ability to read the heavens. Among the undoubted benefits the soldiery derived from this skill of Amphiarus was the knowledge of the moment when to delay (*unde morae?*, 8.179). As we saw earlier, Capaneus accuses Amphiarus of using powers of augury to put off the day of battle (*bellorum proferre diem*, 3.666), using the verb *moror* a few lines earlier to designate Amphiarus' actions (*quid vota virum meliora moraris?*, 3.651). Furthermore, Amphiarus prays to Apollo to contrive more delays (*utinam plures innectere pergas, / Phoebe, moras*, 5.743–744) when it looks increasingly likely that the army will finally leave Nemea. Even Amphiarus' armor reflects his investment in *mora*. In a portrait of him on horseback, his shields are styled "delays for javelins" (*morae iaculis*, 4.220).

Moving now to the poet, a reader will remember that *mora* is integral to the functioning of an epic poem. In a narration where certain events must occur (e.g., Eteocles and Polynices must perish in mutual slaughter) ten books of the epic arise from delaying the march to the requisite *telos*. John Henderson (1998: 243) puts it well: "Much of any epic must consist in delay, obstruction, deferral: anachronic time for hermeneutic thickening, for atmospheric amplification."

Slowing down the story enables presentation of authorial perspective(s) on the action and thereby enriches the work's meaning.<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, since *mora* is a key feature showing the hand of the poet at work, the frequent explicit (and implicit) occurrence of it in relation to Amphiarus constitutes another encouragement to the reader to associate the character with the poet. But the poet and the seer share

<sup>22</sup> Cf. TLL I.1883.32–1885.11 (*amentia*) and TLL V.1.477.60–478.60 (*dementia*); *amentia* and *dementia* are for the most part synonymous. On the madness of epic, see Hershkowitz 1998.

<sup>23</sup> Henderson (1998: 243–245), Feeney (1991: 339–340), and Vessey (1973: 165–167) discuss *mora* in the *Thebaid*. In the case of the *Aeneid*, the reader need only recall Juno's declaration that she will contrive to delay Aeneas' realization of his heroic destiny (*at trahere atque moras tantis licet addere rebus*, 7.315). For *mora* in the *Bellum Civile*, see Masters 1992. I also found an unpublished paper by P. Sidney Horky, "The Delay of Epic: Lucan's *Bellum Civile* and Virgil's *Aeneid*," helpful in thinking through the ramifications of *mora* in epic.

more than pacific impulses and delaying tactics. As Amphiaraus surrenders to martial virtue, becoming a brutal killer on the battlefield, so the poet, valorizing what he tried for so long to delay, no longer eschews narration of brutal actions on the battlefield.

In a passage mentioned above, in which Amphiaraus' chariot is rendered immobile by gore, the narration verges on the abusive when it invites the reader to put him- or herself in the place of a half-dead warrior whose face is about to be run over by Amphiaraus' chariot (7.763–765):

... at illi  
vulnere semineces—nec devitare facultas  
—venturum super ora vident ...

But those half-dead from a wound—there is no way to get clear!—they see Amphiaraus about to drive over their faces.

As those who are barely alive cannot get away, so the reader is compelled to visualize this scene and even to identify with those whose faces are about to be run over; Statius here metaphorizes and enacts the assault of his narrative. Narration of Tydeus' act of cannibalization similarly abuses the reader/listener. The audience need only remember the human gore dripping from the chin of the cannibal Tydeus (8.760–761):

... illum effracti perfusum tabe cerebri  
aspicit et vivo scelerantem sanguine fauces

[Minerva] sees him thoroughly soaked with the shattered brain's gore. She sees him defiling his jaws with living blood.

Minerva's immediate reaction to this sight is to leave and purge her vision by means of secret light (*mystica lampas*) and the Elisos' waters (8.764–766). But while Minerva has means of escape when faced with this scene, the reader/listener, in contrast, lacks one. The reader has the freedom, of course, to put the book down and the listener likewise is free to leave the *recitatio*, but this freedom is not the same as Minerva's; she has the world of the poem to herself while the reader must accept this world on Statius' terms. Again, Statius forces the reader/listener into contemplation of a scene from which there is no way to get clear (*nec devitare facultas*).

The coincidence, then, between Amphiaraus and the poet is manifold. *Vates* both, they share a conflicted relationship to heroism: just as the seer abandons the reluctance that Capaneus criticized as *mollis* to pursue activities surely meeting with his unyielding comrade's approval, so the poet's disapproval of heroic violence coexists with the glorification of violence and an occasionally abusive narrative style. The (eventual) acceptance of war on the part of seer and poet alike connects the epic to a soldierly ideal of Roman manhood because, in the case of both seer and poet, violence emerges as a glorious and seemingly irresistible telos. We will not, however, leave our investigation here. At the conclusion of

Amphiaraus' *aristeia*, he descends still alive to hell for an extended confrontation with Pluto. Not found in other narratives of Amphiaraus' life, this scene may very well be a Statian innovation (Vessey 1973: 71). Such innovation invites further metapoetical analysis, for the exigencies of the epic tradition apparently did not demand this meeting between hero and god. While Amphiaraus remains a point of identification for the poet, the reader comes to see in Pluto a simultaneous point of identification. As in the case of simultaneities perceived in the *immolare* metaphor, seeing the poet in Pluto and Amphiaraus invites questions about the nature of the subjectivity being described, as a single identity is constituted through immortal god and mortal hero.

#### IV. THE POET AS AMPHIARAUS IN HELL

At the end of Book 7, the earth swallows Amphiaraus alive with his horses and chariot. Book 8 opens with his reception in hell (1–126). The fact that he is still living causes consternation (*horror habet cunctos*, 8.4). The fates, initially disoriented, finally cut his life's thread (*visoque paventes / augure tunc demum rumpebant stamina Parcae*, 8.12–13). Throughout the rest of the scene, Amphiaraus is slowly expiring, and this fact is stressed twice (8.85–89, 116–117). The gradual destruction of his body is significant in coming arguments.

Seeing Amphiaraus' arrival as a threatening incursion (8.36), Pluto sends Tisiphone to the upper world to take vengeance (*i, Tartareas ulciscere sedes, / Tisiphone*, 8.65–66). He then turns to Amphiaraus and demands that he account for himself (8.84–85). Respectfully asserting that he has not come to Hades to kidnap Cerberus or make an attempt on Proserpina, Amphiaraus maintains his innocence of any crime (8.90–120). Amphiaraus concludes his plea with a request that any anger Pluto feels find its object in Eriphyle. Pluto silently agrees and Amphiaraus, as an active character, passes from the *Thebaid* (8.120–126).

In this scene between Amphiaraus and Pluto, a reader has ample incentive to continue seeing the poet in the seer. In the course of the interview between Pluto and the slowly expiring but still living Amphiaraus, Pluto poses the following question (8.84–85):

*"at tibi quos," inquit, "manes, qui limite praeceps  
non licito per inane ruis?"*

"But what sort of death for you," he asks, "you who rush headlong through the void by means of a disallowed path?"

Pluto asks Amphiaraus indirectly how he might like to die given that he has come to the underworld by a way or *limes* that is not allowed (i.e., he is still alive). Thinking back to the beginning of the poem, a reader will connect Pluto's question here to Statius' programmatic designation of the subject matter of the *Thebaid* itself as a *limes* (*limes mihi carminis esto / Oedipodae confusa domus*, "let the disordered house of Oedipus be the *path* of my poem," 1.16–17). Through this

word, *limes*, a new point of contact between poet and seer emerges: both have *limites* to follow in their teleological journeys.

Amphiaraus' answer to Pluto reveals still more points of contact (8.90–94):

*si licet et sanctis hic ora resolvere fas est  
manibus, o cunctis finitor maxime rerum,  
at mihi, qui quondam causas elementaque noram,  
et sator, oro, minas stimulatque corda remulce,  
neve ira dignare hominem et tua iura timentem*

...

If it is allowed and right for sacred shades to speak here, O greatest finisher of all things (but for me begetter too, I who had known the "causes" and "elements"), I beg you—soothe your threats and agitated heart. Do not think one who is human and fearful of your ordinances worthy of your anger . . .

There are a number of things to consider in Amphiaraus' words here. In the first place, Amphiaraus addresses Pluto as *finitor*. At the level of the plot, Pluto is the one who sets bounds to life and marks its end for all things. Indeed, Pluto is setting the bounds to the *limes* of Amphiaraus—he reaches now the end of both chariot-ride and life. Reading metapoetically, as the occurrence of *limes* at 8.84 strongly suggests we should, we may see Amphiaraus as the poet facing in Pluto the epic tradition as a whole (or perhaps an epic forebear, whether Virgil or Homer, or both). Limiting the *limes* of the epic poet Statius, Pluto as *finitor* embodies a threat that the poet will face if he transgresses the propriety of the epic genre: such transgression will render his text illegible as epic verse and the text, dead, will not live as Statius hopes it will (12.816–819; or as Ovid hopes, *Met.* 15.871–879). Thinking further about *finitor* (and looking forward to *sator*), a reader will do well to remember that a *finitor* is also an *agrimensor* or land-surveyor (*TLL* VI.1.803.72–83). Significant for our purposes here, determining *limites* (paths) was among the duties of the *agrimensor*. Once the work of the *agrimensor/finitor* was completed, the ownership of the field was secure and the sowing of the seed could occur. And so, and moving now to *sator*, if the poetic tradition (as *finitor*) designates the place where poetic fertility may be possible, then this tradition, as *sator*, can be understood as the source of the seed that enables production. Elsewhere in the *Thebaid*, *sator* nearly always designates Jove.<sup>24</sup> Association with Jove enables an apt addition of his seminal power to qualify further the tradition's authority over definition and annihilation visible in *finitor*.

Still, we are talking about Pluto here; it is perhaps odd to think of the god of the dead, the great *finitor*, as *sator* too. Lactantius (in his note on 8.84), however, directs the reader to the metempsychosis in Book 6 of the *Aeneid* (703–751).

<sup>24</sup>Jove is the referent for *sator* at 1.179, 3.218, 3.488, 5.22, 7.155, 7.734, 9.511 and 11.248. The two exceptions are the passage under consideration here and a mention of the "begetter of the Eumenides" (*sator Eumenidum*, 12.559), by which Uranus is meant.

Lactantius' suggestion to the reader is a good one for a number of reasons. Virgil's underworld is a place where the dead are punished (*Aen.* 6.735–742) and Statius draws a picture of the judgment of the dead at 8.21–31. Also, the use of the word *manes* in Pluto's question to Amphiaraus, "But what sort of death for you?" (*at tibi quos . . . manes*, 8.84), recalls Anchises' remark to Aeneas about how each soul endures its punishment: "Each of us endures his death" (*quisque suos patimur manis*, *Aen.* 6.743). Associating Virgil's life-bearing Hades with Statius' further enables a reader to see Pluto embodying the poetic tradition's enabling and generative aspects. Indeed, meanings of the words *causa* and *elementum* strengthen the impression of poetic generativity here.

At first glance, Amphiaraus' claim that he knew the "causes" and "elements" must refer to some manner of excellence in augury. A metapoetical reading of these words is easy to generate, however. *Causa* can designate the thing that is (to be) put into words (*TLL* III.685.67–687.2; cf. *Silvae* 2.3.6) while *elementa* are the first principles of an art (*TLL* V.2.347.75–349.13; cf. *Achil.* 2.166). Hence, we can see in Amphiaraus' assertion a statement from the poet to the tradition that he has come into possession of his topics and has the requisite skills to versify them. But these words could also designate philosophical knowledge about the physical nature of the universe. *Causae* are ultimate dematerialized causes or αἰτίαι for all things in the universe (*TLL* III.662.15–71), while the *elementa* comprise the material basis, either as atoms (*TLL* V.2.342.82–343.28) or as the four elements (*TLL* V.2.343.29–345.52), of the material results authored by the *causae*. We may therefore understand the poet to imply that he knows how the universe is put together and that, because of this insight, he is qualified to construct a (poetic) world of his own.

Thus by identifying the poet with Amphiaraus, the reader can see in Pluto an instantiation of the prior poetic tradition, potentially deadly to the aspirations of the poet and yet generative too. But discovering the poet in Amphiaraus does not exhaust the search for the metapoetic play at the opening of Book 8: the reader can find the poet in Pluto too.

#### V. POET AS PLUTO

At the beginning of Book 8 Amphiaraus "falls upon" (*incidit*, 8.1) the underworld, "hot with war's sweat" (*belli sudore calens*, 8.7). These details contrast revealingly with similar details in the opening of the poem (1.1–3):

*fraternas acies alternaque regna profanis  
decertata odiis sontisque evolvere Thebas,  
Pierius menti calor incidit.*

Battle-lines of brothers, the changing rule contested in profane hates, and Thebes the guilty—Pierian fever falls upon my mind to narrate these.



Similar language, then, describes both the advent of an all-too-live warrior to hell and the onset of inspiration that launched composition of the *Thebaid*. This similar language suggests that the arrival of Amphiaraus is interpretable as a representation of this inspiration. Such an interpretation is supported further by the fact that Statius speaks of writing under the influence of a sudden heat (*subito calore*) in the preface to *Silvae* 1. Seeing poetic inspiration embodied by Amphiaraus makes the affronted Pluto a figure for the poet. Indeed, if we are thinking of Pluto as the poet, we may see in Amphiaraus not only inspiration, but also an important source for this inspiration: the *Aeneid*.

Statius terms Amphiaraus a *vir* at 7.700 and 7.750 and pointedly portrays Amphiaraus keeping hold of his *arma* as the earth swallows him, his horses, and his chariot (7.818–819):

*illum ingens haurit specus et transire parantis  
mergit equos; non arma manu, non frena remisit*

The huge abyss swallows him and engulfs the horses as they prepare to cross. He did not let the *arms* or reins fall from his hand.

These details—the fact that Amphiaraus is a *vir* with his arms—arguably bring the *Aeneid* to mind because the *Aeneid* would have been known as *arma virumque* in antiquity. I suggest, then, that perception of Amphiaraus as both the warmth of poetic inspiration and Virgil's epic creates an allegory of the writing of the *Thebaid* with Pluto playing the part of the poet: looking upon Amphiaraus (i.e., "Arms and the Man") and feeling the heat of his arrival (i.e., the desire to compose), an angered Pluto (i.e., the poet) sets about securing revenge (i.e., writing the *Thebaid*). Further details in Pluto's characterizations of both his realm and response to Amphiaraus' intrusion *and* the existence of contradictory attitudes in Pluto's own character consolidate this metaphoric interplay between poet and Pluto.

Pluto characterizes his domain in terms significant for our purposes when he condemns Amphiaraus' arrival in hell still alive. Pluto sees an intrusion by Jove (8.38–42):

*... magno me tertia victum  
deiecit Fortuna polo, mundumque nocentem  
seruo; nec iste meus dirisque en pervius astris  
inspicitur. tumidusne meas regnator Olympi  
explorat vires?*

... the third lot threw me defeated from great heaven. I am in charge of the guilty world—and it is not mine and—behold!—permeable to the ominous stars it is spied out! Does the arrogant ruler of Olympus test my power?

Probing at an old wound, Pluto recalls that he was given Hades after Jove and Neptune received heaven and the sea respectively. His world is the guilty world and, now, evidently it is not even his to rule, as he must endure intruders.

In metapoetical terms, Pluto's complaints about being third in a universe of porous boundaries easily call to mind a genealogical vision of Statius' situation as an epic poet. Third after Virgil and Lucan (or perhaps third after Homer and Virgil),<sup>25</sup> Statius faces invasive pressures from these forebears. A reader will also find that Pluto's term for his realm, the *mundus nocens*, further associates the poet with the god of the dead. The participle *nocens* (meaning both "physically harmful" and "congenitally guilty" in Statius)<sup>26</sup> is a term with a rich life in the poem. Thebes is called *nocens* twice (3.354, 11.486–487). After Jove orders the gods not to look at the duel between Eteocles and Polynices, he looks away from the guilty plain (*nocentibus arvis*, 11.134). Polynices thinks that he has made Tydeus *nocens* (11.176–177), that the throne of Thebes is *nocens* (9.54), and that he himself is *nocens* (3.368, 11.386). The furrows that gave birth to the *Spartoi* are *nocens* too (4.436). Indeed, at *Silvae* 1.5.8–9 Statius applies the adjective *nocens* to the arms to be found in the *Thebaid* (*paulum arma nocentia, Thebae, / ponite*). If the reader views Pluto as an impersonation of the poet then the kingdom he claims for his own arguably embodies the subject matter of the poem.

Furthermore, as the arrival of Amphiaraus may be likened to the inspiration that launches the *Thebaid*, so then the "inspired" Pluto, sending Tisiphone to the upper world to work his will, can be seen as claiming authorship of the rest of the *Thebaid* (8.68–79). In what amounts to a preview of coming attractions in the poem, he orders her to bring about the duel between Polynices and Eteocles, the cannibalism of Tydeus, Creon's interdiction on burials, and Capaneus' heaven-storming ascent of the Theban walls. Pluto concludes his orders to Tisiphone with a promise that any future challenge to his authority will be met with the kind of force Jove used against the attack of the giants (8.78–79): *faxo hau sit cunctis levior metus atra movere / Tartara, frondenti quam iungere Pelion Ossae* ("I will make sure that fear of disturbing black Tartarus will not be a lighter affair for all than joining Pelion to leafy Ossa"; cf. 8.42–44).

Seeing the poet in Pluto, the reader will see divine rage in the poet. The arrival of inspiration in the form of the *vir* with his *arma*, perceived as an attack, provokes a response hostile to the established way of doing things. The poet rails against his oppressive poetic inheritance that condemns inspiration to come always in the (Jovian) form of *arma virumque*. Frustrated, the poet threatens to call up the defeated and dispossessed for another round, with the goal, perhaps, of renegotiating the poetic order of things. Statius suggests an epic of infernal revenge to replace the canonical epic of imperial foundation. Still, imaging Pluto's response in terms of the gigantomachy inscribes Pluto (and Statius) in a secondary position because Jove's kingship pre-exists and endures beyond this challenge. Also, Pluto's position as bearer of inferior authority in a universe not disposed

<sup>25</sup> Or even, most scandalously, third after Homer and Lucan, if we bring Martha Malamud's (1995) arguments about *Silvae* 2.7 to bear.

<sup>26</sup> Thome 1993: 244–246.

according to his authority neatly adumbrates the position of Statius vis-à-vis his poetic forebears. Indeed, Stephen Hinds's notion of "secondary" epic, with its implication of deference and self-assertion in the face of poetic forebears, is staged here at the level of the plot (1998: 91–98, esp. 94–95).<sup>27</sup>

Pluto's inconsistent approach to Amphiarus and the shades (he can be savage or humane) provides a final point of commonality between god of the underworld and poet. At the moment of Amphiarus' arrival in Hades, Pluto is judging the shades (8.21–23):

*forte sedens media regni infelicitis in arce  
dux Erebi populos poscebat crimina vitae,  
nil hominum miserans iratusque omnibus umbris.*

Sitting, as chance would have it, in the midst of his unhappy kingdom's citadel, the ruler of Erebus was demanding from the nations an accounting of their life's crimes. Pitying nothing human, he was angered at all the shades.

Here the reader sees the savage side of Pluto; nothing human can touch his heart and all attract his ire. His harsh implacability recalls the behavior of the savage warrior on the field or that of the poet, careless of human sensibilities as he presents bestial cannibalism. A few lines later, however, the reader discovers that humanity had touched his heart when Orpheus came in search of Eurydice (Pluto speaks here; 8.58–60):

*... vidi egomet blanda inter carmina turpes  
Eumenidum lacrimas iterataque pensa Sororum;  
me quoque—sed durae melior violentia legis.*

During those appealing songs, I myself saw the base tears of the Eumenides and the Fates' renewed threads (*sc.* of life for Eurydice). I saw myself too—but greater was the violence of hard law.

In this instance, Pluto is not angered and, instead, feels merciful. He is ready to forgive and allow Eurydice a new life (but hard law does not allow him to do so). The coexistence of diametrically opposed attitudes appears again at the end of the scene between seer and god, when he yields to Amphiarus' pleas (8.123): *accipit ille preces indignaturque moveri* ("he accepts the entreaties and is indignant that he is moved"). Within this scene opening Book 8, then, the poet reveals in Pluto diametrically opposed attitudes toward essentially the same stimulus: humanity. The fracturing we see in Pluto here recalls the poet's simultaneous investments in censure and admiration of heroic masculinity, as well as Amphiarus' resistance followed by capitulation.

If I have been successful in arguing that a reasonable reading of the *Thebaid* will perceive the poet in both Pluto and Amphiarus at the beginning of Book 8,

<sup>27</sup> See also Feeney 1991: 338–344 for discussion of Statius' self-aware and aggressive approach to his belated status.

then the assimilation of god and seer to the poet's subjectivity invites allegorical interpretation. Indeed, for the reader who wants to move beyond merely noting these respective locations for the poet's metapoetic self-identification, the existence of the poet in two places at once does not merely invite allegorical interpretation but demands it. Taking my direction from the phenomenon of poet appearing in two places at once, I will put him back together and think of the epic here as offering a representation of an elite Roman man who has moulded himself in reference to the model of Roman manhood discussed at the opening of the paper.

#### VI. THE *THEBAID* AND ROMAN MANHOOD

As previously noted, the presence of the *Thebaid* in contexts suffused with concern about proper manhood and the prominence of militaristic heroism in the plot confirm the importance of an analysis that interprets the poem in the cultural context of Roman manhood.<sup>28</sup> I will argue presently that the metapoetics articulated through poet, god, and hero are in a metaphoric relationship with the realization of Roman manhood both as a personal practice and as an ideal of social relations among *vir*i. Furthermore, I will show that death appears in the poem both as the hidden telos of a Roman man's self-cultivation as a *vir* and as an ideal guiding his relations with other Roman men.<sup>29</sup> Such a connection to death had an ancient and respected pedigree, to which the treasury of stories of self-sacrificing and aggressive republican heroes (e.g., Regulus, Decius Mus, etc.) attested, and which had a presence in philosophic literature (e.g., Sen. *Ep.* 4.8: *quisquis vitam suam contempsit tuae dominus est*, "he who has scorned his own life is the master of yours").<sup>30</sup>

#### VII. *CURA SUI, SIBI MORS*

Judith Butler argues that unavoidable futility attends efforts to accommodate oneself to a gender ideal; people "do" gender in time and space while the ideal to which the performance refers and which the performance aims to embody "is" (1990: 146):

<sup>28</sup> I think here of Lowell Edmunds's notion of poetry in intertextual relationships with what he calls "systems of nonpoetic discourse," i.e., "language specific to an institution, an organization, or a customary social practice" (2001: 143). In the case at hand, the system of non-poetic discourse is the language and concepts associated with the realization of Roman manhood.

<sup>29</sup> In a reading of the early books of Livy, Sandra Joshel identifies similar dynamics at work during the principate of Augustus. The body and its desires, especially for women but for men also, are so coercively mastered in the service of ideals that "the body as a living, feeling, perceiving entity almost disappears" (1992: 119). The old stories in Livy, with their iconic suicides and executions (e.g., Lucretia, Titus Manlius Torquatus) that repeatedly give bursts of blood to nourish the empire-to-be, "[veil] the deadness of the men who build imperial society" (1992: 128).

<sup>30</sup> See Barton 2001: 40–47 for many more connections in the primary sources between death and the proving of Roman manhood.

The "real" and the "sexually factic" are phantasmatic constructions—illusions of substance—that bodies are compelled to approximate, but never can . . . and yet this failure to become "real" and to embody "the natural" is, I would argue, a constitutive failure of all gender enactments for the very reason that these ontological locales are fundamentally uninhabitable.

Time passes and bodies waste away in time and space, while the model is exempt from such eventualities. Essential, inevitable incommensurability aptly describes the relationship between the ideal and a person's efforts to embody it. This incommensurability forever places under erasure the effort to become a *vir*, to secure masculine authenticity. In the course of a study of Roman manhood, Gunderson explains why true embodiment of the ideal—perfect authenticity—is not possible, i.e., why "these ontological locales are fundamentally uninhabitable" (2000: 21–22):

The labor of establishing this authenticity [of Roman manhood] can naturally never be completed given that its consummation would require an impossible closure of the symbolic and a collapse of the symbolic and imaginary orders.

Ideals mutually constitute each other in dematerialized relationships. If the impossible were to happen and these ideals actually materialized, this materialization would constitute a transgression of their nature as ideals and also decisively interrupt their mutual constitution: the symbolic order would find its (impossible) "closure" in materiality. And this perfect embodiment would have another result. It would constitute a total loss of perspective: the man would cease to know himself because the space needed for his self-knowledge and self-recognition would have vanished. And yet, such closure, a perfect embodiment of an ideal, is the objective of gender performance. This ever-frustrated impetus toward the ideal suggests both that consciousness and life exist precisely because the ideal is not equaled and that the functional goal of masculine self-acculturation is permanent unconsciousness, i.e., death.

Recognition of death as the functional goal of the exacting business of training a male body so that it embodies the ideal of virility suggests a particular perception of the bodily faults that the rhetorical handbooks say may hinder or prevent the creation of masculine mastery.<sup>31</sup> These bodily faults now appear instead as an exuberance of life that solicits the basilisk stare of the ideal guiding performance. A reader in possession of this perspective on the ultimate goal of masculine acculturation will find in the arrival of Amphiarus in hell an allegorical representation of these crucial aspects of Roman manhood's realization.

Amphiarus causes consternation in hell because he has arrived there alive (8.4–5): *horror habet cunctos, Stygiis mirantur in oris / tela et equos corpusque novum*

<sup>31</sup> See Gunderson 2000: 59–86 for discussion of Quintilian's problematization of the male body and cf. Gleason 1995: 55–81 for a similar dynamic in physiognomy.

("Horror takes hold of all. They gaze in awe at the arms, the horses, and a strange body on Stygian shores"). Thinking about the relationship between the gender ideal and efforts to equal it, the reader will find significance in the phrase applied to Amphiarus at 8.5: *corpus novum*. This term explicitly focuses attention on him as a body that is a strange and most unwelcome novelty because it is "horrendously" alive and still, remember, "hot with war's sweat" (8.7). Amphiarus' emphatic physicality also sets him in clear opposition to the spirits of hell and Pluto (none of whom has a mortal body subject to death or decay). Furthermore, the fact that Amphiarus is about to be slowly exterminated (see 8.11–13, 85–89, and 116–117) is interpretable as a representation of the training for the man's body necessitated by the rhetorical handbooks; as Amphiarus is rendered more and more like his dead surroundings (which—exempt from the ravages of time—have at least this much in common with the ideal guiding gender performance), so the Roman man, in his effort to embody an ideal of masculine mastery, deadens the (potentially subversive) exuberance of his body.<sup>32</sup>

Not only the word *corpus* is susceptible of interpretation, however. Moving beyond "strange" to other meanings of *novus*, which can be paralleled elsewhere in Statius' works, strengthens the case for seeing an allegory of the realization of Roman manhood here. Read with the meaning of "replacing one that formerly existed" (*OLD*, *novus* 8a),<sup>33</sup> *novus* marks the presence of allegory as the reader understands Amphiarus' body replacing the reader's prior perception of the seer. I would also suggest that the meaning "altered from its previous state" (*OLD*, *novus* 9b)<sup>34</sup> likewise enables the perception of the allegory's presence if the reader regards *novum* as a substantive use of the adjective in apposition to *corpus* (8.4–5): *mirantur . . . / tela et equos corpusque novum* ("They gaze in awe at the arms, the horses, and at the body, altered from his previous state [as far as you, the reader, are concerned]"). *Novus*, however, can indicate more than the existence here of the allegory of masculine subjectivity. When an additional meaning, "subversive or seditious (of plans, activities, etc.)" (*OLD*, *novus* 10b),<sup>35</sup> is understood with *corpus*, the phrase *corpus novum* moves from marking allegory's presence to making perceptible the repetitive process of the realization of Roman manhood. As noted earlier (above, 308), the man's body in the rhetorical handbooks was the object of an anxious orthopedics. Gunderson notes that the body was seen as "always on the verge of failing," in possession of "its own queer possibilities" (2000: 69). Indeed, he elsewhere compares Quintilian's (and his students') approach to the body to that of a Plautine master faced with a clever slave (2000: 61). As the site from which failure will come, the body is ever in need of more *cura*

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Connolly 1998: 133–137 and Joshel 1992.

<sup>33</sup> *Novus* often refers to a replacement in the works of Statius: see, for example, 1.141, 3.279, 5.744, 11.657, 12.633, 12.808; *Achil.* 1.9; *Silv.* 1.1.34, 1.2.188, 1.4.22, 3.4.48, 4.1.8, 4.1.14, 4.2.61.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. 4.430, 9.741; *Achil.* 1.9, 1.930; *Silvae* 4.1.14.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. 2.108, 4.247, 5.744, 8.66, 8.373, 10.163, and *Achil.* 1.303.

because the more regulation there is the more things there are to go wrong.<sup>36</sup> Coming back to Amphiaraus as a “subversive/seditious” body, the reader will see the repetitive actions overseen by *cura* that constitute Roman manhood. Hell’s horrified inhabitants stand in for both the concerned rhetorical theorist identified by Gunderson and a man’s will to be manly as they compel the body to produce its illegitimacies for correction—corrections to be made to the measure of a deathless ideal of masculine mastery. Indeed, the political dimension of this meaning for *novus* is most apt. The improperly disciplined body is that which will undo the public face of the *vir* and render him ineffective in relations with other *viri*; his *auctoritas* will have been subverted.

#### VIII. MORS ALIIS

Calvin Thomas (1996: 18) writes of the warrior-inflected masculinity of the twentieth century (relevant also to the manhood we see constituted in Roman society and in Statius’ Amphiaraus):

The male body itself is rigidly overcoded as a lethal weapon . . . . [D]eath becomes not a telos of final rest but rather the ideal of the masculine/dominative mode of subjective agency, an ideal of “being-death,” speaking the death that speaks in me to others—an ideal that inhabits and governs the construction of masculine mastery.

According to Thomas, a man’s sense of himself as a subject in the world of other subjects is that he is a warrior who brings death to others. (Thus, for example, Statius describes Amphiaraus as being “like a death-bringing season” [*ceu letifer annus*], or plague,<sup>37</sup> at 7.709.) Death for the warrior does not mark the end of life’s struggle; it provides, rather, an image toward which his actions, symbolic and literal, point: he aspires to death and, therefore, to bring it. Thomas also connects this outward-directed hostility to inner mental processes that produce the man in the first place with the words “speaking the death that speaks in me to others.” Murderousness as a condition of masculine subjectivity comes both from the man’s cognizance of his own mortality and from the life-denying, repetitive, and reflexive cruelties that attend the construction of masculine subjectivity. Writing again of death as a guiding image for masculine subjectivity, Thomas quantifies the relationship of manhood thus guided to a man’s body and the bodies of his opponents (1996: 108): “Working on the vulnerability of bodies but never compelled to have one of its own, death would be the ultimate, invulnerable subject position . . . , a clean machine in search of the killable other.” Thomas here asserts that a manhood that takes death as a model for its subject position will count as nothing the life of its body (as a perfectly responsive machine, it is not

<sup>36</sup> Gunderson elsewhere states this point more fully (2000: 74): “the proliferation of body parts examined by no means serves as a promise of authority for the student as he crosses off items on his to-do list. Instead, the more his body is known in detail, the more it is liable to failures and in need of prohibitions and regulations. The expanded analysis of the body is less helpful than it is monitory.”

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *Aen.* 3.139.

alive at all) and find a plenitude of vulnerabilities in the mortal contingencies of others.

Returning to Amphiarus, the reader will see him taking up the position of death as he commences with the manly accomplishment of slaughter. The battlefield inviolability granted by Apollo allows the reader to associate Amphiarus with the "ultimate, invulnerable subject position" of death that "work[s] on the vulnerability of [other] bodies" while exempt from this same vulnerability. Furthermore, ambiguity in lines 7.699–700 (*certus et ipse necis, vires fiducia leti / suggerit*, "He is certain of violent death. Confidence in death brings strength to bear") suggests that Amphiarus speaks, as it were, the death that speaks in him to others. The uncertainty that these lines can occasion (i.e., is he certain of his own violent death? is he certain he will bring it to others? or is it both?) nicely limns the pervasiveness of death as an ideal both for the subjectivity of a *vir* and for his relations with other men. Indeed, the fact that Amphiarus sees his fighting and death as destined (e.g., 3.646–647) allegorizes the gender system's demand that men be warriors. In a reversible trope, gender is destiny and the fates possess gender's power.<sup>38</sup>

In sum, then, Amphiarus' embrace of warrior manhood is in a mutually constitutive relationship with Roman manhood. On the one hand, the investment of Roman men in a competitive, martial ethos enables the reader to see Amphiarus' transformation into a warrior as a representation of this manhood. Conversely, on the other hand, the story of Amphiarus—because it is epic and identified with death—lends heroic and transcendental glamor to a Roman man's efforts to equal the model that guides gender performance.

#### IX. CONCLUSION

A reader may well ask what it means that death looms so large in an epic whose poet speaks directly of his hope for its immortality (12.810–819). I propose that the pervasive presence of death in the *Thebaid* functions as a self-conscious problematization of any attempt to secure immortality through *res heroicae*. My reading of the poem has revealed that the poet's and hero's dealings with divinity and inviolability lead to lordship of the dead (an ambiguous success) or to an exterminated embodiment. A reader discovers roads leading to darkness and, ominously in the context of an epic poem, silence; surveying the slowly expiring Amphiarus, Pluto wants to know who told the silent ones, the shades, of life (*quis rupit tenebras vitaeque silentes / admonet?*, 8.35–36). This reading of the poem suggests that self-abnegation and degrading slaughter of others do not bring about the presence they promise and that there comes, instead, a shockingly sudden and irrevocable silence of death.

On display in the *Thebaid*, then, is a penetrating investigation into the costs of heroism and manhood. Indeed, by associating himself with both hero and

<sup>38</sup>For more on reversible tropes, see Hinds 1998: 10–16.



god, the poet is forthright about his own implication in that which he criticizes. But critique of *res heroicae* and implication of the poet in this critique are not the whole story; the reader, as we have seen, will discover positive aspects in poet, hero, and god. The poet displays moments of tenderness; Amphiaraus does resist the war; Pluto possesses perceptible compassion. These presences suggest that constructive and life-giving impulses are implicated in the drive for death and destruction.

At the end of the epic, by way of further and final example, the poet's profession of inability to narrate the griefs of the Argive women (and his subsequent narration of them) enables the reader to see a figuration of these positive aspects. The poet begins by professing inability to narrate these griefs (12.797–799):

*non ego, centena si quis mea pectora laxet  
voce deus, tot busta simul vulgique ducumque,  
tot pariter gemitus dignis conatibus aequem*

Even if some god were to let loose from my heart a one-hundred-fold voice, I could not equal with worthy attempt so many simultaneous funeral pyres of the people and leaders, so many simultaneous groans.

In spite of this profession of inability, however, description of the grievous aftermath follows. This description contains an emotional triple repetition of *Arcada* that casts doubt on the assertion of inability as the poetry represents the grief of all over the loss of the handsome Parthenopaeus (12.805–807):

*Arcada quo planctu genetrix Erymanthia clamet,  
Arcada, consumpto servantem sanguine vultus,  
Arcada, quem geminae pariter flevire cohortes.*

[I could not equal in my verse] how his Erymanthine mother cries "Parthenopaeus," "Parthenopaeus" who preserves his looks though his blood is gone, the "Parthenopaeus" over whom both armies cry equally.

Here, again, we have evidence of something more positive in this poem that has memorialized so many *nefanda*, whose genre attributes value to things productive of grief, whose author is implicated in a death-driven economy he regrets. The poet demonstrates that he has the ability to do that which he has said he could not do, at least indirectly. The question, then, is why the indirection? Why not grieve openly, as it were?

In the first place, Statius makes a statement of generic affiliation when he says that he will not be able to narrate this grief. As Hinds and others have pointed out, Statius' profession of inability has a pedigree that stretches all the way back to Homer's own profession of inability when faced with the task of narrating the catalogue in Book 2 of the *Iliad* (2.488–490).<sup>39</sup> Both Homer and Statius are

<sup>39</sup> See Hinds 1998: 35–47, 94–95; Coleman 1988: 86, n. 4.2.8.

able to surmount the difficulty, of course. The profession followed by successful dispatch of the task at hand is a marker of the epic genre. But the reader, even as he or she recognizes a relation to Homer and other poets, can also relate this statement to manhood.

Death-inflected values mark epic poetry and manhood. Grief, tenderness, and love all have the capacity to challenge these values as they both generate questions and suggest that a plot should go differently, that a subjectivity should have different goals. When Statius metapoetically figures the boundaries of the epic genre through his assertion of the inability of his verse to encompass grief, he also figures through these same metapoetics the boundaries of warrior manhood. But as in his depiction of the poet via Pluto and Amphiaraus, the story does not end here. As these male characters exhibit investments both in death-directed activities and in attitudes and actions directed toward life, so in this particular moment of grief (which was supposed to be unsayable) Statius figures the unavoidable presence of contingency, life, and love in the company of the eternal, death, and hateful strife.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Perceiving lament in the *Thebaid* as a reproach against the gods for injustice, Elaine Fantham (1999: 232) sees Statius delivering a message that "damn[s] civil war as unheroic, antiepic." While granting her excellent point that the laments reproach the gods, these laments nonetheless are in hexameters and are found in an epic poem. I prefer to step back and view the *praxis* of the poem in its totality. I do not see Statius telling the reader that the fighting is unheroic. I see him, instead, saying of all the action in the poem, "this is heroic, this is epic."

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