Dictynna

Revue de poétique latine

12 | 2015

Varia

The intertextual matrix of Statius' Thebaid 11.315-23

Astrid Voigt

Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/dictynna/1149>

DOI: 10.4000/dictynna.1149

ISSN: 1765-3142

Electronic reference

Astrid Voigt, « The intertextual matrix of Statius' Thebaid 11.315-23 », *Dictynna* [Online], 12 | 2015, Online since 13 January 2016, connection on 10 September 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/dictynna/1149> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/dictynna.1149>

This text was automatically generated on 10 September 2020.

Les contenus des la revue *Dictynna* sont mis à disposition selon les termes de la Licence Creative Commons Attribution - Pas d'Utilisation Commerciale - Pas de Modification 4.0 International.

The intertextual matrix of Statius' *Thebaid* 11.315-23

Astrid Voigt

- 1 In book 11 of Statius' *Thebaid*, Jocasta rushes to stop Eteocles from confronting Polynices on the battlefield. She has performed the self-defacing ritual acts of lamentation and is accompanied by a group of women including her dutiful daughters. In this scene, Jocasta is described as oblivious to the social constraints of her gender and is compared to Agave who in a Dionysiac frenzy rips off her son's head:

at genetrix, primam funestae sortis ut amens
expavit famam (nec tarde credidit), ibat
scissa comam vultusque et pectore nuda cruento,
non sexus decorisve memor: Pentheia qualis
mater ad insani scandeat culmina montis,
promissum saevo caput allatura Lyaeo.
non comites, non ferre piae vestigia natae
aequa valent: tantum miserae dolor ultimus addit
robur, et exsanguis crudescunt luctibus anni.
(*Theb.* 11.315-23)

But the mother, when at the first rumour of the deadly fate (and she was not slow to believe) she was terrified and out of her mind, was on her way, her hair and face torn, and her breast bare and bloodied, forgetting her sex and her propriety: like Pentheus' mother when she climbed the top of the mad mountain in order to bring the promised head to fierce Lyaeus. Neither her companions nor her pious daughters are able to keep pace: such strength does the ultimate pain lend to the wretched woman, and her feeble age becomes fierce through her grief.¹

- 2 This is a striking and shocking comparison. Why does the poet invite us to think of the mother who decapitates her own son when he tells us about Jocasta's attempt to save her own two sons from mutual fratricide?² While more optimistic readings of Jocasta's character in the *Thebaid* appear to remain more or less silent on this simile, its 'disturbing discrepancy'³ has led more pessimistic readers to incriminate Jocasta and cast doubt on her intentions at this point.⁴ Debra Hershkowitz, for example, concludes from it that 'Jocasta is, in a way, ultimately responsible for the destruction of both her sons simply by having conceived them incestuously.'⁵ Randall Ganiban asks more

directly: 'Will Jocasta in her fury also commit violence against her son?'⁶ In his intertextual reading, moreover, he maintains that 'the intertextual aspects of Jocasta's characterization [...] specifically show the intensification of her madness and *nefas* in *Thebaid* 11.'⁷ In this paper I will propose several intra- and intertexts for this passage which go beyond those examined by Ganiban. Exploring this 'matrix of possibilities'⁸ will help us make deeper sense of this seemingly incongruous comparison and show that there are more facets to Jocasta's characterization than madness and *nefas*. In some cases the intertextual relationship works on a larger cultural scale through the evocation of a model; in other cases the intertextual relationship is based on a resemblance on the micro-textual level or on a parallel in the narrative structure. Not surprisingly perhaps the intertextual matrix of this passage is constituted by texts from the accounts of other women, mostly mothers, whose characterization in other epic poems, tragedies, historiography or Statius' *Thebaid* itself reflects on aspects of Jocasta here and make her, in turn, the Roman mother, the pious mother, the Theban mother, the grieving mother, the epic mother. Before I look at these accounts, I will briefly recapitulate Jocasta's interventions in the tragic tradition.

Jocasta's interventions in the tragic tradition

- 3 There are two types of intervention which Jocasta makes in order to prevent her two sons from killing each other in their power struggle for Thebes. The first is her attempt at reconciling both brothers before the actual battle has begun. The second occurs on the battlefield just before the immediate confrontation of both brothers in a fraternal duel. In Euripides' *Phoenician Women*, Jocasta's attempt at reconciling the brothers is realized in a truce which allows Polynices to come into the city of Thebes and meet face-to-face with Eteocles. At the end of their debate their positions remain unchanged and, when the brothers confront each other again on the battlefield, Jocasta arrives too late in to prevent the fatal duel. Seneca in his *Phoenissae* has conflated these two moments of Jocasta's intervention. She is exhorted by her attendant and her daughter Antigone to interpose herself between the two brothers on the field (Sen. *Phoen.* 401-414), effectively using her body as a human shield. When she does that, she is temporarily successful and a lengthy debate between both brothers and Jocasta ensues (Sen. *Phoen.* 434-664). However, the play breaks off before Eteocles and Polynices engage in physical combat. In Statius' *Thebaid*, both moments again have their own place in the narrative. However, this time, in *Thebaid* 7, Jocasta, together with her two daughters, goes out to Polynices' camp outside the city walls in order to dissuade him from attacking his ancestral city. In *Thebaid* 11, the intervention that is of interest for this paper is addressed only to Eteocles at the moment when he dons his armour just before he meets his brother on the battlefield.⁹

Jocasta the Roman mother

- 4 Taken together, each scenes in Statius' *Thebaid* in which Jocasta attempts to stop her sons from fighting each other has a distinct model from Rome's early history: Veturia, mother of Coriolanus, tries to prevent him from attacking Rome together with the Volscians, a people previously at war with the Romans who received him after he had been banned by his own fellow Romans and made him their leader. Veturia's story is

related by various ancient historians¹⁰ and we can expect it to be part and parcel of the early history of Rome as it would have been known to Statius' contemporary audience. Like Polynices, Coriolanus had gained military strength in exile and intended to take his ancestral city by force. Just like Jocasta in *Thebaid* 7, Veturia goes to see her son in the camp which he has set up in front of the city gates. In Livy's account, Veturia goes together with her daughter Volumnia and her two small sons after being implored by the female population of Rome (*matronae*). Coriolanus is receptive to their emotional appeal and the end of the account attests to the praise which the women received for their contribution to solving this public problem: their fame was acknowledged unreservedly and they received a monument in the temple to *Fortuna Muliebris*:

Non inviderunt laude sua mulieribus viri Romani—adeo sine obtreactione gloriae alienae vivebatur,—monumentoque quod esset, templum Fortunae muliebri aedificatum dedicatumque est.

(Liv. 2.40.12)

There was no envy of the fame the women had earned, on the part of the men of Rome—so free was life in those days from disparagement of another's glory—and to preserve its memory the temple of Fortuna Muliebris was built and dedicated.¹¹

- 5 While Veturia is generally accepted as a model for the scene in Book 7,¹² she is also a model for Jocasta in book 11. Firstly, as has been noted, within the *Thebaid* this episode recalls the earlier one in Book 7.¹³ Secondly, like Veturia, Jocasta here is supported by her female company not only by Antigone, as in Euripides' tragedy, or both of her daughters as in *Thebaid* 7, but also by an anonymous group of women (*comites*, *Theb.* 11.321).¹⁴ Thirdly, Jocasta and Veturia (or Volumnia as she is called by Plutarch) challenge their sons by making their maternal bodies a physical obstacle to the internecine violence. In *Thebaid* 11, Jocasta addresses Eteocles with the following words:

[...] prius haec tamen arma necesse est
experiare domi: stabo ipso in limine portae
auspicium infelix scelerumque immanis imago. 340
haec tibi canities, haec sunt calcanda, nefande,
ubera, perque uterum sonipes hic matris agendus.
parce.

(*Theb.* 11.338-343)

[...] But first you must try out your arms at home. I shall stand in the very threshold of the gate, an unlucky omen, a frightful image of crimes. These my white hairs, these breasts, wicked man, you must trample, this horse you must drive through your mother's womb. Spare me.

- 6 A similar warning appears in some of the accounts of Rome's early history in Veturia's speech to Coriolanus.¹⁵ Plutarch's *Life of Coriolanus* offers a very concise example:

[...] οὕτω διανοοῦ καὶ παρασκεύαζε σεαυτὸν ὡς τῇ πατρίδι μὴ προσμῖξαι
δυνάμενος πρὶν ἢ νεκρὰν ὑπερβῆναι τὴν τεκοῦσαν.

(Plut. *Cor.* 35.3)

[...] be well assured that thou canst not assail thy country without first treading underfoot the corpse of her who bore thee.¹⁶

- 7 So Veturia's / Volumnia's loyalty to her city and the courage which earned her and the women who supported her great public respect reflect on Jocasta's intervention in Statius' *Thebaid* 11. Even though Veturia / Volumnia is successful in that Coriolanus refrains from attacking Rome and Jocasta is not successful, either with Polynices or with Eteocles, Veturia still can be seen as a model for Jocasta and as such emphasizes her loyalty to Thebes, her courage, and her potential for peace-making.

- 8 Jocasta's act of interposing herself in between the weapons of the brothers also recalls the legend of the Sabine women as told by Livy in his account of the early history of Rome.¹⁷ Even though, strictly speaking, the Sabine women do not act as mothers but as wives and daughters, they still provide a strong model for Jocasta's scene in *Thebaid* 11 as they intervene on the battlefield in a kind of civil war. The Sabine women, too, have torn their hair and their clothes; they, too, are driven by their anguish to prevent inter-familial killings; they, too, transgress gender-boundaries and, like Veturia, they meet with unreserved approval:

Tum Sabinae mulieres, quarum ex iniuria bellum ortum erat, crinibus passis scissaque veste victo malis muliebri pavore, ausae se inter tela volantia inferre, ex transverso impetu facto dirimere infestas acies, dirimere iras, hinc patres hinc viros orantes ne se sanguine nefando soceri generique respergerent, ne parricidio macularent partus suos, nepotum illi, hi liberum progeniem. [...] Ex bello tam tristi laeta repente pax cariores Sabinas viris ac parentibus et ante omnes Romulo ipsi fecit. Itaque cum populum in curias triginta divideret, nomina earum curiis inposuit.

(Liv. 1.13)

Then the Sabine women, whose wrong had given rise to the war, with loosened hair and torn garments, their woman's timidity lost in a sense of their misfortune, dared to go amongst the flying missiles, and rushing in from the side, to part the hostile forces and disarm them of their anger, beseeching their fathers on this side, on that their husbands, that fathers-in-law and sons-in-law should not stain themselves with impious bloodshed, nor pollute with parricide the suppliants' children, grandsons to one party and sons to the other. [...] The sudden exchange of so unhappy a war for a joyful peace endeared the Sabine women even more to their husbands and parents, and above all to Romulus himself. And so, when he divided the people into thirty curiae, he named these wards after the women.

- 9 Veturia and the Sabine women are celebrated legends from early Roman history and unequivocal examples of *pietas*, a fundamental value of Roman culture and society. The intertextual links between the episodes of Jocasta's interventions in Statius' epic and Roman historiography allows us to recognize that Jocasta shares the intentions and values of these two models of female loyalty and courage.

Jocasta the pious mother

- 10 In *Thebaid* 11 as a whole, Jocasta's confrontation of Eteocles is a paradigmatic realization of a syntagmatic series of interventions. This, too, reveals piety as a crucial aspect of Jocasta's characterization. Tisiphone prepares for the fraternal duel, the climax of her infernal ambitions, and seeks help from her sister Megaera. She then says:

ambo faciles nostrique; sed anceps
vulgus et affatus matris blandamque precatu
Antigonen timeo, paulum ne nostra retardent
consilia.

(*Theb.* 11.102-105)

Both are compliant, both ours. But I fear the doubtful mob and the mother's pleas
and Antigone, gentle in entreaty, lest they retard a little our designs.

- 11 The Fury clearly anticipates the series of interventions in the narrative of this book. In a truly structural fashion each of these moments provides us with an intertext which helps us decipher the others and the last one in this series, that of *Pietas* the

personification of piety herself (*Theb.* 11.457-495), appears to be the key.¹⁸ When the duel begins, neither of the brothers manages a successful assault (*Theb.* 11.447-56). In this apparent delay, *Pietas* comes down from heaven, where she had sat weeping about the fraternal conflict like 'hapless sister or anguished mother' (*ceu soror infelix pugnatum aut anxia mater*, *Theb.* 11.461). This simile alludes to both Jocasta's and Antigone's attempts at stopping each brother from encountering the other on the battlefield in the preceding narrative. What is more, Jocasta in some ways reciprocates her intertextual relationship with *Pietas* at that point in the narrative when the sheer presence of *Pietas* affects the combatants:

desiluitque polo; niveus sub nubibus atris
quamquam maesta deae sequitur vestigia limes.
vix steterat campo, subita mansuescere pace
agmina sentirique nefas; tunc ora madescunt
pectoraque, et tacitus subrepsit fratribus horror.
(*Theb.* 11.472-76)

And she leapt down from heaven. Beneath the dark clouds a snow-white trail follows the goddess' footsteps, sad though they were. Scarce had she set foot on the plain when the armies turned gentle in a sudden peace and the wickedness was perceived. Then faces and breasts are moistened and silent horror steals upon the brothers.

- 12 This temporary success is that of Jocasta in Seneca's *Phoenissae*:

Vadit furenti similis aut etiam furit.
[...]
victa materna prece
haesere bella, iamque in alternam necem
illinc et hinc miscere cupientes manus
librata dextra tela suspensa tenent.
paci favetur, omnium ferrum latet
cessatque tectum—vibrat in fratrum manu
laniata canas mater ostendit comas,
rogat abnuentes, irrigat fletu genas.
(*Sen. Phoen.* 427, 434-441)

She presses on like a madwoman, or truly is mad. As an arrow flies swiftly when shot from a Parthian's hand, as a ship is whirled along by the thrust of an insane gale, or as a shooting star falls from the sky, scoring the heavens and smashing a direct path with its speeding fires: so she has flown apace in her frenzy, and straightway separated the two battlelines. Conquered by a mother's prayer, the warfare has halted. Now, though keen to join battle from each side in mutual slaughter, they hold their weapons suspended, their right hands poised. Peace wins the day; everyone's weapons are sheathed and idle—but in the brothers' hands they still quiver. The mother displays and tears her white hair, begs as they shake their heads, drenches her cheeks with tears.

- 13 Jocasta's temporary success in Seneca's play is probably also the model for her effect on the Argive troops in *Thebaid* 7.527-38, and also, in turn, for Antigone's on Polynices in *Theb.* 11.382-87, since Antigone's intervention is a duplicate of Jocasta's interventions in the tragic tradition.¹⁹ So when we read *Pietas*' intervention intertextually, she becomes indeed the key for reading Jocasta's intervention in *Thebaid* 11. Jocasta's strong association with this central Roman value which emerges here also reinforces the reading suggested in the previous section.

Jocasta the Theban mother

- 14 But now back to our simile comparing Jocasta in *Thebaid* 11 to Agave who brings her son's head to Dionysus. First of all, a comparison between Jocasta and Agave is not unheard of. In Seneca's *Oedipus*, the chorus compares Jocasta's response to the revelation that her husband is her son to that of Agave when she discovers her crime:

En ecce, rapido saeva prosiluit gradu
Iocasta vecors, qualis attonita et furens
Cadmea mater abstulit nato caput
sensitive raptum.
(Sen. *Oed.* 1004-7)

Look, Jocasta rushes out with urgent steps in violent turmoil, like the frenzied Cadmean mother when she tore away her son's head, or when she recognised her theft.

- 15 In his *Phoenissae*, it is Jocasta herself who makes this comparison right at the beginning of her first speech in the play. Here Jocasta considers Agave lucky because she did not realize what she had done:

Felix Agave! facinus horrendum manu,
qua fecerat, gestavit et spoliū tulit
cruenta nati maenas in partes dati; 365
fecit scelus, sed misera non ultro suo
sceleri occurrat.
(Sen. *Phoen.* 363-7)

Lucky Agave! She carried that horrific deed in the hand that had committed it, a bloodstained maenad bearing spoils of her dismembered son; she committed the crime, but beyond that the poor woman did not come face to face with her crime.

- 16 In both cases, the comparison to Agave is made with respect to Jocasta's incestuous relationship with Oedipus. Later on in *Thebaid* 11, in Tisiphone's speech to *Pietas* the crimes of both women frame the history of Thebes when she accuses the Roman goddess of being absent throughout this history:

'[...] nunc sera nocentes
defendis Thebas. ubi tunc, cum bella cieret
Bacchus et armatas furiarent orgia matres?
aut ubi segnis eras, dum Martius impia serpens
stagna bibit, dum Cadmus arat, dum victa cadit Sphinx, 490
dum rogat Oedipoden genitor, dum lampade nostra
in thalamos Iocasta venit?'
(*Theb.* 11.486-492)

'[...] Too late you now defend guilty Thebes. Where were you then, when Bacchus stirred up war and his orgies drove armed matrons mad? Or where were you idling while the Martian snake drank the unholy pool, while Cadmus ploughed and the Sphinx fell vanquished, while Oedipus was questioned by his father, while Jocasta came to the marriage chamber by our torch's light?'

- 17 So, on a very general level it makes sense to compare Jocasta to Agave. As they are both defining examples of the history of Theban intra-familial crimes, crimes that range from Agave's filicide and Oedipus' patricide to Jocasta's incest.²⁰ But still, why is this comparison used at the point when Jocasta tries to prevent another crime being added to this history, the fratricide between Eteocles and Polynices? Why is it employed at a point when Jocasta's action is associated with that of the personification of *Pietas* in the same book and with that of Veturia or the Sabine women, exemplary models of this Roman value? The answer is because this is Thebes and Jocasta is a Theban mother. In

the following, I will suggest a few more intra- and intertexts in order to unlock a further layer of meaning in this incongruous simile which goes beyond the immediate association of both Theban mothers on account of the crimes they have committed against their familial duties.

- 18 In the necromancy scene of *Thebaid* 4, the daughter of Tiresias, the Theban seer, describes to her blind father the Theban souls as they appear from the underworld. Amongst them is a group of Theban mothers, one of them Agave:

Hic orbam Autonoën, et anhelam cernimus Ino
 respectantem arcus et ad ubera dulce prementem
 pignus, et oppositis Semelen a ventre lacertis.
 Penthea iam fractis genetrix Cadmeia thyrsis 465
 iamque remissa deo pectusque adaptata cruentum
 insequitur planctu: fugit ille per avia Lethes
 et Stygios super usque lacus, ubi mitior illum
 flet pater et lacerum componit corpus Echion.
 (*Theb.* 4.562-69)

Here we see bereaved Autonoë and panting Ino as she looks back at the bow and presses her sweet child to her breast, and Semele with arms outstretched to protect her belly. His Cadmean mother follows Pentheus with lamentation, her wand now broken, now released of the god, her breasts open and bleeding. He flees through Lethe's wilderness even beyond the Stygian lake, where his kindlier father Echion weeps him and composes his torn body.

- 19 It is the echo of the mother's grief about her son and their relationship to each other which reverberates between both passages. This echo is sounded in a set of almost identical words (*Penthea ... genetrix Cadmeia ... pectusque adaptata cruentum*, *Theb.* 4.566-7; *genetrix ... pectore nuda cruento ... Pentheia*, *Theb.* 11.315-18) and encourages us to take what is said about Agave here as a reflection about Jocasta in our primary passage, too. There are various aspects of Agave in this intratext which reflect on Jocasta in the episode in *Thebaid* 11: first of all, Agave appears last on a list of Theban mothers who are all 'direct or indirect victims of divine power'.²¹ Secondly, Agave's existence in the underworld is characterized not only by her grief at the revelation that she has killed her son, but also by her inability to find reconciliation with him. She follows him with lamentation (*Penthea ... insequitur planctu*), he flees from her (*fugit ille*). Finally, Ino and Semele are here shown to be protective of their sons, the one clasping her child, the other shielding her pregnant womb. This is the kind of relationship which Agave was not allowed to have.²² So through this intratext we are reminded that Jocasta, similar to Agave and the other Theban mothers named by Manto, is a victim of supernatural powers. At the same time this intratext conveys a strong feeling of guilt and the sense that the aspiration to realize a protective relationship towards her offspring will be thwarted. The eternal grief and the lack of reconciliation which Agave experiences in the underworld foreshadow the failure of Jocasta's attempt to prevent her sons from killing each other.

- 20 In Seneca, too, Jocasta cannot realize her aspiration to be a pious mother.²³ She says:

nil possum pie
 pietate salva facere. Quodcumque alteri
 optabo nato fiet alterius malo.
 (*Sen. Phoen.* 380-82)

I can do nothing loyally without destroying my loyalty; any hopes I have for one son will harm the other if realized.

- 21 This pointed formulation shows that Jocasta's dilemma is different from that of Agave. Jocasta has two sons and loyalty to one son will compromise her relationship with the other. The simile in the *Thebaid*, then, also appears to express this dilemma: even if Jocasta approaches one of her sons in order to prevent him from fighting with his brother, she will put one of the two at a disadvantage. So Jocasta will always have one son to whom her relationship is like that of Agave to Pentheus.²⁴ However, while in Seneca's play Jocasta's dilemma is caused by the conflicting claims of both of Jocasta's sons and would not exist if there was no fraternal strife, through the simile in *Thebaid* 11 it is more firmly linked to Jocasta's Theban identity. P. J. Davis has identified heredity as one of the forms which determine the history of Thebes. Eteocles and Polynices, in particular, have inherited a disposition to rage (*gentilis furor*, *Theb.* 1.126) which they cannot escape.²⁵ In the same way Jocasta cannot escape the history of other Theban mothers in spite of her aspiration to protect her sons.

Jocasta the grieving mother

- 22 If we look at the simile on a more general level, the comparison is one of Jocasta to a maenad. In Greek and Roman epic poetry, this is a *topos* which is used in situations of extreme grief.²⁶ We find an early example of this *topos* in Homer's *Iliad*. Andromache, the wife of the central Trojan hero responds to the news of her husband's death:

[...] ἄλοχος δ' οὐ πώ τι πέπυστο
 Ἕκτορος οὐ γάρ οἱ τις ἐτήτυμος ἄγγελος ἐλθὼν
 ἥγγειλ' ὅττι ρά οἱ πόσις ἔκτοθι μίμνε πυλάων,
 ἀλλ' ἢ γ' ἰσθὺν ὕφαινε μυχῶ δόμου ὑψηλοῖο 440
 δίπλακα πορφυρέην, ἐν δὲ θρόνα ποικίλ' ἔπασσε.
 κέκλετο δ' ἀμφιπόλοισιν ἐυπλοκάμοις κατὰ δῶμα.
 [...] κωκυτοῦ δ' ἤκουσε καὶ οἰμωγῆς ἀπὸ πύργου·
 τῆς δ' ἐλελίχθη γυῖα, χαμαὶ δέ οἱ ἔκπεσε κερκίς.
 ἢ δ' αὖτις δμῶῃσιν ἐυπλοκάμοισι μετηύδα·
 [...] Ὡς φασμένη μεγάροιο διέσσυτο μαινάδι ἴση, 460
 παλλομένη κραδίην· ἅμα δ' ἀμφίπολοι κίον αὐτῇ.
 αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ πύργον τε καὶ ἀνδρῶν ἴξεν ὄμιλον,
 ἔστη παπτήνας· ἐπὶ τείχεϊ, τὸν δ' ἐνόησεν
 ἐλκόμενον πρόσθεν πόλιος [...]
 τὴν δὲ κατ' ὀφθαλμῶν ἐρεβεννὴ νύξ ἐκάλυπεν,
 [...] ἢ δ' ἐπεὶ οὖν ἔμπνυτο καὶ ἐς φρένα θυμὸς ἀγέσθη, 475
 ἀμβλήδην γόωσα μετὰ Τρωῆσιν ἔειπεν [...]
 (Il. 22. 437-442, 447-9, 460-4, 466, 475-6)

[...] but the wife knew nothing as yet—the wife of Hector—for no true messenger had come to tell her that her husband remained outside the gates; but she was weaving a tapestry in the innermost part of the lofty house, a purple tapestry of double fold, and in it she was weaving flowers of varied hue. And she called to her fair-tressed handmaids through the house [...] But she heard the shrieks and the groans from the wall, and her limbs reeled, and from her hand the shuttle fell to the floor. Then she spoke again among her fair-tressed handmaids [...] So saying she rushed through the hall with throbbing heart like [a maenad], and with her went her handmaids. But when she came to the wall and the throng of men, then on the wall she stopped and looked, and caught sight of him as he was dragged before the city; [...] Then down over her eyes came the darkness of night and enfolded her [...] But when she revived, and her spirit returned into her breast, then she lifted up her voice in wailing and spoke among the women of Troy [...]

- 23 The situation bears more resemblances to that of Jocasta than just the comparison with a maenad: both Andromache and Jocasta are in female company and both move into the male martial sphere. Andromache leaves the female domestic sphere in order to join other Trojans on the city wall, from where they can see what is happening on the battlefield before the city. Jocasta confronts Eteocles at the moment when he dons his armour for his fight with Polynices.
- 24 The intertextual move from Statius to Homer is signposted through an intervening intertext which both relates back to Homer and forward to Statius. This passage comes from Virgil's *Aeneid*. It describes the reaction of the mother of Euryalus, the young Trojan warrior who is killed in a nocturnal expedition:
- Interea pavidam volitans pennata per urbem
nuntia Fama ruit matrisque adlabitur auris
Euryali. at subitus miserae calor ossa reliquit, 475
excussi manibus radii revolutaque pensa.
evolat infelix et femineo ululatu
scissa comam muros amens atque agmina cursu
prima petit, non illa virum, non illa pericli
telorumque memor, caelum dehinc questibus implet.
(*Aen.* 9.473-80)
- In the meantime winged Rumour, harbinger of news, flies swiftly through the fearful city and glides into Euryalus' mother's ears. Then suddenly warmth left the bones of the wretched woman, the shuttles were shaken from her hands and the threads unwound. She rushes, the ill-fated one, and with womanly shriek runs seeking the battlements and the frontlines of the army, her hair torn and out of her mind, she forgets the men, she forgets the danger and the weapons. Then she fills the sky with her lament.
- 25 This passage is very closely related to the passage in Statius' *Thebaid* and again the relation is established through a couple of identical or almost identical words. In both passages the woman responds to a rumour (*Fama*), both women are out of their minds (*amens*) and both are characterized by the tearing of their hair (*scissa comam*), an important part of female ritual lamentation. Both women are 'wretched' (*miserae*), and their behaviour is described as being oblivious to how they transgress gender norms (*non ... memor*) as one sets out to confront the troops and the other her son. At the same time, as is commonly accepted, the lament of Euryalus' mother in Virgil's *Aeneid* is closely modelled on that of Andromache in Homer's *Iliad*.²⁷ Both women are hit by the news of the death of their loved ones while they are sat at the loom, both women run to the battlements and both women swoon when they face the dead body of their loved ones. Euryalus' mother is not compared to a maenad, but in some ways her movement away from the loom suggests just that - as it is considered as characteristic of the female followers of Dionysus.²⁸
- 26 So Jocasta's confrontation of Eteocles is also motivated by her grief. This grief is reminiscent of the grief felt by Andromache for Hector and by Euryalus' mother for her son. The former is the epitome of a loyal wife and the latter was singled out in Virgil's poem for her piety as she was the only woman who followed Aeneas and his men after the rest of the Trojan women refused to continue their toils and their travels and remained on Sicily.²⁹ This reminiscence underlines Jocasta's piety and the intensity of her grief. However, different from Andromache and Euryalus' mother, Jocasta's grief empowers her to take action and make an attempt at preventing the impending violence.³⁰

Jocasta the epic mother

- 27 Despite the 'intertextual suspense'³¹ created through Veturia and the Sabine women as intertextual models for Jocasta in Statius' *Thebaid*, Jocasta remains an epic mother. The failure of her attempt to stop her two sons from killing each other is already foreshadowed by the reference to Hecabe and Amata as mothers who similarly appeal in vain to their sons (or, in Amata's case, son-in-law to be) to desist from the fatal duel with their arch-enemies.³² In particular, Jocasta's bare breast and her references to her maternal organs in her speech to Eteocles (*Theb.* 11.342) are reminiscent of Hecabe's supplication to Hector in *Iliad* 22:

μήτηρ δ' αὖθ' ἐτέρωθεν ὀδύρετο δάκρυ χέουσα,
κόλπον ἀνιεμένη, ἐτέρηφι δὲ μαζὸν ἀνέσχε·
καί μιν δάκρυ χέουσ' ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα·
“Ἑκτορ, τέκνον ἐμόν, τάδε τ' αἶδεο καί μ' ἐλέησον
αὐτήν, εἴ ποτέ τοι λαθικηδέα μαζὸν ἐπέσχον [...]"
(*Il.* 22.79-83)

And for her part his mother in her turn wailed and shed tears, loosening the folds of her robe, while with the other hand she held out her breast, and shedding tears she spoke to him winged words: "Hector, my child, respect this and pity me, if ever I gave you the breast to lull your pain. [...]"

- 28 With Homer's Hecabe being a shared model for both Statius' Jocasta and Virgil's Amata,³³ Jocasta also becomes closely associated with Amata who similarly confronts Turnus in *Aeneid* 12 (54-63). However, Amata in *Aeneid* 12 kills herself through hanging: *et nodum informis leti trabe nectit ab alta* ('and from a lofty beam [she] fastens the noose of a hideous death', *Aen.* 12.603). Again, Jocasta appears to reciprocate the intertextual relationship since this line recalls Odysseus' encounter with Epicaste in the underworld who had chosen the same mode of suicide: ἡ δ' ἔβη εἰς Αἴδαο πυλάρταο κρατεροῖο, | ἄψαμνη βρόχον αἰπὺν ἄφ' ὕψηλοῖο μελάθρου, | ὧ ἄχεϊ σχομένη ('but she went down to the house of Hades, the strong warder, making fast a deadly noose from the high ceiling, caught by her own grief', *Od.* 11.277-9). So the poet establishes a structural similarity between Amata in *Aeneid* 12 and Jocasta in *Thebaid* 11 and links them together intertextually. He thus anticipates already at this point in the narrative Jocasta's suicide later in the same book after her sons have killed each other (*Theb.* 11.634-47).³⁴

Conclusion

- 29 In the end, Jocasta's intervention is not successful. And neither are those of Antigone or *Pietas* later in the book. Tisiphone the Fury prevails and the history of Thebes, characterized by the perversion of *pietas* throughout, is overwhelming. Still, the intertextual matrix of the episode explored here allows us to appreciate the many different dimensions of Jocasta's attempt to prevent her sons' fratricide. Judging from the models from Roman history which underlie this scene Jocasta's intervention deserves praise and does have the potential to be successful. However, through her incestuous relationship with Oedipus she remains caught up in the history of the intra-familial crime in the royal household of Thebes about which she feels guilty even though she is also a victim of supernatural powers and objectively innocent. Her immense grief gives her the power to try and prevent the fratricide in order to fulfil

her aspiration to be a pious mother. Eventually, though, she fails in this aspiration and cannot reconcile herself with her sons just like Agave. This failure ultimately makes her kill herself as the reader is made aware already at this point in the narrative. The tension created through the different pull of each individual intertext makes Jocasta's characterization complex, powerful, and tragic.³⁵

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Augoustakis, A. (2010): *Motherhood and the other. Fashioning Female Power in Flavian Epic*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Augoustakis, Antony (2015): 'Statius and Senecan Drama.' In: W. J. Dominik, C. E. Newlands and K. Gervais (eds.), *Brill's Companion to Statius*. Leiden: Brill, 377-92.
- Bernstein, N. W. (2008): *In the Image of the Ancestors: Narratives of Kinship in Flavian Epic*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Bessone, Federica (2011): *La Tebaide di Stazio. Epica e potere*. Pisa, Rome: Fabrizio Serra.
- Bowie, E. (2014): 'Poetry and Education.' In: Mark Beck (ed.), *A Companion to Plutarch*. Oxford, Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 177-90.
- Davis, P. J. (1994): 'The Fabric of History in Statius' *Thebaid*.' In: C. Deroux (ed.), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History VII*. Bruxelles: Latomus, 464-83.
- Dietrich, J. S. (1999): 'Thebaid's Feminine Ending.' *Ramus* 28: 40-53.
- Dietrich, J. S. (2015): 'Dead Woman Walking: Jocasta in the *Thebaid*.' In: W. J. Dominik, C. E. Newlands and K. Gervais (eds.), *Brill's Companion to Statius*. Leiden: Brill, 307-21.
- Dominik, W. J. (1994a): *The Mythic Voice of Statius. Power and Politics in the Thebaid*. Leiden, New York, Cologne: Brill.
- Dominik, W. J. (1994): *Speech and Rhetoric in Statius' Thebaid*. Hildesheim, Zürich, New York: Olms-Weidmann.
- Dominik, W. J. (2015): 'Similes and their Programmatic role in the *Thebaid*.' In: W. J. Dominik, C. E. Newlands and K. Gervais (eds.), *Brill's Companion to Statius*. Leiden: Brill, 266-290.
- Fairclough, H. R. (ed.) (transl.) (1999): *Virgil. Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid I-VI. Revised by G.P. Goold*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Fairclough, H. R. (ed.) (transl.) (2000): *Virgil. Aeneid VII-XII. Appendix Vergiliana. Revised by G.P. Goold*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Fantham, E. (1999): 'The Role of Lament in the Growth and Eclipse of Roman Epic.' In: M. Beissinger, J. Tylus, S. Wofford (eds.), *Epic Traditions in the Contemporary World. The Poetics of Community*. Berkeley et al.: California University Press, 221-35.
- Feeney, D. C. (1991): *The Gods in Epic. Poets and Critics of the Classical Tradition*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

- Fitch, J. G. (ed.) (transl.) (2004): *Seneca. Oedipus. Agamemnon. Thyestes. [Seneca]. Hercules on Oeta. Octavia*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Fitch, J. G. (ed.) (transl.) (2002): *Seneca. Hercules. Trojan Women. Phoenician Women. Medea. Phaedra*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Foster, B.O. (ed.) (transl.) (1919): *Livy. History of Rome, Volume I: Books 1-2*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Fowler, D. (1997): 'On the Shoulders of Giants.' *Materiali e Discussioni* 39, 13-34 (reprinted in Fowler, D. (2000): *Roman Constructions: Readings in Postmodern Latin*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 115-37.)
- Franchet d'Espèrey, S. (1999): *Conflit, Violence e Non-Violence dans la "Thébaïde" de Stace*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres.
- Frings, I. (1991): *Gespräch und Handlung in der Thebais des Statius*. Stuttgart: Teubner.
- Ganiban, R. T. (2007): *Statius and Virgil. The Thebaid and the Reinterpretation of the Aeneid*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hardie, P. (1994): *Virgil Aeneid, Book IX*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hershkowitz, D. (1998): *The Madness of Epic. Reading Insanity from Homer to Statius*. Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press.
- Heslin, P. J. (2008): 'Statius and the Greek Tragedians on Athens, Thebes and Rome.' In: J. J. L. Smolenaars, H.-J. Van Dam & R. R. Nauta (eds.), *The Poetry of Statius*. Leiden: Brill (= *Mnemosyne Supplement* 306), 111-128.
- Hinds, S. (1998): *Allusion and intertext. Dynamics of appropriation in Roman poetry. Roman Literature and its Contexts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hulls, J. M. (2014): 'Greek Author, Greek Past: Statius, Athens, and the Tragic Self.' In: A. Augoustakis (ed.) *Flavian Poetry and its Greek Past*. Leiden et al.: Brill (= *Mnemosyne Supplement* 366), 193-213.
- Keith, A. M. (2000): *Engendering Rome. Women in Latin Epic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lovatt, H. (1999): 'Competing Endings. Re-Reading the End of the *Thebaid* through Lucan.' *Ramus* 28.2: 126-51.
- Lovatt, H. (2010): 'Cannibalising History: Livian Moments in Statius' *Thebaid*.' In: John F. Miller and A.J. Woodman (eds.), *Latin historiography and poetry in the early Empire: generic interactions*. Leiden and Boston: Brill (= *Mnemosyne Supplement* 321), 71-86.
- Marinis, A. (2015): 'Statius' *Thebaid* and Greek Tragedy. The Legacy of Thebes.' In: W. J. Dominik, C. E. Newlands and K. Gervais (eds.), *Brill's Companion to Statius*. Leiden: Brill, 343-61.
- Markus, D. D. (2004): 'Grim Pleasures: Statius's Poetic *Consolationes*.' *Arethusa* 37.1: 105-35.
- Micozzi, L. (1998): 'Pathos e Figure Materne nella Tebaide di Stazio.' *Maia* 50: 95-121.
- Murray, A.T. (ed.) (transl.) (1919): *Homer. Odyssey, Volume I: Books 1-12*. Revised by George E. Dimock. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Murray, A.T. (ed.) (transl.) (1925): *Homer. Iliad, Volume II: Books 13-24*. Revised by William F. Wyatt. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Newlands, C. E. (2012): *Statius, Poet between Rome and Naples*. London: Bristol Classical Press.
- Parkes, R. (ed.) (2012): *Statius, Thebaid 4*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Pease, A. S. (ed.) (1935): *P. Vergilii Maronis Aeneidos liber quartus*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Perrin, B. (ed.) (transl.) (1916): *Plutarch. Lives, Volume IV: Alcibiades and Coriolanus. Lysander and Sulla*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Shackleton Bailey, D. R. (ed.) (transl.) (2003): *Statius. Vol. 2: Thebaid, Books 1-7; Vol. 3: Books 8-12. Achilleid*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Smolenaars, J. J. L. (1994): *Statius, Thebaid VII. A commentary*. Leiden et al.: Brill. (= *Mnemosyne Supplement* 134.)
- Smolenaars, J. J. L. (2008): 'Statius *Thebaid* 1.72: Is Jocasta dead or alive? The traditions of Jocasta's suicide in Greek and Roman drama and in Statius' *Thebaid*.' In: J.J.L. Smolenaars, H.-J. van Dam, R.R. Nauta (eds.) *The Poetry of Statius*. Leiden, Boston: Brill (= *Mnemosyne. Supplements* 306), 215-238.
- Stadter, P. A. (2014): 'Plutarch and Rome'. In: M. Beck (ed.), *A Companion to Plutarch*. Oxford, Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 13-31.
- Soubiran, J. (1969): 'De Coriolan à Polynice: Tite-Live modèle de Stace'. In: J. Bibauw (ed.), *Hommages à Marcel Renard*. Bruxelles: Latomus, 689-99.
- Tarrant, R. (ed.) (2012): *Virgil. Aeneid. Book XII*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Venini, P. (1970): *P. Papini Stati Thebaidos Liber Undecimus*. Florence: La Nuova Italia.
- Vessey, D. W. T. C. (1971): 'Noxia Tela: Some Innovations in Statius *Thebaid* 7 and 11.' *Classical Philology* 66. 2, 87-92.
- Vessey, D. (1973): *Statius and the Thebaid*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Voigt (forthcoming): 'The power of the grieving mind. Female Lament in Statius' *Thebaid*'. *Illinois Classical Studies* 41.1.

NOTES

1. For the purpose of the present paper, I have used the following editions and translations: Shackleton Bailey (2003) for Statius' *Thebaid*, Fairclough (1999) and Fairclough (2000) for Virgil's *Aeneid*, Fitch (2002) and Fitch (2004) for Seneca's tragedies, Foster (1919) for Livy's *History of Rome*, Murray (1925) for Homer's *Iliad*, Murray (1919) for Homer's *Odyssey* and Perrin (1916) for Plutarch.
2. The simile used to describe Jocasta when she intervenes in the Argive camp in *Thebaid* 7 (477) has equally puzzled readers. See e.g. Keith (2000), 96; Dietrich (2015). Neither of them discusses the simile under examination here. For a reading of both similes in the context of female lamentation see Voigt (forthcoming). For similes in the *Thebaid* more generally see e.g. Dominik (2015).
3. Hershkowitz (1998), 291.
4. For an optimistic reading of Jocasta see e.g. Vessey (1973), 270-82. He attributes to her 'a greater moral stature than in the tragedians' and, although he sees in her 'the helpless victim of fate' he emphasizes 'her love, her grief, her dignity' (274). Franchet d'Espèrey (1999), 255, counts her among the 'incarnations de la non-violence' in Statius' poem. For further reading on Jocasta in Statius' *Thebaid* see also Augoustakis (2010), 62 n.68.
5. Hershkowitz (1998), 291.

6. Ganiban (2007), 164. Cf. also Augoustakis (2010), 33: 'Antigone and Jocasta are both transformed into Maenads in their final attempt to appease the brothers in book 11'. Similarly, Bessone (2011), 178-9 n.3.
7. Ganiban (2007), 160.
8. Fowler (1997), 24, talking about intertextuality as semiotic system.
9. On Statius' relationship to Euripides' and Seneca's tragedies, see e.g. Vessey (1971); Vessey (1973), 270-82; Venini (1970); Smolenaars (1994); Heslin (2008); Augoustakis (2010); Bessone (2011), esp. 75-101; Hulls (2014); Augoustakis (2015); Marinis (2015).
10. The most important ones for our present purpose are Liv. 2.40.1-12; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 8.39-55; Plut. *Cor.* 34-37. See Soubiran (1969), 690-91.
11. Cf. Plut. *Cor.* 37.
12. See esp. Soubiran (1969), but also Smolenaars (1994); Lovatt (2010); Dietrich (2015).
13. Vessey (1971) 88; Vessey (1973), 273; Frings (1991), 122; Smolenaars (1994), 216.
14. Pace Dietrich (2015).
15. See e.g. Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 8.51.1-3.
16. Even though Statius and Plutarch are contemporaries, it is not likely that Statius took his cue from Plutarch since Plutarch's *Lives* are generally dated after Domitian's reign, so after Statius finished writing his epic. Neither can we say with any certainty that Plutarch has read or listened to the *Thebaid*, though it is entirely possible since Plutarch travelled to Rome at various points of the period during which Statius will have composed the *Thebaid* and they may well have met each other at the imperial court or other gatherings of the Roman intellectual élite. On Plutarch's relationship to Rome, see e.g. Stadter (2014); on his likely encounter with Greek and Roman intellectuals, including 'writers in many genres of prose and poetry', at Delphi and Athens, see Bowie (2014), esp. 177. Soubiran (1969), 691 n.2, suggests that Statius and Plutarch might have had reference to one common source, unknown to us.
17. Cf. Franchet d'Espèrey (1999), 258.
18. Cf. Feeney (1991), 388: 'The defeat of Pietas happens many times, in other words. We see Adrastus, Iocasta, and Antigone fail to make the brothers listen to the claims of faith and piety, and then, when we expect finally to see the combat which must follow as a consequence, Statius encapsulates that failure once and for all with the abortive intervention of Pietas herself.' Cf. also Vessey (1973), 276-77.
19. As for Jocasta's attempt to stop Eteocles in *Thebaid* 11, the narrative does not explicitly report the reaction of either Eteocles or his company. However, all these intertexts (note especially the opening simile *vadit furenti similis* in Sen. *Phoen.* 427) and Antigone's reference to Jocasta in her own speech to Polynices (*Theb.* 11.375-6) make it very probable that there is at least some effect on Eteocles, too.
20. Agave's filicide and more importantly her grief when she recognizes what she has done is also one of the defining moments of Theban history as it is recounted in the poem by its own citizens (*Theb.* 3.188-90).
21. Parkes (2012) on 4.562-78. Autonoë had lost her son Actaeon to the divine wrath of Diana; Ino, tried to protect her son Palaemon from her husband Athamas who had been maddened by Juno; Semele, mother of Bacchus, died from Juno's wrath against her relationship with Jupiter.
22. Cf. Frings (1991), 68.
23. Cf. Ganiban (2007), 161-62.
24. Note how Jocasta anticipates Eteocles' objection to his uneven treatment in her speech (*Theb.* 11.348-553).
25. Davis (1994), esp. 473-4.
26. For further examples, see Pease (1935) on *Aen.* 4.301. For the possibility to activate a *topos* for the purposes of intertextual reading see Hinds (1998), 34-47.
27. See e.g. Hardie (1994) on *Aen.* 9.476, 481-97.

28. See e.g. Eur. *Bacch.* 114-19.
29. *Aen.* 9.217-18.
30. On the empowering quality of grief in Statius' *Thebaid* see Voigt (forthcoming). On female lament in Statius' *Thebaid* see also Dominik (1994a), 123-25; Dominik (1994b), 56, 59, 66-68, 119-32; Micozzi (1998); Dietrich (1999); Fantham (1999), 226-35; Lovatt (1999), 136-46; Markus (2004); Augoustakis (2010) ch.1; Newlands (2012), 110-16.
31. Lovatt (2010), 82.
32. On the evocation of Homer's Hecabe and Virgil's Amata in this scene see also Ganiban (2007), 153 n.1, 160, and Bernstein (2008), 91-93.
33. On *Il.* 22.25-92 as a model for *Aen.* 12.1-80, see e.g. Tarrant (2012), 83.
34. Even though in the *Thebaid* Jocasta kills herself with a sword, her suicide through hanging is still alluded to in the simile which concludes this episode (*Theb.* 11.644-7). On the different traditions of Jocasta's suicide see Smolenaars (2008). On Jocasta's suicide in *Thebaid* 11 see Dietrich (2015).
35. This paper has greatly benefited from the comments of the anonymous readers at *Dictynna*. Any remaining shortcomings are, of course, purely my own.
-

ABSTRACTS

In Statius' *Thebaid* 11.315-23, the poet uses a striking simile in order to describe Jocasta's attempt to stop Eteocles from confronting Polynices on the battlefield. He compares her to Agave when she brings her son's head to Dionysus. This paper explores the 'matrix of possibilities' for this passage constituted by intra- and intertexts from the accounts of other women, mostly mothers, whose characterization in other epic poems, tragedies, historiography or Statius' *Thebaid* itself reflects on aspects of Jocasta here and make her, in turn, the Roman mother, the pious mother, the Theban mother, the grieving mother, the epic mother. It will show that there are more facets to Jocasta's characterization than madness and *nefas*.

INDEX

Keywords: Flavian Epic, Intertextuality, Jocasta, Simile, Statius, *Thebaid*, Women

AUTHOR

ASTRID VOIGT

The Open University