

*furor illa et movit Erinys: The Presentation and Agency of Tisiphone in
Statius' Thebaid*

By

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to provide new insight into the Fury Tisiphone, who prominently appears in Statius' *Thebaid*. I examine the development of the *Erinyes* from its earliest origins in Homer to, as I argue, its literary zenith in Statius. Such an approach demonstrates how Tisiphone's depiction by Statius was informed by his epic predecessors, yet how her role in the *Thebaid* was unique and more comprehensive than other characterizations of the Furies in Greek or Latin literature. My intent is for scholars to gain a new appreciation for the power of Tisiphone, a vital character of the *Thebaid*, her role in the poem, and how that role compares with other accounts from ancient literature.

Introduction

The Furies, otherwise known as the *Erinyes* in Greek literature, were divine beings exacting retribution for wrongs and bloodguilt especially in the family. They were often associated with disasters such as disease, madness, or severe pollution.

Customarily, they carried out the curses of a mother or father, or personify those curses.¹

The negative function of the *Erinyes* as powers of death predominates in not only the popular imagination of Greek and Roman audiences but also of medieval and modern audiences.² In the *Eumenides*, Aeschylus refers to them daughters of Night (*Nyx*),³ and introduces them to the stage revoltingly dressed in black, wingless, and with snakes for hair.⁴ According to Hesiod's genealogy in the *Theogony*, however, they sprung from Earth, made pregnant by Uranus' blood,⁵ thus owing their birth to the original familial crime of Zeus castrating his father Uranus. Starting from Virgil's *Aeneid*, there are only three Furies, and their names are Tisiphone, Allecto, and Megaera. In Cantos 8 and 9 of Dante's *Inferno*, the destructive guardianship of Tisiphone, Allecto, Megaera, and Medusa threatens Virgil's authority as a guide and protector of Dante. The Furies' power as protectors of Hell and tormentors of the damned likewise continues with Milton's *Paradise Lost*, in which the 'harpy-footed Furies' lead the condemned to eternal damnation.⁶ In T.S. Eliot's play *The Family Reunion*, the *Eumenides*, similar to their role in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, pursue the main character Harry, who killed his wife. In modern popular culture, the Furies also famously occur as icons of death and avenging goddesses

¹ *Il.* 9.571, 9.454, 11.280, 21.412; *Od.* 2.135; Hes. *Theog.* 472; Aesch. *Sept.* 70; *Eum.* 417.

² For the earliest reference to the *Erinyes* as powers of death, see Hes. *Theog.* 217-222; *Eum.* 125.

³ *Eum.* 321 f., 416.

⁴ Aesch. *Choephoroe* 1048-1050; *Eum.* 48 f.

⁵ *Theog.* 185.

⁶ *Paradise Lost* 2.597-603.

in Rick Riordan's novel *The Lightning Thief* and Neil Gaiman's comic book series *The Sandman*. While there has been a vibrant reception of the Furies from the Middle Ages to modernity, such a reception of

Tisiphone, one of the three Furies, along with her sisters Megaera and Allecto, frequently appears in Latin literature. Her name is most likely derived from a combination of the Greek words τίσις ('vengeance') and φονή ('murder'). Like her Greek counterparts, Tisiphone likewise punished transgressions against both mortal and divine, especially the crimes of murder, parricide, and fratricide. In Book 6 of the *Aeneid*, she is described as the guardian of Tartarus, girded in a blood-red robe.⁷ Armed with her grim serpents and the aid of her sisters, Tisiphone pursues crowds of guilty souls into Tartarus.⁸ In Book 4 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Tisiphone is described as an inhabitant of Dis who wears a dripping red robe and who has a serpent coiled around her waist. At the behest of Juno, Tisiphone drives Athamas and Ino mad with the⁹ breath of a serpent extracted from her hair and poison made from the foam of Cerberus' mouth and Echidna's venom.¹⁰ In both Virgil's *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Tisiphone is limited as a servant of the underworld, confined to do the bidding of a more dominant deity.¹¹ Likewise, her sister Allecto is invoked by Juno and cut short by the goddess midway through her actions (7.552ff.). As David Vessey has rightfully noted, the Fury's limitation as an attendant to a more powerful figure changes with Statius' *Thebaid*, since Tisiphone "enters the world at the behest of man and her activity continues throughout

⁷ Vir. *Aen.* 6.555.

⁸ Vir. *Aen.* 6.571.

⁹ Vessey (1973), pg. 75.

¹⁰ Ovid *Met.* 4.464-511.

¹¹ Pluto in the case of the *Aeneid* and Juno in the case of the *Metamorphoses*.

the epic... She has become a *figura* of violence and madness, a personification of *odium* and *furor*; she is an objectified embodiment of Oedipus' spiritual state". While Tisiphone may not be unique to the *Thebaid*, Statius alters the features of the Fury in ways that were previously unseen in Greek or Latin literature. It is in the *Thebaid* that Statius bestows upon Tisiphone the most considerable extent of her functions in epic poetry. Not only is she a denizen of the underworld, as in the *Metamorphoses* and *Aeneid*, but she is also a muse who carries out the curse of Oedipus against Eteocles and Polynices, and thus becomes a pivotal character in the poem's narrative. Furthermore, we can read her role as that of an internal poet who usurps control of the story from Statius when he falters at the beginning of his poem. Finally, Tisiphone is a perverse actor whose most gruesome feat is to drive the hero Tydeus to cannibalism before his deification.

Tisiphone's unlimited control over the *Thebaid* is representative of the greater competition between the underworld and the gods of Olympus, a theme that has been studied by Philip Hardie. In his analysis of post-Virgilian epic, Hardie has focused on the influence of the underworld and chthonic forces on the Theban and Argive conflict.¹² Divine forces, such as Tisiphone, who embodies the destructive energy of the underworld, and Jupiter, the king of the gods and the ruler of Olympus, consistently compete in the *Thebaid* to assert their control over the realm of men and lessen the distinction between beast, man, and god. Throughout the epic, Jupiter and other Olympian gods lament the impiety of humanity and attempt to elevate the heroes such as Tydeus, Atys, and Amphiaraus to godlike status. The will and energy of Olympus find as its primary competitor the destructive forces of the underworld, represented by

¹² Hardie (1993).

Tisiphone. Of the two realms in the *Thebaid*, Avernus is the more significant source of energy. Olympus represents stasis, peace, and rest. Chthonic forces, on the other hand, represent ceaseless movement, war, and emotional turmoil.¹³ While Hardie's ideas about the underworld are influential for scholars of post-Virgilian epic, his research is limited in detail about the *Thebaid*, because he is writing about several post-Virgilian poems. As such, although he writes about the effect of hellish powers in the *Thebaid*, he does not fully explore the characters like Tisiphone and Megaera, who are vital to the success of the underworld in the poem.

My work builds upon Hardie's more broad ideas about the underworld and Olympus by doing a more detailed investigation of Tisiphone's role throughout the poem. Avernus, with Tisiphone as its agent, is more invasive and more disruptive of the equilibrium in the *Thebaid* than Olympus. By Book 11, Tisiphone, under the orders of Oedipus (Book 1) and Hades (Book 8), successfully outsmarts the Olympians with the help of her sister Megaera, and watches the climactic duel between Eteocles and Polynices. This fratricidal duel represents the final staging of chthonic forces on earth in the epic since Tisiphone can range over humanity unopposed, standing aside to delight in the sight of men fighting without the intervention of the divine or the chthonic. The calamitous authority of Tisiphone in Statius' *Thebaid* functions as a primary force in the epic.

In this thesis, I will explore the various ways in which Tisiphone influences the *Thebaid*. In Chapter 1, I argue that, in invoking Tisiphone with his perverse prayer, Oedipus is akin to a poet summoning a Muse for divine inspiration. After her muse-like

¹³ Hardie (1993), pg. 60.

introduction into the poem, Tisiphone assumes control over the events of the *Thebaid*, exercising poetic authority. In order to understand and explain Statius' innovation of Tisiphone's role as both poet and Muse, I will explore in Chapter 2 the development of the Fury, especially in stories of Oedipus, Eteocles, and Polynices, from Homer to Statius. Such an evolution over nearly a millennium, I believe, will inform a better understanding of Tisiphone's unique role in Statius' *Thebaid*. Finally, in chapter 3, building upon the framework of the first two chapters, I intend to explore Statius' indebtedness to his literary predecessors, especially Virgil and his *Aeneid*. With the context of the Fury first established by Latin epicists like Virgil and Ovid, Statius once again innovates the position of Tisiphone and her importance in Latin literature. All three chapters, I believe, will offer a comprehensive account of Tisiphone's role as the perverse Fury of Oedipus in the *Thebaid*, whose characterization calls upon and distorts the traditional depiction of the *Erinyes* in extant Greek literature.

Chapter 1 – Tisiphone as Muse and Internal Poet

Introduction

In the *proemium* to the *Thebaid* (1.1-45), Statius struggles to assert his authorial control over the narrative of his epic. After invoking Pierian fire and Clio for a heroic or worthy beginning to the *Thebaid*, Statius abruptly begins the narrative proper with Oedipus, wrathful in his hatred of his two traitorous sons. Oedipus' entrance into the narrative, immediately following Statius' invocation of the Muses, is abrupt and foreshadows the un-heroic nature of the *Thebaid*. In this chapter, I argue that Oedipus, who exists in a liminal and corrupted state, operates outside of the heroism of the *proem*, assumes control of the narrative, and calls upon a divine enactor of his vengeance. After hearing the prayer of Oedipus, Tisiphone travels to Earth and brings about the deaths of many Theban and Argive heroes. Her influence in the epic is unparalleled by any other character in the *Thebaid*, as she manipulates Polynices and Eteocles to bring about their fatal fratricidal duel. I contend that, in her desire to bring about a resolution to the central issues of the poem and subsequent success in doing so, Tisiphone establishes her control over the narrative and thereby solidifies her role as an internal poet of the epic.

Invocation of the Muses

Gianpiero Rosati argues that “compared with the practice of post-Ovidian poets, the particular emphasis Statius assigns to the Muses, and more generally to the theme of poetic inspiration, is striking.”¹⁴ Furthermore, he suggests “the Muses and the divinities that traditionally share with them the function of inspiring poets (Apollo, Bacchus, Mercury, etc.) are in effect symbols, or figures, of a self-reflecting discourse about the

¹⁴ Rosati (2002), pg. 229.

creation of poetry, metonymies of literary discourse.”¹⁵ I argue that Statius does not seek inspiration from the Muses for a theme for the *Thebaid*, but rather seeks a suitable starting point for his decided upon subject matter. Rather than providing the conventional epic *proemium* invoking the Muses for divine inspiration, Statius lets his reader know that he has already been given the divinely originated gift of inspiration, which Statius suggests in *Pierius menti calor incidit*. According to the first lines of his epic:

Fraternas acies alternaque regna profanis
decertata odiis sontesque evolvere Thebas
Pierius menti calor incidit. unde iubetis
ire, deae?

“Pierian passion falls upon my mind to unfold
Fraternal conflicts and alternating kingships
Fought over with unnatural hate and guilty Thebes.
From what place do you command me to begin, goddesses? (Stat. *Theb.* 1-4)”

The mention of the *Pierius calor* in line three, a reference to the earliest sources of epic poetry locating the Muses at Pieria, gives immediate attention to the role of the Muses in the formation of the subject matter for the *Thebaid*. The presence of the Muses and their direct influence on Statius highlight that the inspiration for the *Thebaid* is more complicated than the epics of his predecessors. The ambiguity surrounding the introduction of the *Thebaid* lies in Statius’ lack of clarity about his starting point, despite being divinely inspired.

In the first four lines, Statius lays out general themes that will be discussed in greater detail throughout his work: fraternal conflicts (between Eteocles and Polynices), their alternating kingships carried out by their hatred of one another, and guilty Thebes. The first two lines of the *proemium* suggest to the reader that Statius has already

¹⁵ Ibid.

formulated the subject matter that he finds necessary to mention in his work. Despite receiving these motifs from the divine inspiration that he alludes to with ‘*Pierius menti calor incidit*,’ Statius still appears hesitant to assign a proper beginning point for the *Thebaid*. In lines three and four, Statius implores the Muses to reveal the *unde*, a particular starting point that could serve as a beginning to the seemingly endless saga of Thebes that will be the subject of his narrative. Statius immediately recognizes the complexity of the material and the number of texts, which have already narrated similar tales. While Statius does not mention his predecessors, he admits on line 7 that there is a “*longa retro series*,”¹⁶ which recalls previous stories of Thebes and brings attention to the problem he faces in introducing his subject matter. Other works such as the *Cyclic Thebaid*, *Epigoni*, *Seven Against Thebes*, *Oedipus Rex*, *Antigone*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, *Metamorphoses*, and Seneca’s *Oedipus* have extensively covered the story of Thebes and the cursed house of Oedipus. Not only is the *series* of the *Thebaid longa*, but it is also *longa retro*, dating back to Homer. I would argue that the mention of *series* brings to mind Statius’ struggle to find an entry point into the Theban saga. Despite being compelled by Pierian passion and frenzy to compose a Theban tale, Statius struggles to provide a *series* for his introduction and admits that the sequencing of events is so complex and well covered by other authors, including his Latin predecessors like Ovid and Seneca.

Sarah Myers has noted that “through his opening dialogue with the Muses Statius dramatizes his choice of topic, as his control over the narrative is challenged both by external influences and by the intractability and immenseness of his theme, which refuses to be limited.”¹⁷ According to Myers, the Muses (and their induced madness), the poet’s

¹⁶ The sequence of events goes far back.

¹⁷ Myers (2015), pg. 32.

mind, and the emperor Domitian all serve as possible conflicting pressures vying to govern the narrative. Myers is correct in identifying some of the tensions that Statius experiences in the composition of his epic; however, Statius also experiences external pressure from the underworld, which later usurps control of the narrative. Like the *Thebaid*, whose subject is the contestation of authority, the competing mastery that Statius experiences among the external influences over the direction of his poem suggests a parallel between his poetics and the themes of his narrative. Even in the *proemium* to his epic, Statius alludes to the difficulty that he experiences in asserting his authorial control. Likewise, just as Statius contests with the Muses to provide him a suitable starting point for the poem, the Muses contest the authority of the underworld, a theme which becomes especially relevant later in the poem but immediately presents itself at the beginning of the poem. Denis Feeney speaks of three competing structures in the poem (divine, human, underworld), observing that “the first 300 lines deploy each of the three realms in turn (Oedipus 1.46ff., Tisiphone 88ff., Jupiter 197ff.)”.¹⁸ While the contestation of authority between these three realms is apparent in the first 300 lines of the *Thebaid*, I would argue that it is first alluded to in Statius’ *proemium*, where he makes use of *praeteritio* to underscore the conflict between the realms.

Before the introduction of Tisiphone, Oedipus, Eteocles, Polynices, and Jupiter in Book 1 of the *Thebaid*, Statius makes use of *praeteritio*. In the *proemium*, Statius claims that he will pass over alternate Theban foundation myths. He claims that he will not recount the Sidonian rape, the origins of the Thebans, Cadmus searching the seas, the

¹⁸ Feeney (1991), pg. 349.

story of Amphion, Bacchus' wrath against a kindred city. He ends with his vow to avoid the topic of Juno's anger against Ino and Athamas:

quod saevae Iunonis opus, cui sumpserit arcus
infelix Athamas, cur non expauerit ingens
Ionium socio casura Palaemone mater.

“What work of savage Juno, by which unhappy Athamas had selected his bow, for what reason did the unnatural mother of Palaemon not become frightened at the Ionian, having plummeted with her son” (Stat. *Theb.* 1.12-14).

These three lines are both a mixing of Virgil's *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The *opus of saevae Iunonis* references the deeds of savage Juno, an epithet of the goddess, in the *Aeneid*, but also recalls the story of Ino and Athamas in Book 4 of the *Metamorphoses*. In the *Aeneid*, Juno is an agent of madness and the main goddess of vengeance. However, in the *Metamorphoses*, Tisiphone is the agent of Juno's wrath and the goddess of divine retribution, as can be seen in the story of Ino and Athamas. In his questioning from above, Statius mentions Juno as the agent of Ino and Athamas' story, when, in Ovid's account, it was Tisiphone who played this role. The fact that Statius deliberately ignores the agency of Tisiphone invites the reader to re-visit the story in Ovid. While this *praeteritio* exhibits Statius' indebtedness to his epic predecessors, it also alludes to the presence of the Furies in his epic. In Virgil's *Aeneid*, Juno is also described as a savage goddess whose unceasing anger attempts to bring about the destruction of Aeneas and his crew:

Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris
Italiam, fato profugus, Laviniaque venit
litora, multum ille et terris iactatus et alto
vi superum saevae memorem Iunonis ob iram;

“I sing of arms and a man, who first came from the shores of Troy to Italy, a fugitive by fate, and to the Lavinian

banks, often tossed both on land and at sea by the violence
of the divine on account of the mindful wrath of savage Juno” (Vir. *Aen.* 1-4).

The *saevae Iunonis* of Statius seems to be in direct reference to the opening lines of the *Aeneid*. Statius’ reuse of the adjective *saevae*, which is an epithet for Juno in the *Aeneid*, recalls Juno’s role as avenger in the *Aeneid*. For the first six books of the *Aeneid*, Juno is unsuccessful in bringing about retribution for her hatred of Aeneas and the Trojans. By Book VII, however, Juno enlists the help of Allecto in exacting her vengeance. With the Fury’s service, Juno is successful in sowing discord between Amata and Aeneas, leading to war between Latinus and the Trojans and resulting in the most significant conflict that Aeneas encounters in the epic.

The numerous starting points for Statius’ *Thebaid* not only illustrate the enormity of the Theban saga but also underscore Statius’ power in selecting relevant components for his epic.¹⁹ In referencing these tales, which are covered in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*²⁰, Statius alludes to previous literary treatments of the Theban saga and their role in the formation of his epic. As McNelis has noted, Statius does use components at the beginning of his poem as secondary fields of reference to the primary narrative, despite his *praeteritio*.²¹ I would argue that Statius’ reference to Ino and Athamas in line 13, which seems to receive a passing mention in the *proemium*, functions as a critical field of reference for the development of the underworld in the *Thebaid*. Specifically, the mention of Ino and Athamas in the *Thebaid*, which references their tale in Book 4 of the

¹⁹ Ford (1992), pgs. 67-72 and McNelis (2007), pgs. 50-51 both discuss the inherent labor of Statius confronting his literary tradition and selecting relevant parts of that tradition.

²⁰ For Cadmus sowing Dragon’s teeth into the Theban field of Mars, see *Met.* 3.110-123. For Dionysus’ wrath against the city of Thebes, see Euripides’ *Bacchae*. For Juno’s wrath against Semele, the mortal mother of Dionysus, see *Met.* 3.268-342. For the tale of Ino and Athamas, see *Met.* 4.597-601.

²¹ McNelis (2007), pg. 51.

Metamorphoses, alludes to the power of Tisiphone, who was a vital agent in the destruction of the couple.

Statius' inclusion of the story of Ino and Athamas evokes the story of the couple as Ovid tells it in the *Metamorphoses*²². Alison Keith has argued that Statius' *Thebaid* could "be interpreted, in part, as an exploration of (and response to) the themes, settings, characters, and literary genealogy of Ovid's Theban narrative."²³ Her seminal research, which focused on Statius' *proemium* and its connections to Ovid's Theban narrative, identified Ino and Athamas as two literary characters in Ovid who receive additional attention in the *Thebaid*.²⁴ Keith primarily focused on the *proemium* to the *Thebaid* and more specifically how the *praeteritio* of Statius' epic was influenced in part by the Ovidian tale of Thebes in the *Metamorphoses*. Keith also drew attention to Tisiphone's importance in the story of Ino and Athamas in *Metamorphoses* 4.451-511 and her connection to the *Thebaid*. According to Keith, the function of Tisiphone in the *Metamorphoses* influenced her counterpart in the *Thebaid*. In the Ovidian tale, Juno becomes incensed at the surrogate couple of the young Dionysus²⁵ and ultimately resolves to exact her revenge with the help of Tisiphone. Tisiphone, functioning as the agent of Juno's wrath, infects the couple with frenzied madness. Athamas, unable to escape the vengeful Fury, believes that his wife Ino and his children have been transformed into animals. Immediately after Ino and Athamas' transformation, Athamas shouts for his comrades to spread hunting nets in the woods (his house) because he

²² Statius' debt to Ovid in his characterization has been well discussed by Feeney (1991) 343-4 and 346-9.

²³ Keith (2000), pg. 151.

²⁴ Ibid, pg. 158.

²⁵ According to mythological accounts of Dionysus' birth, Zeus rescued the unborn Dionysus and sewed him into his leg after the death of Semele. After carrying him to term, Zeus entrusted baby Dionysus to his half-brother Hermes, who took Dionysus to Semele's sister (Ino) and her husband (Athamas) to raise the child secretly.

thought he saw a lioness and her two cubs (*Met.* 4.512-514).²⁶ Athamas, who changes into a ravenous hunter, suspects that his wife and two sons have changed into lions and that his house has been transformed into a forest. In his fit of madness, Athamas kills his child Learchus and chases after Ino. As her frenzied husband pursues her, Ino throws herself into the sea with her son Melicertes. Pitying the fate of Ino and her child, Venus and Poseidon later immortalize Ino as the sea goddess Leucothea and Melicertes as Palaemon. Ovid's inclusion of Tisiphone, a figure that seems to be an Ovidian innovation in the accounts of Ino and Athamas²⁷, foregrounds the Fury as a chthonic force which disrupts the equilibrium of man through madness.

The connection to Ovid is made more explicit in *Theb.* 1.121-122. As Tisiphone ascends from Tartarus to Thebes, the mother of Palaemon, Ino (deified as Leucothea) snatches Palaemon from his dolphin as she spots Tisiphone:

ipsa suum genetrix curvo delphine vagantem
abripuit frenis gremioque Palaemona pressit.

That mother (herself) snatched her own Palaemon from the reins as he was wandering on his curved dolphin and pressed him to her bosom (*Stat. Theb.* 1.121-122).

From this, it seems clear that Statius had an understanding of the Ovidian Ino and Athamas and makes reference to his story from the *Metamorphoses* by including the responses of Ovid's characters to Tisiphone in his narrative. Like characters in the *Thebaid*, Ino and Athamas are ultimately left to cede to the calamitous authority of Tisiphone. Nevertheless, the fear that Ino, now the deified Leucothea, shows at the

²⁶ Protinus Aeolides media furibundus in aula / clamat "io, comites, his retia tendite silvis! / hic modo cum gemina visa est mihi prole leana.

²⁷ Apollodorus' *Library* 1.80-84 and Hyginus' *Fabulae* 2 offer alternate accounts of the death of Ino and Melicertes. However, in neither narrative does Tisiphone appear. The madness of Athamas seems to have been attributed to natural causes, rather than divine or chthonic intervention.

presence of Tisiphone seems to acknowledge the role that the chthonic goddess played in her destruction in the *Metamorphoses*. Ino's reaction in the *Thebaid* indicates that she is aware of her story as it is told in the *Metamorphoses* and is cautious of replicating its conclusion. Consequently, I believe that Ino's presence and actions in the *Thebaid* are self-referential and show Statius' acknowledgment of his predecessor. Ino's fear connects the events of Book 4 of the *Metamorphoses* with the *proemium* and later developments of the *Thebaid*.

In their submission to chthonic and divine vengeance, Ino undergoes a monstrous transformation into a wild animal, and Athamas kills his son Learchus, mistaking him for a lion cub. As a result of their madness, Ino and Athamas lose any distinction between their humanity and bestiality. This transformation would not have been possible without the intervention of Tisiphone. Tisiphone's role as an avenger of Juno's divine wrath in the *Metamorphoses* is similar to her role in the *Thebaid*. Like her Ovidian counterpart, the Statian Tisiphone is also called to bring about vengeance. The chthonic retribution that Tisiphone exacts on the domain of man causes bestial transformations, similar to those of Ino and Athamas, which ultimately bring about the collapse of Theban and Argive society. In the *proemium* to the *Thebaid*, Statius names the *opus Iunonis* as the primary cause of Ino and Athamas' madness, when Tisiphone was the true actor in the story of Ino and Athamas from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. It is significant that even though Statius calls attention to Juno when telling this story, readers of Ovid would also be thinking of Tisiphone here because of her role in the story as it is described in the *Metamorphoses*. By bringing up Ino and Athamas, Statius wants his readers to recall Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and specifically his mention of Tisiphone as the agent of Juno's

wrath. In his highly reflective themes from his predecessors mentioned in this passage, along with the deliberate overlooking of the agency of the Furies in the exacting of Juno's vengeance, Statius invites his reader to re-visit the stories of Allecto and Tisiphone in Virgil and Ovid (respectively), and alludes to the presence of furies as exactors of divine vengeance later in the epic. Thus Ovid's story of Ino and Athamas provides an alternate field of reference to the Theban narrative in the *Thebaid*, by which one can view the development of Tisiphone and other chthonic forces in the poem.

After his brief *praeteritio*, Statius finally settles on a subject suitable for his epic: "limes mihi carminis esto / Oedipodae confusa domus" (Stat. *Theb.* 16-17).²⁸ Interestingly, the use of *limes* in line 16 does not suggest that Statius has settled upon a beginning for his Theban tale. On the contrary, the *limes* of Statius' *carmen* indicates that Statius has decided upon a limit to the subject matter of his poem, rather than discovering the *unde* previously hinted at on line 3. One can read these lines as a literal declaration of Statius' intended subject matter: Statius has been inspired to sing of Oedipus' sons (lines 1-2) and his choice is whether or not to take the story back to Thebes' origins (*praeteritio*) or to limit it to the house of Oedipus with no backstory (lines 16-17). However, I would suggest that by setting a boundary (*limes*) for his subject matter, but yet resisting the command that the Muses have given him, Statius is opening up a space to express his take on the familiar story of Oedipus. Rosati claims that Statius exhibits a self-conscious desire to act independent of the will of the Muses and stubbornly resists the divine inspiration he mentions at the beginning of his epic.²⁹ Statius' comments in lines 16 and 17 openly oppose the subject matter demanded by his sacred Muses. Statius,

²⁸ Let the limit of my poem be the disturbed house of Oedipus.

²⁹ Rosati (2002), pg. 229.

with the authoritative tone of the future imperative *esto*, will decide the *limes* of his epic, not the Muses.

The passivity of Statius, inspired by the *Pierius calor*, is further implied in his distracted mention of Domitian. Despite deciding upon a limit for his subject matter, Statius laments his inability to narrate the worthy achievements of Domitian. Ultimately, Statius consoles himself (and presumably Domitian) with his claim “tempus erit, cum Pierio tua fortior oestro / facta canam” (*Theb.* 32-33).³⁰ The reference to the *Pierio oestro* acting upon him not only recalls the *Pierius calor* on line 3, thus creating a ring composition with the opening lines, but also suggests the compulsion that Statius feels from the ‘inspiration’ of the Muses. Like Socrates, who acts as a gadfly always compelling Athens to make the philosophically and morally correct decisions, the Muses goad Statius into narrating about subject matter that they find suitable. Since the Muses have not yet compelled Statius to discuss Domitian, despite his utmost desire to do so, Statius must continue with his Theban epic.

With the distractions of the *praeteritio* and reference to Domitian, Statius recognizes that he still has not resolved the starting point for his poem. He thus/then invokes Clio, the Muse of history, to provide a suitable hero to discuss after the proemium:

quem prius heroum, Clio, dabis? immodicum irae
Tydea? laurigeri subitos an vatis hiatus?
urguet et hostilem propellens caedibus amnem
turbidus Hippomedon, plorandaque bella protervi
Arcados atque alio Capaneus horrore canendus.

Which of the heroes will you give first, Clio? Tydeus, excessive
In his anger? Or the sudden chasm of the laurelled prophet?
Wild Hippomedon also presses down on me, driving forward his enemy
The river with corpses and war of the reckless Arcadian should be lamented,
And Capaneus should be sung of with another dread (Stat. *Theb.* 1.41-45).

³⁰ A time will come when, more powerful with the Pierian gadfly, I will sing of your deeds.

In this passage, Statius calls to mind Tydeus, Amphiaraus, Hippomedon, Parthenopeus, and Capaneus. Despite listing five of the seven Argives responsible for the attack on Thebes, Statius omits Eteoclus, a figure included among the Seven in Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*, and Polynices, whether purposefully or otherwise. Certain commentators on the *Seven Against Thebes*, such as G.O. Hutchinson, have pointed out the difficulties in ascertaining the authenticity of Eteoclus to the Theban epic cycle.³¹ A.F. Garvie suggests that Eteoclus was an invention of Aeschylus, but Hutchinson casts doubt on this claim.³² Additionally, of the collection of Argive heroes, Eteoclus seems to be genealogically the least Argive of the Seven. Proetus, the king of Argos, shared his kingdom equally with Melampus and Bias: Capaneus was descended from Proetus, Amphiaraus from Melampus, and Adrastus, Hippomedon, and Parthenopeus from Bias. Tydeus and Polynices were joined into the line of Bias through marriage. Iphis, the father of Eteoclus, is sometimes the father-in-law of Capaneus and sometimes the father-in-law of Amphiaraus. Despite Eteoclus' inclusion in Aeschylus' account of the war in his *Seven Against Thebes*, an essential precedent for Statius' poem,³³ the hero is absent not only from Statius' opening catalogue of heroes but also from the rest of the epic. As a result, Statius' catalogue is incomplete.

Despite including only five characters in his catalogue, Statius seems to emphasize the well-recognized and well-understood Argive heroes in the Theban epic cycle. While most of the heroes provided perform controversial deeds, their stalwart valor in the epic

³¹ Garvie, pg. 117.

³² Ibid.

³³ The connection between the *Thebaid* and the *Seven Against Thebes* will be further discussed in the second chapter.

tradition is unmatched by other Argives. In his invocation to Clio, Statius anticipates a martial beginning to his epic. Such a martial opening is standard in epic, especially in the *Iliad*, so Statius' invocation of Clio does not break from typical epic tradition. However, in his reference to Tydeus, Capaneus, Amphiaraus, Parthenopeus, and Hippomedon, and his omission of a pivotal Argive like Polynices from his catalogue, I would suggest that Statius presents himself as less interested in the origins of the hostility between Polynices and Eteocles, as he had indicated in lines 16-17, and more interested in the militaristic events of the Seven.

Of particular note is Statius' inclusion of the word *heros* (*heroum*) on line 41, a word that commonly occurs in the *Aeneid* to refer to Aeneas³⁴, once in both Statius and Ovid to invoke Odysseus (*Laertius heros*)³⁵, and most frequently in the *Metamorphoses* to refer to the various Greek heroes, such as Cadmus, Orpheus, Heracles, Jason, and Achilles. The word seems to have a particular connection to heroes from the Greek tradition, particularly in its etymological connection to the Greek word ἥρωες, but also as it relates to the epic concept of heroism. Harry Peck suggests that the terms *heros* and ἥρωες refer to those individuals, either regarded as the offspring of gods or mortals, who were the most distinguished warriors of prehistoric times and distinguished themselves by their virtue and therefore deserved a higher distinction after their deaths.³⁶ I would generally agree with this definition of *heros*, given its use in conjunction with well-recognized and distinguished figures in epic like Odysseus and Aeneas. As a result, I would suggest that Statius is

³⁴ Virgil, *Aen.* 1.195, 5.543, 6.102, 192, 451.

³⁵ Stat., *Achilleid* 2.30 and Ovid, *Met.* 13.121 respectively.

³⁶ Peck, Harry Thurston, *Harpers Dictionary of Classical Antiquities*, s.v. heros, 1898.

attempting to find a suitable heroic beginning for the *Thebaid* in militaristic actions of the five Argive heroes he references to Clio.

Intervention of Oedipus

In his attempt to find a heroic starting point for the undertaking of his Theban epic, Statius is abruptly interrupted by the intervention of Oedipus. Not only is there a sudden end to Statius' line of questioning to Clio, but there also appears to be an end to his need for the *unde*, as mentioned on line 3. This interruption is the first troubling presence of the underworld in the *Thebaid* and sets the chthonic tone for Tisiphone's role as both a muse and poet for the events of the work.

The futurity of the Muses' invocation with the verbs and gerundives *iubetis* (line 3), *canam* (line 33), *dabis* (line 41), and *canendus* (line 45) is transferred into the pluperfect, imperfect, and historical present with the introduction of Oedipus into the narrative. Statius' use of the pluperfect, imperfect, and historical present tenses signifies a definite, past, and completed sense to the actions of Oedipus, whereas the previously used future tense denotes Statius' intended and indefinite purpose for the composition of his poem. The future tense also suggests potentiality, hinting at the unfulfilled wishes of Statius that are deferred by the intervention of Oedipus. Additionally, the necessity implied by the gerundives is lost with Oedipus' entrance. Finally, this change of tense also suggests the starting point for the historical narrative of Statius' epic. Despite anticipating that his poem would begin with the introduction of one of the well-recognized combatants involved in the *Seven Against Thebes* to suit his martial purposes, Statius is instead left with Oedipus, a hateful figure who lives out his life in a cave-like dwelling:

Impia iam merita scrutatus limina dextra
merserat aeterna damnatum nocte pudorem

Oedipodes longaque animam sub morte trahebat.
illum indulgentem tenebris imaeque recessu
sedis inaspectos caelo radiisque penates
servantem tamen assiduis circumvolat alis
saeva dies animi, scelerumque in pectore Dirae.

Oedipus had already probed his impious eyes with guilty
hand and sunk deep his shame condemned to everlasting night;
he dragged out his life in a long-drawn death.
He devotes himself to darkness, and in the lowest recess of
his abode he keeps his home on which the rays of heaven never look;
and yet the fierce daylight of his soul flits around him with unflagging
wings, and the Avengers of his crimes are in his heart. (Stat. *Theb.* 1.46-52).³⁷

Oedipus, who ‘dragged out his life under a long death,’³⁸ exists at the beginning of the *Thebaid* as a creature who has descended into darkness, isolated from sources of power. Statius’ Oedipus exists in a liminal state between life and death, condemning himself to a living death of eternal darkness. His desire to live in the recess of the deepest part of his home (*imaeque recessu sedis*) exhibits not only his corpse-like nature but also his association with the underworld. In contrast to the possible themes, characters, and starting points that Statius addresses in his *proemium*, the narrative is instead commandeered by the inhuman Oedipus. Statius’ attention to the location of Oedipus’ domain emphasizes the liminal space at the beginning of the account of Thebes. Not only has Oedipus secluded himself from the rest of Thebes, but he has also shut himself off from the sight of the divine. As Vessey has noted, Oedipus’ “whole being has become dehumanized and twisted; all that is left is a single, obsessive desire for *poena*, for his sons to share in the punishment that had befallen him.”³⁹ The *Thebaid* begins in a space that occupies the threshold of both the underworld and earth, thus immediately alluding

³⁷ Translation provided by Shackleton Bailey (2004).

³⁸ longaque animam sub morte trahebat (Stat. *Theb.* 1.48).

³⁹ Vessey (1973), pg. 75.

to the sinister connection between the two realms, which finds Oedipus as its understood intermediary. No longer the king of Thebes, Oedipus becomes a man possessed by ‘the Furies of the crimes in his heart.’⁴⁰

Much like Statius, who, at the beginning of the epic, is consumed by the inspiration of the divine and calls out to them to assist in his endeavor, Oedipus likewise calls upon Tisiphone in his frenzied state. As a result, Oedipus, who has assumed temporary control of the narrative, functions as a poet, similar to Statius, who calls upon Tisiphone to serve as both a Muse and an exactor of his filial curse, which bears many similar characteristics to an epic *proemium*.⁴¹ Oedipus begins his curse with an invocation to various chthonic deities:

‘Di, sontes animas angustaque Tartara poenis
qui regitis, tuque umbrifero Styx livida fundo,
quam video, multumque mihi consueta vocari
anne, Tisiphone, perversaque vota secunda:...

‘Gods who rule the guilty souls and Tartarus, too small for
punishments, and Styx, spiteful in your shaded depths,
which I see, and you Tisiphone, who are accustomed to being called by me often,
give me your nod and accompany my perverse prayer...’ (Stat. *Theb.* 1.56-59).

Oedipus’ invocation, much like the invocations of epic poets to their Muse(s), is meant to ensure the favor of his inspiring addressee. Furthermore, the curse offers an opportunity for Oedipus to verify his claims through divine authority, and elaborate on the formative part that the deities have played in his inspiration. Tisiphone in particular, in a role analogous to that of a Muse for a poet, is accustomed to being frequently called upon by Oedipus and attending to his will. In his invocation to Tisiphone, Oedipus claims that she nurtured him in the events of his past:

⁴⁰ scelerumque in pectore Dirae (Stat. *Theb.* 1.52).

⁴¹ For further discussion of Oedipus’ curse, see Ganiban (2007) 24-43.

si dulces furias et lamentabile matris
conubium gavisus ini noctemque nefandam
saepe tuli natosque *tibi*, scis ipsa, paravi.

“If I gladly obtained sweet madness and the lamentable marriage
of my mother, and I entered into the impious night often,
and I bore children *for you*, as you well know...” (Stat. *Theb.* 1.68-70).

Interestingly, Oedipus suggests that he was always an agent of the Fury, carrying out her bidding whenever necessary. Tisiphone raised Oedipus, nurtured him when he was exposed, helped him solve the riddle of the Sphinx, and instigated him to have his children with Jocasta. Statius’ use of *tibi* (line 70) emphasizes Tisiphone’s role in the calamitous fate of Oedipus.

Tisiphone, who is a surrogate of Oedipus, is simultaneously the master of his soul and destiny. If Tisiphone were responsible for the exposing of Oedipus, the death of Laius, the marriage of Oedipus and Jocasta, and the subsequent births of Ismene, Antigone, Eteocles, and Polynices, Tisiphone could also have orchestrated Oedipus’ vengeance against his sons before he even swore his oath. Tisiphone has a firm grasp on the affairs of mortals in the *Thebaid*, especially of Thebans. Like an epic Muse, who is ever-present in the inspiration of her poet, Tisiphone likewise accompanies and inspires Oedipus. However, the presence of chthonic figures resembling poets and Muses in the *exordium* of the poem invites the reader to re-consider Statius’ frustration at his inability to receive the inspiration from the Muses necessary to find a suitable starting point for his epic poem. Oedipus’ and Tisiphone’s appearances in the *Thebaid* signal that the gods of Olympus, who are slow to respond to the prayer of Oedipus later in Book 1, are also equally slow in responding to the invocation of Statius. Like the curse of Oedipus, which is more quickly heard and heeded by Tisiphone than Jupiter, the slow response of the

Muses to Statius' *proemium* ultimately leads to the intervention of chthonic forces in the poem. Starting from Oedipus, who by Book 1 has effectively surrendered to the chthonic authority of the Furies and subsequently lost any sign of his humanity, Tisiphone will further assert her control over the Thebans throughout the poem and thereby transform from resembling an epic Muse to assuming the role of an epic poet and creator of the narrative.

Introduction of Tisiphone

Before examining Tisiphone's introduction to the *Thebaid*, it is crucial to first re-evaluate the curse of Oedipus as an invocation of her. Scholars interested in the infernal elements of Statius' *Thebaid* often focus on the *nefas* that Oedipus prays for and its importance to Tisiphone's role in the epic. In his recent commentary, Stefano Briguglio says of *nefas*: "nefas è parola chiave del poema."⁴² Ganiban likewise attaches the same importance to *nefas*, especially as it contrasts with the *pietas* of the *Aeneid*.⁴³ Both scholars suggest that *nefas*, originally sought by Oedipus in his prayer (line 86), drives the work to its dramatic conclusion with the deaths of Eteocles and Polynices. While I would agree with the notion that *nefas* is vital to the *Thebaid* and its infernal elements, I would suggest that *nefas* is little more than a concept, which cannot affect the epic on its own. An external agent must bring about *nefas* in the *Thebaid*. Tisiphone, and her function in executing Oedipus' prayer, brings about the *nefas* that Oedipus prays for in *Theb.* 1.86. Without Tisiphone, the *nefas* that Briguglio and Ganiban imagine as being paramount to the chthonic development of the *Thebaid* would only be a wish.

⁴³ For the relevant discussion of Oedipus' curse and its inclusion of *nefas* see Ganiban, pg. 24-44.

Tisiphone has a unique role in the *Thebaid* – unlike other characters, she alone has the opportunity to affect actions in the poem and bring about a catastrophic conclusion to the narrative. Tisiphone’s effect over the *Thebaid* is akin to that of a poet; after Oedipus’ prayer, Tisiphone is given free rein in her ability to create and destroy elements in the epic as she sees fit. The first example of Tisiphone’s control over other characters in the *Thebaid* comes in the curse of Oedipus. As I mentioned earlier, the curse allows Oedipus to establish goodwill with Tisiphone and other infernal agents, similar to a poet to his poetic Muses, but it also reflects Tisiphone’s corruption of Oedipus. On line 59, Oedipus asks that Tisiphone accompany his perverse prayer “*Tisiphone, perversaque vota secunda.*” As Briguglio has noted, the use of *perversa* is a *hapax legomenon* in Statius, and thus worth investigating.⁴⁴ I would agree with Briguglio and Feeney’s suggestions that the inclusion of *perversa* with *vota* alludes to the chthonic nature of Oedipus’ curse since the prayer is pronounced by a father asking for the deaths of his two children, one at the hands of the other.⁴⁵ Vessey also notes that “Oedipus rightfully recognises that his prayers are ‘perverse’ (59), that is that they run contrary to natural affection.”⁴⁶ While the meaning of *perversa* is key to an understanding of the *vota*, the fact that the adjective *perversa* is a *hapax* in Statius is remarkable. Many events and themes of the *Thebaid* can be characterized as ‘perverse’: the prayer of Oedipus in Book 1, the conflict between Eteocles and Polynices, the necromantic scene in Book 4, the forceful *katabasis* of Amphiaraus in Book 6, the cannibalism of Tydeus in Book 7, the deaths of Eteocles and Polynices in Book 11, and the brothers’ lack of fraternity even in their ritual cremation in

⁴⁴ Briguglio (2017), pg. 161.

⁴⁵ Feeney (1991), pg. 346; Briguglio (2017), pg. 161.

⁴⁶ Vessey (1973), pg. 74.

Book 12. Despite all of these events that are corrupted in nature, Statius deems only the *vota* of Oedipus to be *perversa*. As a result, I believe that the prayer of Oedipus represents the highest form of perversion in the poem. In his prayer, Oedipus offers his blood-soaked diadem, the symbol of his power over Thebes, to Tisiphone. This ritual offering symbolizes the transfer of political control over Thebes from its former king to Tisiphone, his supposed patron and nurse. This offering is also significant because it precedes Oedipus' wish that his sons' power, which now symbolically manifests itself in Tisiphone, be eternally tormented.

However, the contents of Oedipus' invocation, as Willie Schetter notes are also manipulated by Tisiphone's presence in and influence over the epic.⁴⁷ Schetter argues that Tisiphone has control over Oedipus as he prays for the destruction of Eteocles and Polynices. I would agree with this notion, since Statius alludes to the chthonic evolution of Oedipus, as he first appears secluded deep underground in darkness. Driven by insatiable feelings of revenge, Oedipus is not truly aware of the contents of his curse or the effect that they will have later in the epic. In Book 11, after witnessing the deaths of his two sons, Oedipus laments his actions in Book 1 and experiences a change of heart:

quisnam fuit ille deorum
qui stetit orantem iuxta praereptaque verba
dictavit Fatis? furor illa et movit Erinys
et pater et genetrix et regna oculique cadentes;
nil ego:

“Which of the gods was the one
that stood next to me as I was praying and dictated
my forestalled words to the Fates? Madness moved those things
and the Fury moved my father, mother, throne, and my falling eyes.
But not me...” (Stat. *Theb.* 11.617-621).

⁴⁷ Schetter, pg. 7.

As Schetter notes, there is no justification for this striking attitude change.⁴⁸ Schetter is correct to suggest that Oedipus' condemnation of his curse is odd. The reason for Oedipus' attitude change, according to him, however, is not. As Oedipus claims, it was *furor* and *Erinyes* that stood by him and corrupted him to pray for his perverse prayer (*perversa vota*) of Book 1. By Book 11, Oedipus recognizes the control that Tisiphone had on him throughout the work.

As Oedipus' assertions after the fratricidal duel suggest, Tisiphone is an omnipresent figure in the epic whose dominion over the narrative affects any character of her choosing. As a result of her defilement, Tisiphone causes Oedipus to implore her to bring the deaths of his two sons, willingly bequeath his crown to her, and thereby give her regal influence over Thebes. With these newly acquired powers, Tisiphone's first action in Book 1 is to bring about a dispute over the rule of Thebes. She does this with relative ease. Both Eteocles and Polynices are quickly twisted by her presence:

Atque ea Cadmeo praeceps ubi culmine primum
constitit assuetaque infecit nube penates,
protinus attoniti fratrum sub pectore motus...

And when she first stood headlong at the Cadmean citadel
and corrupted the household gods with her accustomed cloud,
immediately, shocked commotion occurred under the brothers' breasts... (Stat.
Theb. 1.123-125).

The *assueta nube*, which will be elaborated further in Chapter 2, shows the Thebans' familiarity with Tisiphone's presence. Her proximity alone can infect (*infecit*) king, son, and household god. Nothing in Thebes can resist Tisiphone's dominion. Immediately after her introduction (*protinus*), shocking commotion (*attoniti motus*) affects Eteocles and Polynices and causes them to contest each other's power. With minimal effort, apart

⁴⁸ Ibid.

from her journey from Tartarus to Thebes, Tisiphone can accomplish her first goal less than 100 lines after being invoked by Oedipus – the sovereignty of Eteocles and Polynices is split and contested, leading to the first schism between the brothers.

The discord between Eteocles and Polynices is the first demonstration of Tisiphone's poetic control over the *Thebaid*. Through Tisiphone, the conflict in the story is brought about. This conflict, orchestrated by Tisiphone, I would argue, affects all elements of the plot. Tisiphone's ability to create plot components in the *Thebaid* is akin to a poet, who likewise organizes the plot, conflict, and resolution of their story. It is not until the death of Eteocles and Polynices in Book 11 that the fraternal feud finds its cataclysmic outcome.

Results of Tisiphone's Agency

Throughout the epic, Tisiphone finds herself at odds with the will of the Olympians in the ethereal realm. Competing against gods and goddesses like Jupiter, Minerva, and Apollo, Tisiphone contends for the souls of Theban and Argive heroes alike. Heroes such as Tydeus and Amphiaraus, who would typically have received godlike elevations from their patron deities, are destroyed by the intervention of Tisiphone.

The death of Tydeus is a clear example of the effects of Tisiphone. Tydeus is one of several heroes in the *Thebaid*, like Capaneus and Menoeceus, who feels an aversion to the frailty of his human body and yearns for divine immortality. As he copes with his inevitable death (8.716-66), Minerva, the benefactor of his heroic actions in the *Thebaid*, descends to earth to reward Tydeus with his long-sought immortality. Despite her plan

for Tydeus' immortality and deification among the Olympians, she flees the battlefield in horror upon seeing Tydeus glutted with the blood and brains of Melanippus:

iamque inflexo Tritonia patre
venerat et misero decus immortale ferebat,
atque illum effracti perfusum tabe cerebri
aspicit et vivo scelerantem sanguine fauces
(nec comites auferre valent).

Now Tritonia had come with her father appeased
and she was bearing immortal glory for the miserable man.
She sees him bathed in the gore of the broken open brain and
sees him defiling his jaws with living blood
(nor were his comrades strong enough to rip him away) (Stat. *Theb.* 8.758-762).

Minerva nearly offered Tydeus the immortal glory (*immortale decus*) befitting an epic hero. Descended from Olympus to reward the virtue of her champion, Minerva only found that he had cannibalized his enemy and gnawed at his brains. Disgusted by Tydeus' choice, Minerva flees from him and withdraws any previous offer of immortality.

Tydeus, like other heroes in the *Thebaid*, exists on the liminal threshold of humanity, bestiality, and immortality. Minerva felt that she could offer the possibility of immortality to Tydeus but was outraged at Tisiphone's control over the hero.⁴⁹ With Tisiphone's influence, Tydeus loses all sense of humanity and completes his transformation into a beast. Gazing at Melanippus' gasping features, 'he recognized himself in him' *seseque adgnouit in illo* (Stat. *Theb.* 8.753). Tydeus' loss of humanity and transformation into a beast is foreshadowed earlier in a simile with Capaneus. As Capaneus delivers the body of Melanippus to Tydeus, he is compared to Heracles

⁴⁹ infelix contentus erat: plus exigit ultrix / Tisiphone (Stat. *Theb.* 8.757-758).

bringing the Erymanthian boar to the Argives.⁵⁰ In this perverted simile, Statius refers to one of the labors of Heracles before Tydeus' cannibalism of Melanippus. The simile serves as a contrast to the Heraclean model that Tydeus attempts to follow throughout the epic and foreshadows Tydeus' inevitable *nefas*. Near his inevitable death, Tydeus recognizes in Melanippus, compared to a defeated boar, his own bestial nature. As Hardie notes, "the fight within Tydeus between beast and god becomes a contest between Avernus and Olympus: Tisiphone and Minerva contend for the soul of Tydeus (8.759)."⁵¹

Similar to Tydeus, who experiences both Olympus and the underworld competing over his soul, Amphiaraus undergoes a comparable experience. A favorite of Apollo in the epic, Amphiaraus is promised divine immortality by the god. Just like Tydeus, however, I would argue that Tisiphone prevents the immortal elevation that was rightfully guaranteed. In Book 7, at the beginning of the Theban and Argive conflict, the physical division between the underworld and Earth is shattered as the battlefield opens up to swallow Amphiaraus. The 'infernal bellowing' (*Theb.* 7.797) of the chasm in the ground is mistaken by both the Thebans and the Argives as the din of war. Hardie mentions that the confusion experienced by the soldiers represents "a cataclysmic confusion of above and below."⁵² The disorientation of both sides, I would also argue, suggests the turmoil of war and the underworld. Tisiphone has become such a vital actor in the conflict that the sounds and sight of Avernus seem nearly indistinguishable from those of war. Swallowing up Apollo's hero in an infernal *katabasis* represents another example of Tisiphone, and the underworld's, authority over the realm of man. While

⁵⁰ *qualis ab Arcadio rediit Tiryntius antro / captivumque suem clamantibus intulit Argis* (Stat. *Theb.* 8.749-750).

⁵¹ Hardie, pg. 69.

⁵² Hardie, pg. 79.

Amphiaraus does not undergo a bestial transformation, as in the case of Tydeus, he does experience a chthonic intervention that leads to his untimely death. The dominance of Tisiphone and the underworld over the will of the divine and the conflict of the Thebans foreshadows the Fury's inevitable triumph.

Before Tisiphone and her sister can bring about the conclusion of Oedipus' prayer, they must first attend to those who attempt to delay the fratricidal duel. Of those that Tisiphone and Megaera are concerned about are Faith, Piety, Antigone, Jocasta, but also Oedipus: *ipse etiam, qui nos lassare precando / suetus et ultrices oculorum exposcere Diras, / iam pater est*: (11.105-107).⁵³ Tisiphone's quote foreshadows Oedipus' change of heart after the duel – even her chief ally and pawn in the epic is under threat of resisting against her authority. Despite the danger that Tisiphone faces from the divine and the realm of man, she feels unconcerned. As she remarks to Megaera: *vincentur*.⁵⁴ The future sense of *vincentur* suggests the inevitability of her victory over both the realms of the divine and mortals. As Ganiban has noted, the personification of *Pietas*, an idea very familiar to Virgil's *Aeneid*, stands in stark contrast to Tisiphone's *nefas*.⁵⁵ Despite the potential hazard that Tisiphone and Megaera face from the divine, with *Pietas* and *Fides* as commanders, Tisiphone can rout all opponents of her, leading to a genuinely uncontested environment in which she can enact divine vengeance and bring about the deaths of Eteocles and Polynices.

While watching the fated downfall of the brothers, Tisiphone proclaims her agency in the downfall of heroes such as Tydeus, Eteocles, and Polynices. Similar to

⁵³ Even he, who is wont to wary us with his praying / and to call upon the Furies as avengers of his eyes, is now a father:

⁵⁴ Stat. *Theb.* 11.99.

⁵⁵ Ganiban (2007), pgs. 152-175.

Oedipus, who, in his invocation to Tisiphone, assigns an imperative role to her in the development of his fate, Tisiphone also declares that her cataclysmic influence over Tydeus kept him from his immortal destiny. Tisiphone's role in the development of the critical events of the *Thebaid* illustrates that her role in the epic has surpassed that of a muse and has cast her instead as an internal architect of poetic events. In essence, her power has become comparable to the influence of a poet over his poetry. As she asserts her unopposed authorial control over the events and outcome of the epic, Tisiphone expresses her exhaustion at the events and happily surrenders her command over the narrative. Like Statius, who frequently experiences exhaustion and calls upon a muse for new inspiration, Tisiphone also suffers similar enervation from the subject matter culminating in her eventual exit from the epic.

Immediately following the fratricidal duel and the death of Polynices and Eteocles, Statius attempts to re-assert his authorial and poetic control over his narrative in an apostrophe:

Ite, truces animae, funestaque Tartara leto
polluite et cunctas Erebi consumite poenas.
vosque malis hominum, Stygiae, iam parcite, divae:
omnibus in terris scelus hoc omnique sub aevo
viderit una dies, monstrumque infame futuris
excidat, et soli memorent haec proelia reges.

Go, fierce souls, pollute destructive Tartarus with
death and exhaust all the punishments of Erebus.
And you, Stygian goddesses, spare now the ills of humanity:
In all lands and every age may one day alone witness
this crime. Let the monstrous infamy perish from future generations,
and let kings alone remember this conflict (Stat. *Theb.* 11.574-579).

Georgacopoulou has recognized that Statius' apostrophe from 11.574-579 functions not only as an attempt to bring a conclusion to the curse of Oedipus but also as an invocation

of the Furies.⁵⁶ While I agree with Georgacopoulou's conclusions about the passage, I feel that the reasons for Statius' apostrophe are underexplored in her article. I would argue that Statius attempts to reassert authorial control over his epic because he seems to believe that, in the aftermath of the death of Eteocles and Polynices, the infernal forces that dispossessed him of his authority might finally be satiated.

This would explain, in part, Statius' desire to banish the goddesses back to the realm of Tartarus. His triple command with *ite, polluite*, and *consumite* encourages the goddesses to seek out the souls of the underworld to pollute and exhaust. His invocation of Tartarus and triple command suggest that Statius believes that Tisiphone and her sisters no longer have a purpose in the narrative. Their function as divine avengers of Oedipus' corrupted will has been fulfilled in the death of Eteocles and Polynices. When Tisiphone divides Eteocles and Polynices at the beginning of the epic, the subject of their dispute is over the rule of Thebes. However, after the intervention of Tisiphone in several episodes throughout the work, the brothers, under the influence of the Furies, had progressed to such a point of madness that they fought against each other, resulting in the deaths of both. As Schetter noted, Tisiphone and her sister in Statius' *Thebaid* not only represent the principles of evil and perversion but also of boundless destructive will (Zugleich ist sie das Prinzip schrankenlosen Vernichtungswillens).⁵⁷ This limitless desire for devastation can also be witnessed in the *Aeneid*, in which Juno believes that Allecto had overstepped the limits of the power granted to her by the goddess:

te super aetherias errare licentius auras
haud pater ille velit, summi regnator Olympi.
cede locis. ego, si qua super fortuna laborum est,
ipsa regam.”

⁵⁶ Georgacopoulou, pg. 95.

⁵⁷ Schetter, pg. 22.

That you could freely roam over the heavenly air
That father, the ruler of all Olympus, did not wish.
Withdraw from this place. I, if there is any fortune of your labors,
I will preside over it myself (Vir. *Aen.* 7.557-560).

In both the *Aeneid* and the *Thebaid*, a Fury is summoned to enact vengeance, is successful in her task, and ultimately banished. Unlike Juno, however, Statius was not the one who formerly invoked Tisiphone in his apostrophe. Statius seems to recognize the unceasing will of the Furies, alluded to by Schetter, and consequently attempts to invoke them. The *ite* of Statius' apostrophe is similar in many regards to Juno's *cede locis*.

Statius ends his string of imperatives with *parcite*, followed closely by his direct address *divae*. Georgacopoulou suggests that a similar apostrophe to Statius' comes at the end of the *Eumenides* with Athena's address to the Furies.⁵⁸ Unlike the apostrophe at the end of the *Eumenides*, Statius is ultimately unsuccessful in his invocation of Tisiphone and her sisters. The Furies of Statius' *Thebaid* seem to operate under their own jurisdiction and cannot be affected by external forces. Statius appears to understand the futility of his apostrophe in the jussive subjunctives that follow. In his use of *excidat*, *viderit*, and *memorent*, Statius himself seems to pray that the subject of his epic will fall into obscurity, a disturbing desire for an epic poet. I would argue that Statius recognizes the infernal corruption of his narrative by Tisiphone and recognizes the lack of his authorial control in his work, leading to him imploring that the Theban conflict will be remembered by kings alone: *et soli memorent haec proelia reges* (Stat. *Theb.* 11.579). Similar to Oedipus' prayer in Book 1, the corruption of Eteocles and Polynices, the downfall of Tydeus, the death of Amphiaraus, and the fratricidal duel, the apostrophe of

⁵⁸ Georgacopoulou, pg. 98.

Statius is a confirmation of Tisiphone's ability to control the events and characters of the *Thebaid*. Statius' apostrophe, addressed primarily to the Furies, is his final attempt to regain narrative power over his epic. Nevertheless, it seems to confirm what had been established for eleven books – that Tisiphone was the primary instigator of the *Thebaid*'s story and had usurped Statius' authorship.

Chapter 2 – Tisiphone and Thebes

Introduction

In the last chapter, I examined the role of Tisiphone in the *Thebaid* as both the muse of Oedipus' corrupted invocation (*perversa vota*) and an internal poet-figure who sows conflict at all stages of the poem. In this chapter, I plan to examine the development of the *Erinys* in Greek literature, particularly as it relates to Theban tales of Oedipus, Eteocles, and Polynices., and to explore the influence of these paradigms upon Statius' characterization of Tisiphone. Scholars such as Martin West, Hugh Lloyd-Jones, Friedrich Solmsen, and J.T. Sheppard have written extensively on the role of *Erinys* in Greek literature. While such scholarly works have been illuminating, especially as they relate to Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*, Statius' reception of the literary presentation of the Fury in Homer, Aeschylus, and Sophocles is outside of their purview, since they are solely interested in Greek literature. My research expands upon their work by considering the influence of Greek paradigms upon Statius. Broadening out from my analysis of Tisiphone in the Chapter One, which was primarily confined to her appearance in the *Thebaid*, I will consider how Statius' indebtedness to his literary predecessors influenced his portrayal of Tisiphone. As Statius himself mentions in the fifth book of the *Silvae*, *...te nostra magistro / Thebais urguebat priscorum exordia vatum*.⁵⁹ I intend to scrutinize the uniqueness of Tisiphone's presentation as compared to other appearances of the Fury in ancient literature. Such a study, I believe, will inform a

⁵⁹ ...with you [his deceased father] as my mentor, / the *Thebaid* followed closely on the introductions of ancient poets (Stat. *Silvae* 5.233-234).

better understanding of Tisiphone's presence, attributes, connection to Oedipus, and significance in Statius' *Thebaid*.

The Role of the Fury in Greek Epic

The first account of Oedipus' story, and more specifically the connection between Oedipus and the Furies, can be found in Homer's *Odyssey*. In Book 11, as Odysseus travels to the underworld, he remarks that he saw Jocasta, the mother of Oedipus. Upon seeing her, he recounts the story of Oedipus, its notoriety to the Thebans, and the disastrous conclusion of Jocasta's suicide and Oedipus' blinding:

μητέρα τ' Οἰδιπόδαο ἴδον, καλὴν Ἐπικάστην,
ἣ μέγα ἔργον ἔρεξεν ἀιδρεΐησι νόοιο
γημαμένη ᾧ υἱί: ὁ δ' ὄν πατέρ' ἐξεναρίζας
γῆμεν: ἄφαρ δ' ἀνάπυστα θεοὶ θέσαν ἀνθρώποισιν.
ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν ἐν Θήβῃ πολυηράτω ἄλγεα πάσχων
Καδμείων ἦνασσε θεῶν ὀλοὰς διὰ βουλὰς: 275
ἣ δ' ἔβη εἰς Αἴδαο πυλάρταο κρατεροῖο,
ἀψαμένη βρόχον αἰπὸν ἀφ' ὑψηλοῖο μελάθρου,
ᾧ ἄχει σχομένη: τᾷ δ' ἄλγεα κάλλιπ' ὀπίσσω
πολλὰ μάλ', ὅσσα τε μητρὸς Ἐρινύες ἐκτελέουσιν. 280

And I saw the mother of Oedipus, beautiful Epicaste (Jocasta),
who accomplished a terrible deed in the ignorance of her mind
once she married her son: she married him who killed his
father: and straight away the gods made these matters notorious for mankind.
But he served as lord of the Cadmeans in lovely Thebes as he suffered
woes through the destructive council of the gods:
but Epicaste went down to the house of Hades, the strong gate-keeper of Hell,
and fastened a high noose from a lofty beam,
overpowered by her sorrow: but for him, she left behind several woes,
as many as the Furies of a mother bring to pass (Hom. *Od.* 11.271-280).

In Odysseus' telling of the story, Epicaste's ignorance led to her marrying her son, the murderer of her husband Laius. The unnatural union of Oedipus and Epicaste led to the gods immediately making known their crimes to mankind. Just like the Sophoclean tale nearly three centuries later, Epicaste hangs herself, but Oedipus continues to rule. Unlike

later tales of Oedipus, he does not blind himself but is instead cursed by Epicaste's Furies after her suicide. Odysseus mentions that after her death, Epicaste leaves behind several woes to Oedipus (ἄλγεα κάλλιπ' ὀπίσσω πολλὰ μάλ', ὅσσα τε μητρὸς Ἐρινύες ἐκτελέουσιν).⁶⁰ As Hugh Lloyd-Jones has noted in his article *Curses and Divine Anger in Early Greek Epic*, "that indicates that the Erinyes will act as they usually do in such cases, so that there will be more trouble for Oedipus, and perhaps for his descendants."⁶¹ Subsequent stories of Oedipus, chiefly those mentioned in tragedy, pick up on the importance of the Furies in the aftermath of Epicaste's death. Andreas Markanatos, in his recent monograph *Oedipus at Colonus: Sophocles, Athens, and the World*, claims that "perhaps given the chthonic aspect of the encounter between Odysseus and Epicaste, it is all too natural that the Furies are invoked as merciless and relentless administrators of justice."⁶² Since the encounter between Odysseus and Epicaste takes place in Book 11 of the *Odyssey*, the book in which Odysseus travels to the underworld to meet with his mother, Markanatos is right to note that Odysseus' retelling of the story of Oedipus and Epicaste bears chthonic features. The Furies of Epicaste, which may necessarily owe themselves to the chthonic elements of Book 11, were brought upon Oedipus as unceasing avengers of his mother's death, similar to the story of Clytemnestra and Orestes. Under the agency of the avenging spirits of a wronged parent, Oedipus was tormented for the rest of his life, most likely with the realization that he committed crimes of parricide and incest in the ignorance of his mind. Markanatos claims that the mention of the Furies in the *Iliadic* variant of Oedipus' myth removes the full impact of

⁶⁰ Hom. *Od.* 11.279-280.

⁶¹ Lloyd-Jones, pg. 2.

⁶² Markanatos, pg. 46.

Oedipus' culpability.⁶³ While I would agree that Oedipus' accountability for the events which follow the death of Epicaste can be attributed to such implacable and impersonal divine agents as the Ἐρινύες, I would argue that the role of the Fury, particularly in the son-cursing of Oedipus, can be seen well beyond the *Iliadic* story of Oedipus.

One of the most important early accounts of the fratricidal duel between Eteocles and Polynices can be found in the Greek cyclic *Thebaid*. Unfortunately, not much is known of the poem's story, with only 11 fragments surviving into modernity.⁶⁴ Even in antiquity, the origins of the epic *Thebaid* along with the contents of the poem seem to have been in question. The anonymous author of the scholion on Euripides' *Phoenissae*⁶⁵ speaks of a plurality of writers in the poem's composition. Writers such as Callinus⁶⁶ and Herodotus ascribe the epic *Thebaid* to Homer. Others, such as the anonymous author mentioned above, believe that the text was composed by 'Peisandros,' which may be a reference to Pisander of Camirus, the author of an early epic *Heracleia*, to whom other works have also been ascribed. Given the scarcity of information about the content and composition of the Greek *Thebaid*, it is difficult to make any definitive claims about the text. Nevertheless, I would like to examine one potential fragment of the poem, its connection with the *Iliadic* story of Oedipus, and its impact on the Latin *Thebaid* of Statius. Fragment 2, which comes from Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae*, suggests that Oedipus cursed his sons because Polynices had mistakenly placed the silver table of Cadmus and the golden cup of Laius before Oedipus:

αὐτὰρ ὁ διογενὴς ἦρωσ ξανθὸς Πολυνείκης

⁶³ Ibid, pg. 56.

⁶⁴ Such fragments can be found in the critical editions of Kinkel (1877), Allen (1912), Bernabe (1988), and Davies (1988).

⁶⁵ Mon. 560, pp. 414-15 of Eduard Schwartz, *Scholia in Euripidem I* [Berlin, 1887].

⁶⁶ West, fr. 6.

πρῶτα μὲν Οἰδιπόδῃ καλὴν παρέθηκε τράπεζαν
ἀργυρέην Κάδμοιο θεόφρονος· αὐτὰρ ἔπειτα
χρύσειον ἔμπλησεν καλὸν δέπας ἠδέος οἴνου.
Αὐτὰρ ὃ γ' ὡς φράσθη παρακείμενα πατρὸς ἐοῖο
τιμήεντα γέρα, μέγα οἱ κακὸν ἔμπεσε θυμῷ,
αἴψα δὲ παισὶν ἐοῖσι μετ' ἀμφοτέροισιν ἐπαράς
ἀργαλέας ἤρᾳτο, θεὰν δ' οὐ λάνθαν' Ἐρινύν,

5

Then the golden-haired highborn hero Polynices
first set before Oedipus the beautiful silver table
of the divine-minded Cadmus: Then he filled the fine
golden cup with sweet wine. But as soon as Oedipus perceived
that his father's honored gifts were placed before him, a great evil
filled his heart, and he immediately prayed for grievous curses on both
his sons, nor did the divine Fury fail to notice (Ath. 465e).

Curiously, fragment 3, cited in a scholion on Sophocles' *Oedipus Colonus*, claims that Eteocles and Polynices, who were accustomed to send Oedipus the shoulder of a sacrificial beast, potentially a creature from some sacred festival, instead sent their father the hindquarters of the animal, resulting in Oedipus being infuriated with his two sons. Scholars such as West and Lloyd-Jones have struggled to reconcile the two fragments and attribute them to the same poem. Whether the fragment quoted from Athenaeus is genuine or not, it implies that Oedipus was distressed at the reminder of his parricide. I would argue that the fragment fits with themes initially discussed in the *Odyssey*. In both Book 11 of the *Odyssey* and fragment 2 of the *Thebaid*, the Furies haunt Oedipus after the death of his mother, causing many pains for him, which include the memory of his parricide and his mother's suicide. The Oedipus of the cyclic *Thebaid* is likewise tormented by his past, causing something as trivial as the placing of Laius' goblet before him to curse his sons. Of particular note is the last line I have included of the fragment (θεὰν δ' οὐ λάνθαν' Ἐρινύν). Like Tisiphone of the *Thebaid*, who is a θεὰν Ἐρινύν, some divine Fury attends the curse of Oedipus and brings his prayer to fruition.

The Role of the Fury in Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*

Nowhere does the word Ἐρινός appear more in Greek tragedy than in Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*. To Aeschylus, the role of the Fury is more strongly felt in the *Seven* than other well-known plays which feature the Furies, such as the *Orestes* and even the *Eumenides*. Like Homer, and potentially the author of the cyclic *Thebaid*, the Fury is vital in orchestrating the curse of Oedipus against Eteocles and Polynices. Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*, following the tradition set by the cyclic *Thebaid*, likewise states that Oedipus' curses were aroused by his sons' wretched maintenance of him.⁶⁷ As West and other scholars have noted, there is a strong prominence in the *Seven Against Thebes* on the curse as a force that drives the deaths of Eteocles and Polynices. Indeed, this curse, born from the wrath of Oedipus, is an instrumental part of the *Seven* and arguably the primary element of Aeschylus' tale of Oedipus. Friedrich Solmsen, in his seminal research of the Ἐρινός of Oedipus, divides the curse in Aeschylus' *Seven* into five distinct characteristics: 1.) The *Erinys* asserts herself suddenly and turns order into chaos. 2.) Although she appears suddenly, her presence is not unexpected and is understood by both the characters of the play and the audience to foretell the inevitability of crisis and catastrophe. 3.) There is a strong theme of δίκη against ὕβρις in the tragedy, with the Thebans representing the former concept and the Argives embodying the latter. Such a difference in the character of Eteocles and Polynices further necessitates Eteocles' need to face his brother in battle. 4.) Eteocles sees no way of evading what Fate (the *Erinys*) has prepared for him. Fighting his brother is the honorable decision, and it would be shameful of him to try to avoid meeting his brother in single combat. 5.) The *Erinys* has a

⁶⁷ cf. lines 785-787.

prominent role in Eteocles' change of mind from lines 653 onwards. For my discussion on the *Seven*, I will be further exploring these characteristics and the impact that they had on Statius' Tisiphone in the *Thebaid*.

In the *Seven Against Thebes*, the appearance of the Fury is sudden. Although Eteocles first makes reference to the Ἐρινύς of his father on line 70, the Fury is not mentioned again until line 574, during the catalogue of the Seven. According to Amphiaraus, the sixth Argive, Tydeus is a murderer and bane of both Thebes and Argos. Most importantly in Amphiaraus' description, Tydeus is the Ἐρινύος κλητῆρα, the summoner of a Fury. Hutchinson suggests that in bringing about the expedition to Thebes, Tydeus is helping to fulfill the curse of Oedipus and thus acts as the herald of the Fury.⁶⁸ I believe that this comment could also have brought about Tydeus' connection to Tisiphone in the *Thebaid*. In both the *Seven Against Thebes* and the *Thebaid*, Tydeus acts as a servant of the destructive will of the Fury and helps bring about the curse of Oedipus. The *Erinys* emerges again in the nominative on line 700, in which the Chorus begs Eteocles to resist the inevitability of the prayers of Oedipus and to pray to the gods. After this mention of the Ἐρινύς, there are seven more references to the Fury in just over 300 lines. While Eteocles alludes to the curse of his father within the first one hundred lines, the Ἐρινύς lies dormant and does not re-appear until the latter half of the poem. However, after its re-emergence, the Ἐρινύς plays a vital role in the destruction of Eteocles and Polynices. The inevitability of the curse becomes the dominant theme in the *Seven* and orchestrates the deaths of Eteocles and Polynices.

⁶⁸ s.v. line 574.

While the appearance of the *Erinys* might be sudden in Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*, it is by no means unexpected. The origin of Oedipus' curse has been traced by some scholars back to the other two plays of Aeschylus' trilogy: *Laius* and *Oedipus*.⁶⁹ While no significant fragments of either tragedy have been discovered, Sheppard and Solmsen especially found references in the *Seven* to earlier events in the trilogy that heavily feature the curse of Labdacidae. From lines 720-725, 742-749, and 771-779, the chorus sings of an three-fold ancient transgression (παλαιγενῆ παρασίαν): first originating with Laius, who disobeyed the oracle of Apollo in begetting Oedipus, then passing to Oedipus, who killed his father and married his mother (also in accordance with the prophecy of Apollo), and finally terminating with Oedipus cursing his sons and bringing about their mutual deaths.

Solmsen, Sheppard, Hutchinson, and other scholars have rightfully posited that this choral ode reflects earlier themes in the trilogy. To Solmsen especially, the ἐρινύες of Oedipus are a *Leitmotif* of the trilogy.⁷⁰ The *Erinys* of the *Seven* most likely originated in the first play of the trilogy, *Laius*. As Hutchinson noted, "...the history of all three generations is joined into a terrible unity."⁷¹ Relative to the time of the *Seven*, the third and final play in the trilogy, Laius' sin in *Laius* is παλαιγενῆ (line 742), the curses of Oedipus in *Oedipus* are παλαιφάτων (line 766), and the denunciation of Eteocles and Polynices in the *Seven* is the third generation (line 744). According to the account provided by the chorus, Laius was given an oracle through Apollo not to have children. However, whether acting hubristically or out of lust, Laius bears Oedipus against

⁶⁹ cf. Sheppard (1911), Solmsen (1937), and Hutchinson (1985).

⁷⁰ Solmsen (1937), pg. 199.

⁷¹ s.v. lines 720-791.

Apollo's command. This brings about the beginning of celestial hostility against Thebes and the inevitability of its destruction. As Hutchinson has noted, Laius' objection to his oracle leads to the death of Eteocles and Polynices, after which the oracle's prophecy has been fulfilled.⁷² Instead of being sacked by the Argives, Thebes will be sacked by the *Epigoni* (notably Thersander, son of Polynices). After the death of Eteocles and Polynices, a messenger reports that Apollo has brought Laius' old impudence to an end with the death of Oedipus' sons (*τὰς δ' Ἐβδόμας ὁ σεμνὸς ἑβδομαγέτας / ἄναξ Ἀπόλλων εἴλετ', Οἰδίπου γένει / κραινῶν παλαιᾶς Λαῖου δυσβουλίας*).⁷³ In the ode that follows, the chorus indicates that Oedipus' curse did not fail, but the disobedient decisions of Laius have persisted throughout (*βουλαὶ δ' ἄπιστοι Λαῖου διήρκεσαν*).⁷⁴ According to Aeschylus' trilogy, Laius' transgression against the divine will of Apollo brings about two generations of curses, starting from Laius to Oedipus and terminating in the deaths of Eteocles and Polynices.

In the *Seven Against Thebes*, Eteocles recognizes that he, as well as the Thebans, has been abandoned by and will receive no aid from the divine:

θεοῖς μὲν ἤδη πῶς παρημελήμεθα,
 χάρις δ' ἀφ' ἡμῶν ὀλομένων θαυμάζεται;
 τί οὖν ἔτ' ἂν σαίνοιμεν ὀλέθριον μόρον;

It would appear that the gods have already abandoned us,
 will the gods favor an offering from me, now that my fate is sealed⁷⁵?
 Why then would we still cringe before death, our fate? (Aesch. *Seven Against Thebes* 702-704).

⁷² s.v. line 749.

⁷³ Aesch. *Seven Against Thebes* 800-802.

⁷⁴ Aesch. *Seven Against Thebes* 841.

⁷⁵ I have followed the suggested translation provided by Hutchinson (s.v. 703).

Eteocles understands on lines 695-697 that his father's Fury sits beside him and tells him, "κέρδος πρότερον ὑστέρου μέρου." The κέρδος that she references is the death of Polynices, which will be a gain for Eteocles. However, though that κέρδος comes first (πρότερον), his fate (μέρου) comes immediately after (ὑστέρου). The outcome, as Eteocles realizes, is his death. As a result, Eteocles is cognizant of his death and the fact that he cannot achieve the killing of his brother without dying himself. Consequently, the Chorus, who tries to convince him he can escape his fate by praying to the gods, is misguided as Eteocles claims from 702-704, since the gods have abandoned him and his brother. Like the Olympians of the *Thebaid*, who are absent from the fratricidal duel between Eteocles and Polynices, the gods of the Seven have likewise abandoned their heroes and offer no protection from the μέρους of Eteocles and Polynices, which will be carried out by Oedipus' Ἐπιτύς. Hutchinson is right to claim that "Eteocles replies, not that the gods are resolved on his destruction, but that they have abandoned interest in him."⁷⁶ Similarly, in the *Thebaid*, when Jupiter realizes that the duel between Eteocles and Polynices is imminent, he orders his fellow gods to retreat. As he claims, "stat parcere mundo / caelitibusque meis;" (Stat. *Theb.* 11.131-132). The Jupiter of the *Thebaid*, like the gods of the Seven, is resolved to spare the earth and his celestials. Unlike Orestes, who rightfully suffered the Furies of Clytemnestra after killing her, neither Eteocles nor Polynices has committed such a terrible sin to incur the wrath of a Fury. I would argue that the gods of Olympus recognize this fact and attempt to save the sons of Oedipus, but are ultimately unsuccessful in doing so. As Solmsen rightfully noted:

⁷⁶ s.v. lines 698-701.

“The august figures of the Olympian deities, who in Aischylos’ work stand for political and moral justice, are not yet powerful enough to stop the working of a family curse and to protect the (probably innocent) offspring of a doomed family from the consequences of an old bloodguilt.”⁷⁷

Because of the power of the Fury, and her control over the narrative of the *Seven* and the *Thebaid*, the gods of Olympus are forced to retreat, feign interest in Eteocles and Polynices, and avert their gazes from the inevitable conflict.

Unfortunately for Eteocles and Polynices, the curse of their father is unavoidable. Not even the will of the divine, no matter how deserved, could cease the inescapability of their deaths. From nearly the first mention of the Ἐρινός on line 70, Eteocles and the chorus recognize the destructive capacity of Oedipus’ curse and its probable effect on Thebes. As the chorus mentions about the curse:

τέκνοις δ’ ἀγρίας	785
ἐφῆκεν ἐπικότους τροφᾶς,	
αἰαῖ, πικρογλώσσους ἀράς,	
καί σφε σιδαρονόμῳ	
διὰ χερί ποτε λαχεῖν	
κτῆματα: νῦν δὲ τρέω	790
μὴ τελέσῃ καμψίπους Ἐρινός.	

“Next he launched brutal, wrathful words against the sons he had bred – ah! Curses from a bitter tongue – that wielding iron in their hands they would one day divide his property. So now I tremble in fear that the swift-running *Erinys* will bring this to fulfillment (Aesch. *Seven Against Thebes* 785-791).”⁷⁸

Similar to the account from fragment 2 of the *Thebaid*, Oedipus utters ἀράς (ἐπαράς in the case of the *Thebaid*). Such a word is customary for curses and is often found in close proximity to Ἐρινός, as can be seen in Hom.*Il.*9.566 and Aesch.*Eu.*417. As the chorus

⁷⁷ Solmsen (1937), pg. 208.

⁷⁸ Translation provided by Herbert Weir Smyth (1926).

fears in the clause on 791, the swift-running Fury (καμψίπους Ἐρινύς) does bring about the ἀράς of Oedipus. Just as in the *Thebaid*, in which Tisiphone brings the fated conclusion of Oedipus' corrupted will in Book 1, the *Erinys* of the *Seven Against Thebes* likewise causes the deaths of Eteocles and Polynices.

After the death of Eteocles and Polynices, the Fury is only invoked for her destructive power over the plot of the play. In a choral refrain, the semichorus raises a lamentation that introduces the supernatural agents of disaster:

ὦ
Μοῖρα βαρυδότειρα μογερά
πότνια τ' Οἰδίπου σκιά·
μέλαιν' Ἐρινύς, ἧ μεγασθενής τις εἶ.

Ah!
O Destiny, you grievous mistress of heavy fate
and shade of Oedipus!
O black Fury, indeed you are powerful! (Aesch. *Seven Against Thebes* 975-977).

The reference to Μοῖρα may likewise be an allusion to the Furies since the two are often linked as in *Eu.* 961ff. and *Pr.* 516. Additionally, as Hutchinson has noted, the shade (σκιά) of Oedipus could also be connected with the Fury, since there is a logical progression of thought from Oedipus to the Fury, who was instrumental in his destiny.

This connection is further supported by a refrain from the semichorus on lines 1054-

1056:

φεῦ φεῦ·
ὦ μέγалаυχοι καὶ φθερσιγενεῖς
Κῆρες Ἐρινύες, αἴτ' Οἰδιπόδα
γένος ὠλέσατε πρυμνόθεν οὔτως.

Alas, alas:
O you much boasting destroyers of families,
Keres, Furies, who thus destroyed the race of
Oedipus from the stern (Aesch. *Seven Against Thebes* 1054-1056).

The deaths of Eteocles and Polynices, as had been suggested but feared, were inevitable because of the effect of the Fury. She utterly destroys (ὠλέσατε) the race of Oedipus. The aorist further indicates the completion of her action and the end of the curse. At this point in the play, Eteocles and Polynices are dead and the chorus, broken into two semichoruses, is left to lament their recently deceased heroes. Such a fate, however, was well-recognized by all members of the play because of the effect that the Fury has on those around her.

In both Aeschylus' *Seven* and Statius' *Thebaid*, the Fury acts like someone who causes sudden but destructive madness. Hutchinson has commented on the effect that the curse of Oedipus has on the mood of Eteocles in the *Seven*. As he claims, "Eteocles is at once resolved to fight his brother; but at first he gives expression to the natural feelings of horror and grief. These he checks (656f.)."⁷⁹ For nearly the first half of the play, Eteocles was hesitant to meet Polynices in battle, following the pleas of those around him. However, by line 653, the Fury has such a hold on Eteocles, as she has on his father, that she causes a complete change in his resolve. For the latter half of the play, Eteocles is entirely committed to the death of his brother. Neither the chorus nor any other character could change his decision. Eteocles' self-control is distorted by the presence of the Fury as he stresses that the fratricide is the irresistible will of heaven and the act of a stalwart warrior. Without the contact of Oedipus' devastating *Erinys*, Eteocles may not have had such a furious desire for the deaths of him and his brother. Such themes of madness, the presence of a Fury, and the mutual devastation of Eteocles and Polynices can also be seen in Sophocles.

⁷⁹ s.v. lines 653-719.

The Fury in Sophocles

Sophocles, in his Oedipus trilogy, builds upon themes of the Fury first established in Aeschylus. Once again, the oracle given to Laius is treated as the origin of Oedipus' actions, whether unintentional as Oedipus claims, or deliberately influenced by an ancestral curse.⁸⁰ West, as well as other modern interpreters, suggests, "both for Aeschylus and for Sophocles Laios and his descendants laboured under an ancestral curse... and that the reason for it was Laios' abduction and rape of Pelops' son Chrysippus."⁸¹ Modern scholars of Sophocles have been content to analyze the author's indebtedness to his predecessor's trilogy of *Laius*, *Oedipus*, and the *Seven*. However, I believe that nowhere is Sophocles' exhibition of the Fury, and its connection to the *Thebaid*, more profound than in a choral interlude of *Antigone*. In both the *Seven* and *Antigone*, there is a choral retrospect about the destructive potential of Oedipus' curse. Like in Aeschylus, the *Erinyes* turns order into chaos, is inevitable, and brings about a definite shift in attitude for Oedipus. I argue that the chorus' understanding of the *Erinyes* in Sophocles' *Antigone* is a closer model for the language and imagery of Oedipus and Tisiphone in the *Thebaid* than Aeschylus' *Seven*:

ἀρχαῖα τὰ Λαβδακιδᾶν οἴκων ὀρῶμαι
πήματα φθιτῶν ἐπὶ πήμασι πίπτοντ', 595
οὐδ' ἀπαλλάσσει γενεὰν γένος, ἀλλ' ἐρείπει
θεῶν τις, οὐδ' ἔχει λύσιν. νῦν γὰρ ἐσχάτας ὕπερ
ρίζας ὃ τέτατο φάος ἐν Οἰδίπου δόμοις, 600
κατ' αὖ νιν φοινία θεῶν τῶν νερτέρων
ἀμᾶ κόνις λόγου τ' ἄνοια καὶ φρενῶν ἐρινύς.

Ancient are the sufferings of the Labdacid house
I see heaping upon the sufferings of the dead,
nor does generation relieve generation: some god
casts down ruin, and they have no escape.

⁸⁰ Soph. *OC* 265-274, 521-548, 960-999, esp. 964f.

⁸¹ West (1999), pg. 42.

So now the light stretched over the furthest roots
in the house of Oedipus,
but in turn the bloody ash of the gods of the underworld,
the folly of speech, and the Furies of the heart cut it down (Soph. *Ant.* 582-603).

Many parallels can be drawn between the physical description of Oedipus' abode in this passage and the one in the *Thebaid* from 1.49-52. According to the chorus of *Antigone*, light (φάος) had spread itself (τέτατο) over the furthest foundations (ἐσχάτας ὑπερ ῥίζας) of the house of Oedipus but was ultimately denied by three destructive entities: the bloody ash of the gods of the underworld, folly, and a Fury of the heart. The mention of the blood-stained ash may be a reference to Jocasta, who, in hanging herself, leaves behind her Furies to torture her son. Additionally, the ash could refer to Laius, the memory of whose bloody parricide plagued his son after his death. Like the Oedipus of the *Odyssey*, Oedipus in Sophocles' *Antigone* is tortured by the folly of speech/ignorance of the mind, the death of his mother and father, and the Furies, which his mother leaves behind. These three entities, which are significant in Homer, Aeschylus, and in the Theban cycle of Sophocles, all lead to Oedipus' isolation from humanity and his connection with chthonic forces. Similar to the account of the *Thebaid*, the house of Oedipus in the world of Sophocles' *Antigone* exists in a liminal space in which light is not permitted to enter.

One further connection to Statius' *Thebaid* comes in the phrase φρενῶν ἐρινύς, a phrase that only occurs in Sophocles' *Antigone*. This phrase seems to be the source for the allusion in Statius' phrase *scelerumque in pectore Dirae* (1.52). In his commentary on Book 1, Briguglio suggests that the *scelerum Dirae* of Oedipus are probably an allusion to Lucan 2.79-80.⁸² However, I would suggest that Statius, in his reference to the Furies

⁸² Briguglio, ad loc. line 52.

of the heart, looked to Sophocles' *Oedipus*, who was likewise eternally tormented by the Furies. In both *Antigone* and the *Thebaid*, Furies possess Oedipus' spirit and remind him of his crimes. The presence of the Furies in the description of Oedipus' abode, which has become a liminal space between earth and the underworld, models very carefully the account of Oedipus' house in the *Thebaid* and suggests a connection between Oedipus and forces of the underworld after the events of *Oedipus Rex*. This linking of Oedipus and his *Erinys*, especially in Sophocles' *Antigone* heavily influenced Statius' introduction of Tisiphone into the narrative of the *Thebaid*.

The Connection Between Thebes and the Underworld

Having dealt with characterizations of the Fury in previous tales of Oedipus from Homer to Sophocles, I would now like to examine Statius' relation to his Greek and Latin predecessors. In the *Thebaid*, Oedipus claims that as Tisiphone was his mentor (*te praemonstrante*),⁸³ he solved the riddle of the sphinx, killed Laius, married his mother, and had Eteocles and Polynices. Likewise, Statius mentions while Tisiphone travels from Tartarus to Thebes, she takes a path that is a *notum iter*. Throughout Book 1, as I have suggested in the first chapter, there is an immediate familiarity between Tisiphone, Oedipus, and Thebes. As Vessey proposes, "Oedipus has brought her [Tisiphone] into existence and, indeed, Tisiphone is nothing other than a reflexion of him."⁸⁴ While I would agree with Vessey's suggestion that Oedipus brings Tisiphone into existence in the poem by invoking her, I feel that Vessey fails to recognize the unique affiliation between the Oedipus and his Fury in claiming that she is nothing other than a reflection of him. The relationship between Tisiphone and Oedipus in Statius has to be assumed by the

⁸³ Stat. *Theb.* 1.67.

⁸⁴ Vessey (1973), pg. 75.

reader based on Oedipus' invocation of the deity. Unlike previous treatments of his tale, Oedipus has a unique bond with Tisiphone, spanning back to his birth. However, I believe that Tisiphone in the *Thebaid* is modeled closely on the *priscorum exordia vatum* mentioned in the *Silvae*. Statius' familiarity with the literary treatments of the *Erinys* of Oedipus in Greek epic and tragedy heavily influenced the assumed relationship between Oedipus and Tisiphone at the beginning of *Thebaid*. With such an understanding of his predecessors, Statius can create a distinctive sequel in which Tisiphone's control over Thebes and Oedipus is well-established.

As Tisiphone crosses from Tartarus to the realm of man, she ventures to the gates of Taenarus.⁸⁵ In order to venture to Thebes, Tisiphone must first travel along a path that serves as a link both to Thebes and the realm of man:

arripit extemplo Maleae de valle resurgens
notum iter ad Thebas: neque enim velocior ullas
itque reditque vias cognatave Tartara mavult.

"Immediately rising up from the valley of Malaea, she took the familiar path to Thebes: for she does not go or return down any road quicker, nor does she prefer known Tartarus" (Stat. *Theb.* 1.100-102).

Feeney (1991) mentions in a footnote that Tisiphone's road to Thebes is 'familiar' to readers in the first instance from Ovid (*Met.* 4.481-488).⁸⁶ He further suggests that Tisiphone's characterization can be seen as a parallel to Ovid's treatment of the goddess in *Metamorphoses* 4. While I believe that Feeney's argument is appealing, I would also suggest that the use of *notus* with *iter* indicates that there is a dedicated road from Taenarus to Thebes and that Tisiphone has become familiar with it based on how

⁸⁵ Stat. *Theb.* 1.96.

⁸⁶ Feeney (1991), pg. 344.

frequently she uses it. Like the shrine of Sychaeus in Dido's palace at *Aeneid* 4.457-9, which is the gateway to the underworld in Silius Italicus' *Punica*⁸⁷, Thebes is a popular destination between Avernus and earth in this epic. Tisiphone, in her assertive control over the Thebans, travels to Thebes more often than any other mortal city and, as a result, can neither go (*it*) nor return (*redit*) down any different path quicker. Thebes in the *Thebaid* functions as a focal point to the destructive forces of Avernus embodied in Tisiphone. Her affinity with Oedipus and the affairs of the Thebans causes her not even to prefer (*mavult*) Tartarus, her domain, to Thebes. Tisiphone's familiarity with the Thebans is so strong that she can infect the royal house of Cadmus 'with her usual cloud':

Atque ea Cadmeo praeceps ubi culmine primum
constitit *assuetaque* infecit *nube* penates...

“And when she first stayed headlong at the Cadmean citadel and
Corrupted the dwelling with her *accustomed cloud*...” (Stat. *Theb.* 1.123-124).

Like the *notum iter* above, the *assueta nube* may refer to Ovid's tale of Ino and Athamas from Book 4. The minds of Ino and Athamas are not maddened by wounds, but rather from the heavy breath of snakes from Tisiphone's hair breathing on them (*inspirantque graves animos*).⁸⁸ The use of *nubes* here may refer to the breath of the snakes, but could also denote the poison brew that Tisiphone concocts in *Metamorphoses* 4 from Cerberus' froth, the venom of the Hydra, strange hallucinations, and other ingredients.⁸⁹ With her 'accustomed cloud,' Tisiphone in the *Thebaid* can corrupt (*infecit*) the minds of Eteocles and Polynices just like her Ovidian equivalent was able to infect Ino and Athamas.

⁸⁷ Hardie, pg. 64.

⁸⁸ Ovid, *Met.* 4.498.

⁸⁹ attulerat secum liquidi quoque monstra veneni, / oris Cerberei spumas et virus Echidnae / erroresque vagos caecaeque oblivia mentis / et scelus et lacrimas rabiemque et caedis amorem, / omnia trita simul, quae sanguine mixta recenti / coxerat aere cavo viridi verata cicuta (Ovid, *Met.* 4.501-505).

Tisiphone's familiarity with Thebes, how to corrupt the city, and the scope of her influence are all characterizations borrowed from Ovid. Unlike Virgil's Tisiphone, who presides over the gates of Tartarus in *Aeneid* Book 6⁹⁰ Statius' Tisiphone, like Ovid's Tisiphone, functions as an intermediary between two realms: the realm of man and the realm of the underworld.

The proximity of Taenarus to Thebes shows the fragility of the threshold in the *Thebaid* between the underworld and earth. Tisiphone's familiarity with Thebes foreshadows the ease by which the Fury will cause strife in the poem and inevitably carry out the prayer of Oedipus. Throughout the *Thebaid*, the channels of communication between the realm of men and the realm of the underworld are more direct than those between men and Olympus:

Talia dicenti crudelis diua seueros
aduertit uultus. inamoenum forte sedebat
Cocytus iuxta, resolutaque uertice crines
lambere sulphureas permiserat anguibus undas.
ilicet igne Iouis lapsisque citatior astris
tristibus exiluit rapis.

“Such a cruel divinity turned her stern face
To the one speaking. By chance, she was sitting next to
Cheerless Cocytus; with her hair let down,
She allowed her snakes to lick the sulphurous water.
Immediately, faster than the fire of Jupiter and falling stars,
She leaped up from the sad banks” (Stat. *Theb.* 1.88-93).

The inclusion of the comparative *citatior* with the ablatives *igne* and *lapis astris* confirms that Tisiphone is faster to act than Jupiter, who has not yet appeared in the poem. Her immediate (*ilicet*) answer to Oedipus' prayer asserts the perverted fact that the realm of Avernus is more authoritative over mortals than the divine in the poem. Feeney

⁹⁰ Vir. *Aen.* 6.555.

claims that Tisiphone's alacrity foreshadows her eventual triumph over the divine in Book 11 when she can descend on *Pietas caelesti...ocior igni* ('faster than heaven's fire,' Stat. *Theb.* 11.483).⁹¹ The chthonic energy of ceaseless movement, emotional turmoil, and war manifests itself among the Thebans and Argives in the fastest way possible. Olympus, with Jupiter, Mercury, Apollo, and Minerva as its leaders, attempts to contend with a goddess whose influence over and acquaintance with Thebes has been previously established. With little effort, Tisiphone can prove her supremacy in her conflict with the divine, watch the effects of her destructive power, and roam unopposed by further influence from Olympus.

The Triumph of the Underworld

By Book 11, Tisiphone has expanded the scope of her chthonic authority so significantly that she doubts that she can continue without the aid of her sister Megaera as a companion (11.59-61). After summoning her sister to serve as an accomplice to the final staging of chthonic forces, Tisiphone claims that she alone was the one to bring about the *nefas* of Tydeus and orchestrate the conflict between the Thebans and Argives:

vidistis (Stygiis certe manifestus in umbris)
sanguine foedatum rictus atroque madentem
ora ducem tabo: miserum insatiabilis edit
me tradente caput.

"You saw (for truly he was manifest in the Stygian shades)
Jaws defiled by blood and a leader's face dripping
With black gore: insatiable he devours a miserable
Head once *I* brought it to him" (Stat. *Theb.* 11.85-88).

Tisiphone emphasizes her agency in the downfall of Tydeus. Like Oedipus, who assigns an essential role to Tisiphone in the development of his fate, Tisiphone claims that she

⁹¹ Feeney (1991), pg. 347.

was intimately involved in the destiny of Tydeus. According to Tisiphone, *she* was the one responsible for Tydeus' bestiality at the end of Book 8. Tisiphone's recounting of Tydeus' actions to Megaera shares similar vocabulary with the description of Tydeus at the end of Book 8. Tydeus was defiled (*foedatum*)⁹² by blood (*sanguine*),⁹³ and his face was dripping or drenched (*madentem*)⁹⁴ by the gore (*tabo*)⁹⁵ of his enemy. As with Statius' narration of the events in Book 8, Tisiphone's recollection in Book 11 of the events at the end of Book 8 emphasizes the monstrous and beast-like imagery of the hero. Not only was Tisiphone able to assert her cataclysmic influence over Oedipus, the former king of Thebes, but she also was able to corrupt Tydeus and keep him from his fated immortality.

After Megaera's intervention, Tisiphone and her sister can watch the final effects of the underworld on earth, Eteocles' and Polynices' duel, which results in the death of both brothers. Despite the pleas of their mother and sister, the brothers cannot be kept from their fratricidal battle. Jupiter, Minerva, Apollo, and all other divinities associated with noble warfare in epic, flee from the action. Personifications of *Pietas*, *Fides*, *Fortuna*, and *Fata* are absent from the resulting conflict. With the flight of such manifestations of virtue, the psychological, theological, and social reality underlying the conflict is laid bare. Like Minerva, who fled from Tydeus in disgust in Book 8, the realm of Olympus cedes to the ceaseless power of Tisiphone and the underworld. The two sisters range over the earth unopposed by the Olympians (11.57-112, 403-423, 457-496). Finally, the Furies stand aside to watch their plans come into effect:

⁹² See also *scelerantem*, *Theb.* 8.761.

⁹³ See *sanguine*, *Theb.* 8.761.

⁹⁴ See also *perfusum*, *Theb.* 8.760.

⁹⁵ See *tabe*, *Theb.* 8.760.

nec iam opus est Furiis; tantum mirantur et astant
laudantes, hominumque dolent plus posse furores.

“And now there is no need for the Furies; they only marvel and stand
applauding, and they grieve that the madness of men is greater (than theirs)” (Stat.
Theb. 538-539).

Near the end of the *Thebaid*, Tisiphone and Megaera delight in the destruction of humanity and the victory of the underworld. Every bastion of heroism in the Theban and Argive conflict has now surrendered to the authority of the Furies, undergone a monstrous transformation, and denied any possibility of heroic and divine elevation. Tisiphone wore away the liminal boundary between man and beast to such a point that the two spheres of man are nearly indistinguishable. The Furies are grieved (*dolent*) that the madness of men surpasses their own. This suggests that while the Furies can act on the Thebans and Argives externally, the destructive potential of men, especially those in the Theban and Argive conflict, is far greater than that of Tisiphone and Megaera. With the aid of Tisiphone and her sister, the Thebans and Argives alike reach the full extent of their bestial and cataclysmic potential. The fight and subsequent deaths of Eteocles and Polynices represent the final stand of the underworld on earth. The only actors able to contend with the madness and chthonic energy of the underworld are the Thebans and Argives themselves.

Chapter 3 – Tisiphone: The Nexus of the Underworld and Earth

Introduction: The Role of Women in Greek Epic

In contrast to Greek epic poetry, particularly the *Iliad*, Latin epic approaches the multifaceted relationship between war, gender, and the engendering of war in a manner distinctly different from Greek epic poetry. Alison Keith provides a detailed study of the difference in her book, *Engendering Rome*.⁹⁶ As Keith mentions, Latin epic takes its point of departure from the famous passage of the *Iliad*, in which Hector addresses Andromache before battle. Hector draws a distinction between men and women, combatant and non-combatant, and battle-front and home-front, which can be interpreted as a dichotomy between war and peace⁹⁷:

ἀλλ' εἰς οἶκον ἰοῦσα τὰ σ' αὐτῆς ἔργα κόμιζε
ἰστόν τ' ἠλακάτην τε, καὶ ἀμφιπόλοισι κέλευε
ἔργον ἐποίχασθαι: πόλεμος δ' ἄνδρεςσι μελήσει
πᾶσι, μάλιστα δ' ἐμοί, τοὶ Ἴλιῳ ἐγγεγάασιν.

No, but going to the house, take care of your own tasks,
the loom and the distaff, and order your handmaidens
to go over their work: war is a concern for all men,
especially for me, for the ones born in Ilium (Hom. *Il.* 6.490-493).

As Keith notes, this passage symbolizes the attitudes between men and women in Greek epic, most evident in Hector's suggestion πόλεμος δ' ἄνδρεςσι μελήσει. According to Hector, the deeds (ἔργα) of women are the loom (ἰστόν) and the distaff (ἠλακάτην), two prominent symbols of household labor for women in the Greek world. Contrary to men, especially Trojan men and Hector, whose primary concern is war, the concern of women should be the maintenance of the household, a notion that is maintained and propagated long after the composition of the *Iliad*.

⁹⁶ Keith (2000).

⁹⁷ Keith (2000), pg. 66.

Keith further suggests “despite attempting to keep Andromache peacefully within the confines of his home, the violence of war in the *Iliad* cannot be contained within this neat opposition for it threatens to spread from the battlefield into the besieged city.”⁹⁸ Despite attempting to assign Andromache the domain of peace and himself the realm of war, Hector is ultimately unsuccessful in protecting his wife, since Hector’s death and Andromache’s later enslavement to Neoptolemus represent the final disastrous results of the Trojan conflict in the epic. Additionally, Hector’s assessment is undermined by frequent references to the complicity of women with the outbreak of the war – in the depiction of Helen as the cause of the war, in Andromache’s earlier offer of tactical advice to her husband, and Thetis’ gift of arms to her son.⁹⁹ What Hector seems to forget is that the war was fought on account of Helen and that her compliance in following Paris back to Troy was what caused the outbreak of the war.

Keith asserts that despite the constant allusions to the participation of women in the Trojan War, the Homeric ideal of martial glory is expressed in the phrase κλέα ἀνδρῶν (the exploits of men), which reveals the androcentrism of the genre of Greek epic.¹⁰⁰ Attaining κλέος in the *Iliad* is confined to men since, according to Hector, men are the ones who can participate in war and consequently gain glory and fame. This specifically male engendering of war changes with Latin epic, in which women, particularly the divine, can create and engage in conflict. Building from the foundation of Keith’s scholarship, I will explore how the Furies transform from being voiceless figures

⁹⁸ Keith (2000), pg. 66.

⁹⁹ On Helen, see Collins (1988), 41-67; on Andromache, see Arthur (1981); on Thetis, see Cooper, Munich, Squier (1989). 9-10.

¹⁰⁰ Keith (2000), pg. 66.

lacking personalities in Greek poetry to corporeal characters with well-established identities in Latin epic.

The Role of the Fury in the *Aeneid*

The opening words of the *Aeneid* (*arma uirumque cano* 1.1) invite comparison with the subject matter of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. I would agree with Keith's suggestion that the *arma uirum* of the *Aeneid* can be read as a cursory translation of κλέα ἀνδρῶν.¹⁰¹ In typical epic tradition, Virgil's *proemium* takes an androcentric focus on war, highlighting the κλέος of its male protagonist Aeneas. Nevertheless, while Virgil states that the subject matter for his epic will be battles and a man (Aeneas), his *proemium* disregards the intricate relationship between gender and the structure of war, which will become apparent later in the epic.

One of the most obvious departures from the Homeric ideal of male martial glory occurs in Book 7 of the *Aeneid*, in which Turnus mocks the Fury Allecto, disguised as a prophetess. In his ridicule of the prophetess, whose words echo Hector's parting advice to Andromache to leave war men, Turnus tells Allecto to stay within her realm as a prophetess and let men wage war:

Cura tibi divom effigies et templa tueri:
bella viri pacemque gerent, quis bella gerenda.

Take care of the statues of the gods and look after the temples:
let men wage war and peace, who war should be waged by (Vir. *Aen.* 7.443-444).

Just as the *arma uirum* of the *proemium* could be seen as a translation of the κλέα ἀνδρῶν, Turnus' jussive suggestion *bella viri pacemque gerent* could be seen as an indirect translation of Hector's claim πόλεμος δ' ἄνδρεςσι μελήσει. These claims, as

¹⁰¹ Keith (2000), pg. 67.

Keith notes, situate Turnus within the “traditional ideology of Greek epic that defines masculine martial glory as the subject of the genre.”¹⁰²

While Turnus attempts to align himself with the masculine martial claims of Hector in the *Iliad*, Allecto is not as compliant or as reticent as Andromache in her response:

Respice ad haec: adsum dirarum ab sede sororum,
bella manu letumque gero.

Look well at this: I am present from the seat of my dread sisters,
I bear war and destruction in my hand (Vir. *Aen.* 7.454-455).

The use of *gero* in the first-person here stands in stark contrast to the subjunctive and gerundive use of *gero* by Turnus (*bella viri pacemque gerent, quis bella gerenda*). In his commentary on Book 7 of the *Aeneid*, Horsfall suggests that the *uiri...gerent* of line 444 does not have a literal sense, but *gero* on line 455 does, as shown by the whip (7.451) and the torch (7.456) that Allecto wields in her hand.¹⁰³ While Turnus attempts to consign Allecto to the domain of the temple, Allecto actively assigns herself as a harbinger of war, one who could wage war (*bella*) and destruction (*letum*) in her hand. As Keith suggests, “in the symbolic economy of the *Aeneid*, the very voice of violence and war is female.”¹⁰⁴ I would propose that this violent and warlike voice of women in the *Aeneid* is most prevalent in the claims of Allecto, who, in rejecting the proposition of Turnus, consequently renounces the traditional male martial glory of the *Iliad*.

The fact that such a radical departure from the traditional association of men with war occurs in Book 7 of the *Aeneid* is significant. Whereas the first six books of the

¹⁰² Keith (2000), pg. 72.

¹⁰³ Horsfall (2000), pg. 306.

¹⁰⁴ Keith (2000), pg. 69.

Aeneid take up themes and characters with the *Odyssey*, the second six books, beginning with Book 7, share martial themes that parallel the *Iliad*. I would suggest that Allecto's rebuke of Turnus in Book 7 of the *Aeneid* invites readers to recall Hector's reprimand of Andromache in Book 6 of the *Iliad* and the inversion of gender roles which occurs. The fact that Virgil's reversal of gender roles occurs at the beginning of the *Iliadic* portion of his epic is also crucial because it sets the tone for the function of women, especially the Furies, in the instigation of and participation in the conflict between Aeneas and Turnus. Unlike their Greek precedents, who were confined to the home and had minimal meaningful effects on men and their pursuits of war, women in Latin epic take a more active role in martial themes beginning with Allecto and the *Aeneid*. While Virgil claims in his *proemium* that the focus of his poem will be *arma* and a *uir*, such martial conflict is not orchestrated by Aeneas, but by women (Juno and Allecto). Allecto's role as a harbinger of war is not only central to the development of conflict in *Aeneid*, but also for the development of the engendering of war in Latin epic.

Upon rejecting Turnus, Allecto lobs her smoldering torch deep within Turnus' heart. Such a torch is used by Tisiphone to madden Athamas in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, to ward off Heracles in Seneca's *Hercules Furens*, cause the mass suicide of Suguntum in Silius' *Punica*, and bring about the Lemnian massacre in Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*. This torch, which is a standard accessory of the Furies (particularly Tisiphone), will be further examined later in the chapter in my section on Tisiphone in Statius' *Thebaid*. Turnus, like other victims of the Furies, equally suffers from the torch of Allecto. As Turnus awakens from his sleep, a desire for battle and the insane crimes of war rage

within him, and anger above (*saevit amor ferri et scelerata insania belli, ira super*).¹⁰⁵

The effects of the Fury on Turnus are nearly immediate and summon him to battle. The role of women in beckoning men to war is a common motif in Latin epic. In the case of the *Aeneid* and other Latin epics, these women are commonly the Furies, who represent the portents of war and destruction. I would agree with Keith's claim that "the Furies not only symbolize the violence of war but actively summon 'the man' to battle throughout the poem."¹⁰⁶ Another passage that highlights Keith's suggestion that the Furies summon men to action can be found in Book 2 of the *Aeneid*.

During his account of the sack of Troy, Aeneas mentions that he was called to battle against the Greeks by a *tristis Erinys*:

Talibus Othryadae dictis et numine divom
in flammas et in arma feror, quo tristis Erinys,
quo fremitus vocat et sublatus ad aethera clamor.

From such words of Panthus and the will of the divine
I was brought into flames and arms, where the gloomy Fury,
where a din and a shout lifted to heaven call me (Vir. *Aen.* 2.336-338).

Of particular importance here is Aeneas' claim that he was brought into battle by the will of the divine (*numine divom*) but was ultimately led where a Fury (*Erinys*), a din (*fremitus*), and a shout (*clamor*) led him. The proximity of *Erinys* to two symbols of war (*fremitus* and *clamor*) implies the connection that the unnamed Fury, possibly Allecto, has with the realm of war. While this section occurs chronologically before the events of Book 7, I would suggest that it foreshadows the role that the Furies play in inciting conflict and the presence of the Furies on the battlefield, which can be seen later in Book 10 of the *Aeneid*.

¹⁰⁵ Vir. *Aen.* 6.461-462.

¹⁰⁶ Keith (2000), pg. 69.

Book 10 of the *Aeneid* represents a pivotal turning point for the war between the Latins and Trojans. In the book, countless Latin and Trojan heroes die, including Pallas, Lausus, and Mezentius. After the death of Pallas and Mezentius' *aristeia*, Virgil gives a grim account of the battlefield:

Iam gravis aequabat luctus et mutua Mavors
funera: caedebant pariter pariterque ruebant
victores victique, neque his fuga nota neque illis.
Di Iovis in tectis iram miserantur inanem
amborum et tantos mortalibus esse labores:
hinc Venus, hinc contra spectat Saturnia Iuno,
pallida Tisiphone media inter milia saevit.

Now grave Mars equally weighs lamentations and mutual
deaths: the conquerors and the conquered kill and fall
in equal measure and flight is known to neither the former nor the latter.
The gods in the halls of Jove pitied the useless anger of both sides
and that such labors existed for mortals:
on one side Venus observes, on the other side Saturnian Juno,
and pallid Tisiphone rages among the thousands. (Vir. *Aen.* 10.755-761).

The presence of *Mavors*, most likely a divine manifestation of the battle, is unsurprising. Additionally, the lamentation of the gods at the sheer destruction of the conflict connects back to earlier events of the book – the debate between Venus and Juno in the presence of Jupiter, and Juno's protection of Turnus. I would suggest that of particular importance in this passage, and the passage that follows is the location of Tisiphone in relation to other female divinities. Unlike Juno and Venus, who are located on opposite sides of the battle as suggested by the *hinc...hinc*, Tisiphone rages in between the thousands of troops (*media inter milia*). Virgil's use of *hinc* and *inter* with Venus, Juno, and Tisiphone insinuates the participation of the goddesses in the conflict. The use of *inter* suggests that Tisiphone has a much more active role in the conflict than Juno and Venus, who are relegated to the outside as spectators. The involvement of the goddesses in the battle is

further implied by the verbs used to characterize them. The use of *spectat* also emphasizes the spectatorship of Venus and Juno, who, instead of partaking in the conflict as soldiers, watch from the outside and lament (*miserantur*) the anger of both sides (*iram amborum*). At best, the use of *spectat* and *hinc* with Juno and Venus implies the generalship of the two goddesses, who, like generals, watch and command their forces from the outside. However, I would argue that the lamentations of the gods (*di*), in which Juno and Venus would be included, two lines prior indicate the lack of control that the divine have in the conflict. Unlike Juno and Venus, who could function as leaders of their respective armies, Tisiphone operates more like an enraged soldier, participating in the destruction on both sides. The use of *saevit* with Tisiphone is interesting not only because it reveals that she raves furiously among and along with the soldiers, but also because it is a typical action that she performs on others, as can be seen in the story of Ino and Athamas.

The position of the goddesses and their actions in the conflict is meaningful not only within the context of the *Aeneid* but also its connection to the *Thebaid*. As Hardie claims, and as already mentioned in the introduction, the will of Olympus in the *Thebaid* finds as its chief opponent the destructive forces of the underworld, represented by Tisiphone.¹⁰⁷ A similar setting can be found in this passage from the *Aeneid*. The sheer destruction between the Latins and Trojans was orchestrated not by the gods on Olympus, who lament the *inanem iram*, but by Tisiphone, whose ceaseless war, movement, and emotional turmoil, like her counterpart in the *Thebaid*, is represented by the verb *saevit*.

¹⁰⁷ Hardie, pg. 60.

Consequently, the Olympian gods of Book 10 in the *Aeneid*, much like the gods of the *Thebaid*, find Tisiphone as their primary competitor.

One further connection to the Tisiphone of Statius' *Thebaid* comes immediately after Tisiphone's presence on the battlefield. From lines 762-768, Virgil gives a physical description of Mezentius as he looms over the plain:

At vero ingentem quatiens Mezentius hastam
turbidus ingreditur campo. Quam magnus Orion,
cum pedes incedit medii per maxima Nerei
stagna viam scindens, umero supereminet undas
aut summis referens annosam montibus ornum
ingrediturque solo et caput inter nubila condit:
talis se vastis infert Mezentius armis.

But truly Mezentius, shaking his lofty spear,
advances troubled over the plain. Like tall Orion,
when he goes on foot cutting through the deep waters
in the midst of the sea, and with his shoulders he rises above the waves
or he advances over the highest mountains carrying back
an aged ash-tree, he settles his feet in the earth and his head among the clouds:
of such a kind, Mezentius carried himself with his vast weapons. (Vir. *Aen.* 10-
762-768).

Of note in this passage is Mezentius' comparison to the mythological figure Orion.

Several adjectives and verbs are used in close proximity to Mezentius that highlight his physical stature and his superhuman height: *ingentem*, *magnus*, *maxima*, *supereminet*, *summis*, and *vastis*. His relation to Orion further highlights his size. Mezentius' height is relevant because it suggests that Mezentius has undergone a bestial transformation.

Rather than being compared to a well-known fighter, as one might expect from this simile, Mezentius is compared to a giant because his height overshadows that of his comrades and enemies.

Turnus and Amata similarly undergo monstrous transformations following the intervention of Allecto. From 7.385-388, Amata is compared to a top as she rages similar

to a bacchant. The comparison to a bacchant is apt for a woman, especially Amata, foreshadowing her lack of humanity and newfound bestiality. This simile, in particular, recalls Euripides' *Bacchae* since both Agave and Amata lose a son, literally in the case of the *Bacchae* and figuratively with the proposed marriage of Turnus to Lavinia in the *Aeneid*. Like Amata, who transforms into a top, Turnus similarly changes but transforms instead into a boiling cauldron. In his simile, from 7.462-466, it would appear that Allecto is the fire, which spurns on Turnus (the cauldron) and drives him into war with Aeneas. In the similes of both Amata and Turnus, Virgil highlights the lack of humanity that both experience in their conversions into objects.

As Hardie noted in the *Epic Successors of Virgil*, the presence of chthonic figures in epic, especially in the *Thebaid*, cause godlike heroes to undergo monstrous transformations.¹⁰⁸ Similar to Tydeus, who suffers a egregious conversion before consuming the brain of Melanippus, Mezentius experiences a similar conversion. While Orion is a particularly sympathetic giant to be compared to, the simple fact that he was compared to a giant, one of the mythological beasts, in close proximity to Tisiphone's function in the battle narrative is meaningful not only within the context of the *Aeneid* but also within the *Thebaid*. Book 10 of the *Aeneid* shows one of the first instances of a hero who experiences a monstrous transformation similar to his literary descendants in the *Thebaid*.

The Influence of the *Aeneid* on the *Thebaid*

Beginning with Aeneas' account of the sack of Troy and extending to Aeneas' arrival at Italy, the Furies in Virgil's *Aeneid* play an active yet subtle role in inciting and

¹⁰⁸ Hardie, pg. 65-66.

participating in the conflict of the epic. I would argue that the *Aeneid* provides several motifs for the Furies that are later embodied by Statius' Tisiphone. Virgil, in stark contrast to Homer, provides the first instance in epic, especially in Latin epic, in which women play an active role in conflict. The Furies of the *Aeneid*, like Tisiphone in the *Thebaid*, provoke men into battle, exert their negative control, and actively conflict with the will of the divine. Other goddesses, especially Juno and Venus, also play a vital role in the development of the events of the *Aeneid*. Venus, in Book 2, convinces her son to flee Troy and to pursue his fate elsewhere. In contrast, Juno attempts to keep Aeneas from realizing his destiny by any means possible. This includes utilizing the help of Allecto in Book 7 in orchestrating conflict between Turnus and Aeneas, a decision that she later regrets by the end of the book. While each goddess has her particular motivations, the Furies' primary impetus in the *Aeneid* is the utter destruction of mortals.

Perhaps the most similar connection that the Furies in the *Aeneid* share with their counterparts in the *Thebaid* comes from Book 7. As Juno summons Allecto to carry out her destructive will, she invokes particular characteristics of the Furies that will aid her cause:

Tu potes unanimos armare in proelia fratres
atque odiis versare domos, tu verbera tectis
funereasque inferre faces, tibi nomina mille,
mille nocendi artes. Fecundum concute pectus,
disice compositam pacem, sere crimina belli:
arma velit poscatque simul rapiatque inventus.

You can arm like-minded brothers to war
and to stir homes with hatred, to bring in your whips under roofs
and funeral torches, you have a thousand names,
you have a thousand arts of harming. Rouse your fertile breast!
Dispel the established peace! Contrive your crimes of war! (Vir. Aen. 7.335-340).

Ganiban has already noted the similarity of the abilities that Juno attributes to Allecto to those Oedipus requests of Tisiphone in his curse:

tu saltem debita uindex
huc ades et totos in poenam ordire nepotes.
indue quod madidum tabo diadema cruentis
unguibus abripui, votisque instincta paternis
i media in fratres, generis consortia ferro
dissiliant. da, Tartarei regina barathri,
quod cupiam vidisse nefas. nec tarda sequetur
mens iuvenum: modo digna veni, mea pignora nosces.

At least, come here my owed avenger
and begin the punishment of my descendants.
Put on this crown dripping with putrid gore, which I
have pulled off with my bloody nails, and, roused by paternal prayers,
go between the brothers, let the bonds of kinship be severed
by the sword. Give the *nefas*, queen of the Tartarean abyss,
which I would desire to see, nor will the minds of young men follow slowly:
come now, worthy one, you will recognize them as my children (Stat. *Theb.* 1.80-87).

While I would agree with the suggestion that the attributes Juno assigns to Allecto are similar to those Oedipus ascribes to Tisiphone, I would suggest that Juno's invocation of Allecto has an intertextual connection with the *Thebaid* that recalls the opening lines of the epic. Of particular note is Juno's claim that the Furies can arm like-minded brothers into battle and to stir homes with hatred (*Tu potes unanimos armare in proelia fratres / atque odiis versare domos*). In essence, the opening two lines of this invocation of Allecto are parallel to the opening lines of the *Thebaid* (*Fraternas acies alternaque regna profanis / decertata odiis sontesque evolvere Thebas*). The *fraternas acies* of Statius' *Thebaid* seems to function as a conceptual chiasmus to the *proelia fratres* of the *Aeneid*, despite the latter phrase being in separate cases. Likewise, the structure of *odiis sontesque evolvere Thebas* parallels *odiis versare domos*, with the former substituting *domos* with *sontes Thebas*, a specific variation meant to reflect the location of Statius' epic. In both

the *Aeneid* and the *Thebaid*, a Fury causes like-minded brothers to be armed against one another and homes to be overturned by hatred. The similar structure of the opening lines of the *Thebaid* to Juno's invocation of Allecto in the *Aeneid* seems to suggest Statius' awareness of the attributes of his Fury Tisiphone and her effect on the poem. The features ascribed to Allecto and the Furies, first established in Virgil's *Aeneid*, find their dramatic pinnacle in Statius' *Thebaid* with the actions of Tisiphone and her uninhibited control over the epic.

As Ganiban and other scholars have noted, another connection between the *Aeneid* and the *Thebaid* comes in the emphasis on *pietas* in the former and *nefas* in the latter. In the *Aeneid*, Virgil carefully constructs the piety (*pietas*) of Aeneas and his reverence to both his people and family. While forces, both divine and human, Olympian and chthonic, would attempt to oppose his fate, Aeneas is ultimately fruitful in his destiny of establishing the Roman people, a conclusion that is heavily influenced by his reverence. In the *Thebaid*, however, *nefas* is the central theme of the poem that affects all aspects of the narrative. As Ganiban has rightfully noted

“Moreover, when Oedipus, the *Thebaid*'s symbol of *impietas*, utters his prayer for *nefas*, he intertextually represents an “anti-Aeneas,” an embodiment of *impietas*, a Junonian figure of wrath and resistance to heavenly control and cosmic order. His call for a criminal war, like Juno's in *Aeneid* 7, challenges the moral and political authority of Jupiter, while at the same time it suggests the irrelevance of *pietas* in his criminal world.”¹⁰⁹

As an architect, Tisiphone carries out the *nefas* that Oedipus wishes to see (1.86), ultimately bringing the destruction of his two sons and the destruction of the Theban and Argive forces. *Nefas* pervades all aspects of the *Thebaid*: it is an omnipresent concept that functions as the antithesis to the *pietas* of the *Aeneid*. While Ganiban is correct in

¹⁰⁹ Ganiban, pg. 43.

noting the similarities between Juno and Oedipus, the former is ultimately unsuccessful in enacting the revenge she seeks, while the latter is eventually yet involuntarily successful in having his impious vengeance enacted.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Oedipus' entrance into the *Thebaid* is similar to that of an epic poet: in his frenzy, he invokes the help of his patron and inspirer Tisiphone to carry out the *nefas* that he prays for. Similar to Oedipus, Juno likewise invokes the aid of Allecto in carrying out *impietas* and *nefas*. As a result, I would argue that both Oedipus and Juno function as internal poets in their respective epics. In both the *Aeneid* and the *Thebaid*, Oedipus and Juno lose any authorial control that they attempted to assert because of the destructive and overreaching will of a Fury. In Book 7 of the *Aeneid*, Allecto exerts her uninhibited control over Turnus and the Latin people. So damaging is her influence that Juno banishes the Fury and attempts to reassert her control over the conflict:

Te super aetherias errare licentius auras
haud pater ille velit, summi regnator Olympi:
cede locis; ego, siqua super fortuna laborum est,
ipsa regam.

That you could freely roam over the heavenly air
that father, the ruler of all Olympus, did not wish.
Withdraw from this place. I, if there is any fortune of your labors,
I will preside over it myself (Vir. *Aen.* 7.557-560).

Juno, unlike the other gods and goddesses of the *Aeneid*, loses any control that she once had. Juno, who for six books attempted to bring about her *ira* against pious Aeneas, invokes the aid of a Fury in halting the destiny of Aeneas. Interestingly, however, Juno understands that the effectiveness of the Fury and the scope of her power are antithetical to the will of Jupiter. The mention of *errare licentius* shows Juno's uneasiness at the

freedom of Allecto's control. Juno recognizes that Allecto has wandered too freely beyond the boundaries initially assigned to her. Juno seems to understand that the presence of a Fury in the *Aeneid* is an all-corrupting force, one which leads to the ruin of Trojan and Latin alike, culminating in the battle narrative of Book 10. Tisiphone's role as an active combatant on the battlefield resembles her function as an instigator of and participant in conflict in Statius' *Thebaid*. Additionally, Tisiphone's role in causing bestial transformations, which becomes a common motif in the *Thebaid*, most likely was influenced by Mezentius' actions in Book 10 of the *Aeneid*.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have shown that Tisiphone's role in Statius' *Thebaid* is unique and more comprehensive than other characterizations of the Furies in Greek or Latin literature. It is in the *Thebaid* that Tisiphone is awarded her most significant control. Nevertheless, her attributes and character were inspired by nearly a millennium of literary development, starting with Homer. Unlike the scholarship of Hardie, Keith, Ganiban, Vessey, and others, which argues that Tisiphone's role in the *Thebaid* is important but not central to an understanding of the poem, my thesis has demonstrated that Tisiphone is a central character in the *Thebaid*. I believe that my research is a comprehensive account of Tisiphone that builds upon the formative groundwork of the aforementioned scholars. By focusing on Tisiphone's control over the narrative of the *Thebaid*, I hope to have offered new interpretations of several episodes of the epic with a focus on how Tisiphone controlled them. With such an argument, I believe that scholars can gain a new appreciation for the power of the underworld, a central theme of the *Thebaid*, its role in the poem, and how that role compares with other accounts from ancient literature.

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