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THEBAID'S FEMININE ENDING

Jessica S. Dietrich

'Closure: Get Over It'

Miss Manners 12/6/98

'I know, it probably doesn't have the sense of closure that you want, but it has more than some of our other cases.'

Agent Dana Scully on 'The X-Files'

Thebaid 12 is a problematic ending to a disturbing poem. Part of the problem is the unsatisfactory nature of the final book.¹ Book 12 is itself concerned with the processes of ending and its problems. The main narrative of the *Thebaid* is the story of the sons of Oedipus, Eteocles and Polynices, and their battle over the throne at Thebes. Their final confrontation occurs in Book 11. This ending is full of closural allusions and very closely linked to the ending of the *Aeneid* and its final battle between Aeneas and Turnus.² If the poem is 'over' after Book 11, why does Statius write the final book? It's not enough to say—as critics have—that it's just badly structured poetry.³

All things come to an end, but how a text ends lends structure, meaning and form to the entire work. The sense of an ending is to make *sense*—to give meaning and resolution. Taste in endings can be representative of a time or a style. A recent *New Yorker* article remarks on the recent proliferation of book titles with the words 'The End of...'.⁴ Kermode argues that the Apocalypse gives structure and meaning to literary works of the modern era.⁵ Brooks seems to suggest that the attention to endings has increased in sophistication over time:

This tenuous, fictive, arbitrary status of ends clearly speaks to and speaks of an altered situation of plot, which no longer wishes to be seen as end-determined, moving toward full predication of the narrative sentence, claiming a final plenitude of meaning. We have, in a sense, become too sophisticated as readers of plot quite to believe in its orderings. Part of our sophistication no doubt has to do with the cinema, a form that is consubstantial with temporal successiveness and has made the syntax of plot so available it seems to offer no further challenges.⁶

In Hollywood endings are sometimes changed in response to audience reaction—if the paying public is not satisfied, the ending is changed, as in the case of *Striptease*: 'but when the film's dark ending tested poorly at research screenings, it was rewritten.'⁷ A happy ending may please a movie audience, but resolution is not always the goal of a literary work. In order to determine how reso-

lution is achieved, Fowler lists five senses of the word 'closure' in modern criticism:

- (1) The concluding section of a literary work;
- (2) The process by which the reader of a work comes to see the end as satisfyingly final;
- (3) The degree to which an ending is satisfyingly final;
- (4) The degree to which the questions posed in the work are answered, tensions released, conflicts resolved;
- (5) The degree to which the work allows new critical readings.⁸

The studies done on closure in Latin literature seem to centre around generic expectations. Hardie discusses closure in epic: 'Epic, at the summit of the ancient hierarchy of genres, is obsessed with power, structures of control, and ends that justify their means.'⁹ Quint also views closure as a characteristic of genre: 'The opposition between epic and romance, dear to the literary theorists of the Renaissance and to modern critics, describes the distinction between a teleological, linear narrative and a looser, more episodic narrative that appears to resist the closure it may simultaneously project.'¹⁰ Such a connection between genre and closure relies on too limited a definition of epic. The *Odyssey* with its loose complicated structure and attention to family relationships has no place in either Hardie's or Quint's model of epic. Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* and Apollonius' *Argonautica* also push at these definitions. Although it is helpful to look at the tradition of endings in Latin epic and their attempts at closure, this leads to an incomplete picture of closure in Roman poetry. Fowler discusses other places to look for closure:

This tension between completion and continuance becomes of even greater importance if we extend the study of closure not only to the endings of complete literary works but also to the infratextual 'lieux stratégiques' within them and to what one might call the *super textual* groupings of works in collections or oeuvres. The techniques of closure at these levels are mostly the same as those found at the end of individual works, though obviously there will be a hierarchy of endings and there are clear advantages in seeing the phenomenon of closure on a broad front right from the level of the phrase, the line, the stanza, the chapter, the book through to the largest groupings of collected works.¹¹

The self-consciousness of the Roman poets in their attention to the problems of closure indicates the importance of an understanding of techniques in the endings of all kinds of Latin poetry which project themselves as complete, whole works of art by calling attention to their own endings.

The Latin literary tradition itself makes it virtually impossible to regard closure and closural devices as marks of genre.¹² Instead, there are certain trends

and approaches to poetic closure throughout the tradition which stand out. The Latin poets all share an attention to formal closure through repetition of words and images. Thematic closure is also often brought about by the description of a ritual, such as the triumph at the end of Ennius' *Annales* 15¹³ and Silius Italicus' *Punica*. The treatment of death in these Roman poets is also a closural allusion, especially how death relates to the poet and his poetry, as in Propertius' *Elegies* 1.22, which grows into a bid for poetic immortality, in Horace's *Odes* 3.30, in Virgil's *Georgics*,¹⁴ in Ovid's *Amores* 1.15 and 3.15, and *Metamorphoses* 15. On the other hand, this expression of hope for the future is counterbalanced by the sudden and bleak endings of Lucretius and Virgil's *Aeneid*.¹⁵ The darkness and pessimism especially of the *Aeneid* look forward to the utter despair and rejection of the poetic world in the endings of the Neronian poets Calpurnius Siculus and Seneca. The Flavian authors inherited this tradition of closure in Latin poetry. Statius adopts a unique pastiche of these endings in his closing of the *Thebaid*.

The first word of the twelfth book indicates the problems with closure that the poet will explore in the final book—*nondum* (12.1). The reader might reasonably expect the poem to end after the climactic hand-to-hand combat of Eteocles and Polynices at the end of Book 11, yet Statius tells the reader at 12.1 that the work is not yet over.¹⁶ Nowhere else in the *Thebaid* does Statius use *nondum* to open a book, nor is it seen in other epics as the first word of a book.¹⁷ Temporal words such as *iam* and *interea* are common words for opening books, connecting them to the previous books.¹⁸ *Nondum* is unusual, perhaps looking back to Statius' statement in the proem—that he is not yet able to narrate Domitian's accomplishments: *quando Itala nondum/signa nec Arctoos ausim spirare triumphos* ('since not yet would I dare to be inspired to sing about Italian standards nor northern triumphs', 1.17f.). There is an implication in the opening of the poem that Statius would cover these events in a different poem, which is similar to Virgil's statement in the third book of the *Georgics* that he will cover Augustus' accomplishments at a later time.¹⁹ *Nondum* reinforces the problems of closure by emphasising that the work is 'not yet' over, and that the story continues.

The problem with the ending in *Thebaid* 12 mirrors Statius' struggle to open his poem: *unde iubetis/ire, deae?* ('from where do you bid to go, goddesses?', 1.3f.). Statius then considers the possibilities for the Theban story—he could begin with the rape of Europa, or the foundation story of Cadmus, and he calls the story of the history of Thebes a *longa retro series*—a long, backward-running line (1.7). He finally decides to limit his poem: *limes mihi carminis esto/Oedipodae confusa domus* ('let the confused house of Oedipus be the limit of the song for me', 1.16f.). This concern for a place to begin on this long backward running line of the history of Thebes is then paralleled in what Statius constructs as the difficulty of finding the ending.

One of the ways in which Statius plays with endings in *Thebaid* 12 is by offering up a sample of endings from other epics.²⁰ The funeral of Menoeceus re-

calls the funeral of Hector in *Iliad* 24; the renewed violence between Theseus and the Thebans evokes *Odyssey* 24 and the battle with the families of the suitors. The repeated scenes of pyres and burials on the battlefield is similar to Lucretius' description of the disposal of the plague victims in *De Rerum Natura* 6, while the final duel of Creon and Theseus is marked by parallels to the final battle of Turnus and Aeneas in *Aeneid* 12. Statius' address to his work as a 'little ship coming to harbour' (*et mea iam longo meruit ratis aequore portam*, 12.809) refers to the ending of Apollonius' *Argonautica* and the way in which the narrative journey and the poetic journey end simultaneously. Statius' final coda is borrowed not only from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, but also Virgil's *Georgics*. I would also argue that the epilogue looks beyond epic formulation of endings, and recalls and responds to various poetry books, especially Horace's *Odes* and Virgil's *Eclogues*. On the one hand, these alternative endings might heighten the reader's awareness that the poem is coming to an end, but it also underscores the impossibility of complete closure. This overdetermination weakens the force of closure.²¹

Closure works on many different levels. For example, structural principles can influence when and how a text closes, but a narrative structured around time presents difficulty—time does march on.²² Therefore a time structured narrative might look to closural devices such as references to death and marriage, or allusions to such liminal events as nightfall and coming home to reinforce structural principles.²³ The most difficult to analyse however, is what I would define as thematic resolution—are the questions of the text answered? Fowler talks about the ending being 'satisfyingly final.'²⁴ What I would argue for in any text and the *Thebaid* in particular is a tension between the closing of a text and the struggle to keep it open. A reading that acknowledges this tension would recognise a degree of closure and openness that bears on the entire text. Statius' presentation of the figure of Theseus in *Thebaid* 12 is an example of this simultaneous opening and closing in a thematic sense.²⁵

Just as closure implies a certain degree of resolution of the critical issues in a literary work, so the figure of Theseus can be read as bringing resolution and hope to the bleak world of the *Thebaid*: 'Theseus is the great peace-maker, who because he is both just and merciful is alone able to draw a close to the dark tale of human sin, passion and madness.'²⁶ Theseus does resolve the most immediate issue in the final book—the burial of the Argive men.²⁷ Theseus' association with the city of Athens and the altar of Clementia in the city also makes him an example of an ideal ruler in contrast to the other leaders featured in the poem, in particular those of the Theban royal house.²⁸ Clementia in this poem provides a paradigm for leadership.²⁹ Vessey contrasts Statius' presentation of Theseus with his role in Euripides' *Suppliques*.³⁰ However, Vessey does not note that his role in the *Thebaid* is perhaps more similar to his role in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, where he also steps in to settle a confrontation at the conclusion. The tradition of Theseus as arbiter is well established in tragedy. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, however, Theseus is acting within his role as king of

Athens in the area surrounding Athens, whereas in the *Thebaid* Theseus' association with Argos and Thebes is tenuous at best. Vessey sees the figure of Theseus as a balance for the role of Adrastus in the first book, but he claims that he supplements Adrastus and makes up for his weaknesses:

The final section of Book 12 is dominated by Theseus, just as the first book closed with Adrastus as its central figure. The cult of Clementia in Book 12 balances the worship of Apollo in 1. Theseus is, in some ways, a second and greater Adrastus; Athens is another and more perfect Argos. Adrastus allowed himself to become a partner in a corrupt and sinful war. Theseus is willing to fight, but only for a just and holy end. Compared with Theseus, Adrastus is a weak, helpless and inadequate monarch. His scrupulous piety to the gods was not enough, for he did not possess Theseus' dispassionate and noble virtue.³¹

Vessey ignores the fact that the real counterpart of the ending of Book 12 is the opening section of the work and that Theseus echoes Oedipus as much as he makes up for Adrastus' presentation.

Statius uses the epithet *Aegides* (12.546) for Theseus, making reference to Theseus' father. There is a more pointed reference at 12.625f. which implicates Theseus in his father's death: *unde uagi casurum in nomina ponti/Cressia decepit falso ratis Aegea uelo* ('where the Cretan ship with false sails deceived Aegeus about to fall and give a name to the wandering sea'). Theseus' involvement in his father's death not only complicates his character as one who has trouble with the people closest to him, but also connects him to Oedipus, who was, of course, also involved in the death of his father. Theseus' connection to Oedipus lends a kind of ring composition to the poem. The poem opens with the effects that Oedipus' anger towards his sons has on the rule of Thebes. Theseus is also characterised by anger in his attack on Thebes: *iusta mox concitus ira* ('soon stirred up by a righteous rage', 12.589). By returning to Oedipus through Theseus, Statius seems to undercut the presentation of Theseus as an ideal monarch and therefore to undermine the sense of resolution he can achieve. Instead, the situation at Thebes remains virtually unchanged from the opening of the poem.

In defeating Creon, Theseus destroys the legitimate male line to the Theban throne. By disrupting the line, Theseus reopens the original question of the poem—who is to be king of Thebes? Theseus does 'resolve' the problems in Thebes by ridding it of a tyrant, but he also prolongs the situation by claiming the throne for himself. The problem at Thebes is not who is to be king, but the institution of monarchy itself.³² Vessey says that Theseus is an ideal monarch, but Statius gives the reader reasons to question his motives. The simile of the bull at lines 601-605 connects Theseus to many of the other less successful monarchs in the poem, including Eteocles, Polynices and Tydeus. In addition to Theseus' involvement in the death of his father and his connection to Oedipus,

Statius creates a nexus of myth surrounding Theseus, which indicates that there is a more sinister side to his character. As the 'earthly' representative of Clementia Theseus does aid the Argive women who come to Athens in order to supplicate him. However, the scene in which Evadne confronts Theseus is framed by the captive Amazons (12.519-39 and 635-38).³³ References to Theseus' past with Ariadne³⁴ and his future with Phaedra³⁵ also complicate the presentation of Theseus' relationships with women. What indication is there in the poem that Theseus will be any better a king than those before him? In fact there are more indications that by virtue of being a monarch, Theseus will only repeat the behaviour displayed by his predecessors.

The figure of Theseus displays this tension in *Thebaid* 12 between closure and openness, the latter of which has an association with 'femininity'. Contemporary music theory provides a model for critiquing the notion of a feminine ending. In her book *Feminine Endings*, McClary begins by quoting the authority for the term and proceeds to analyse its implications:

The 1970 edition of the Harvard Dictionary of Music, for instance, includes the following entry:

Masculine, feminine cadence. A cadence or ending is called 'masculine' if the final chord of a phrase or section occurs on the strong beat and 'feminine' if it is postponed to fall on a weak beat. The masculine ending must be considered the normal one, while the feminine is preferred in more romantic styles.

This standard definition makes it clear that the designations 'masculine' and 'feminine' are far from arbitrary. The two are differentiated on the basis of relative strength, with the binary opposition masculine/feminine mapped onto strong/weak.³⁶

This strong/weak opposition can then be mapped on to a closed/open opposition. Closure is associated with strength, while openness, lacking force, is weak—therefore feminine. Terms like closure and openness are most often used to judge works based on generic expectations, for example 'normal' vs 'romantic'. This then leads to a ranking of texts based on how well they fit generic expectations.³⁷ If epic poetry is poetry of power, power is strength, strength is closure, then epic should be closed. Therefore, either the *Thebaid* has trouble with closure and it must be bad poetry, or the problems of the end are ignored to read the text as closed. However, it should be argued that openness and closure do not bear on the quality of the poem, but on the meaning, and that there are legitimate reasons to leave a text open.

The film *Antonia's Line*, the 1995 winner of the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film, beautifully demonstrates a 'feminine' open structure which bears on the themes of the work. The film tells the story of a woman's life, and in-

roduces her descendants—a daughter, grand-daughter and great-grand-daughter. The narrative moves through the lives of all of the women in turn. The movie ends with Antonia's death, but words on the screen after the fade-to-black indicate that the story does not end with the death of Antonia, but her 'line' continues, as well as their stories. The denial of an ending certainly indicates an open structure. There are other indications—the attention to the seasons and harvests throughout the picture emphasise the continuation of cycles in nature. This movie is truly a 'woman's movie'—a chick flick, if you will, telling the story of women, and the structure emphasises the movements and structuring principles of these women's lives—their connection to nature, their involvement in birth, and therefore the continuation of the 'line'.

Like *Antonia's Line*, Statius puts a strong emphasis on female figures in the final book. *Thebaid* 12 is concerned with the effects of war, particularly the people who have survived—women. The book opens at dawn with the aftermath of the battle. There is a description of the Theban battlefield as the Thebans bury their dead. Early in the book Statius highlights Creon's lament and burial of his son Menoeceus. This is an exclusively male funeral attended only by Creon and his guards—Menoeceus' mother, Eurydice, being conspicuously absent. Immediately following the funeral of Menoeceus, Statius shifts the scene to the mourning band of Argive women. The second episode of the twelfth book is linked to the previous episodes by the connective *interea* (12.105). The events which follow are contemporaneous with the preceding events—the funerals of the Thebans and Creon's lament for Menoeceus.

It is clear from the first word that this passage will be concerned with themes similar to previous episodes in the book—that of lamentation (*flebilis*, 'tearful', 12.105). At this point Statius begins to emphasise female characters. I think that there is a deliberate contrast here between Creon's lonely male lament and the shared experience of female grief. It is this female experience and sympathy which occupy the remainder of the book. Having been made aware of Creon's edict forbidding the burial of the Argives, the Argive women decide to go to Athens to supplicate Theseus for his help, while Argia, the wife of Polynices, goes to Thebes herself. The narrative then splits between the Argive women at Athens and Argia at Thebes. Argia makes a heroic journey to Thebes, accompanied by Menoetes, a weak male figure. The relationship between Argia and Menoetes is similar to that of Antigone and Oedipus at the end of Book 11. Statius gradually brings Argia and Antigone together in this part of the book. At Thebes, Argia finds her husband's corpse while Antigone approaches her on the battlefield and there is a moment of suspense in their potential hostility. However, together they succeed in defying Creon's edict and attend to Polynices' corpse. Statius contrasts male behaviour—impious antagonism—by the brothers displayed through the splitting of the flame on the pyre (Argia and Antigone inadvertently place Polynices' corpse on the pyre used for the body of Eteocles) with female cooperation in the expression of piety. At Athens, Theseus has recently returned from defeating the Amazons (more female figures),

and hearing Evadne's plea he agrees to help the Argive women. Theseus' army marches quickly to Thebes arriving just in time to spare Argia and Antigone their deaths at the hands of Creon. Creon is summarily killed by Theseus, and the women run on to the battlefield to lament the dead. The female experience on earth is mirrored in the actions of the goddesses, especially Juno, who aid the women's endeavours throughout the book.

How does a reading of the *Thebaid* as a gendered, feminine text contribute to its meaning? Statius' use of the feminine voice, particularly strong in the twelfth book, may illuminate a reading of the poem as a whole, and there are also implications for situating the work in the Latin poetic tradition, especially in relation to Virgil's *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

There is a moment in the *Thebaid* 12 that crystallises Statius' use of the female voice. This moment comes after Juno arranges for Cynthia to aid Argia in recovering the body of Polynices. In the sudden flood of light, Argia recognises the cloak she wove for her husband. Argia soon identifies the corpse of Polynices and begins her lamentation speech. The juxtaposition of the recognition of the cloak with Argia's lament recalls and removes the association of weaving with the female voice. Statius makes it clear that Argia was responsible for the production of the cloak that her husband wore, but he cannot describe in great detail what was depicted on it, bypassing the opportunity for marginalising the female voice and its challenge to male values. The narrative 'accident' of male blood concealing female *texta* (12.314) is contrived by Statius to give full narrative play to the female voice, which is made all the more conspicuous by the evocation and inversion of epic's tradition of submerging the woman's story in the products of the *domus*. Prime among them are *texta*.

Argia's speech in Book 12 displays similarities with other laments, most notably Aeneas' for Pallas in *Aeneid* 11. More appropriately, however, Argia's speech closely resembles that of Euryalus' mother in *Aeneid* 9, which is perhaps the closest of the *Aeneid*'s speeches to the *Thebaid*'s repeated expression of grief and loss. Despite the similarities, however, the different handling of the lamenting female figure in Virgil and Statius highlights the disparity of the authors' positions. Argia in fact echoes the words of Euryalus' mother in her address to the corpse: *Hunc ego te, Euryale, aspicio* (*Aen.* 9.481) is expanded: *hunc ego te, coniunx, ad debita regna profectum/ductorem belli generumque potentis Adrastris/aspicio* ('I see you thus, husband, who had marched out for the owed kingdom as a leader of the war and the son-in-law of powerful Adrastus', 12.322-4). Argia and Euryalus' mother also share similar visions of the corpse lying exposed on the battlefield.³⁸ Euryalus' mother notes the cloak that she is weaving for her son, now a funeral shroud. Here in the *Aeneid* the woman's voice stops the fighting, thus successfully challenging traditional male values. She is never named, however, and immediately after her speech she is physically removed from the scene.³⁹ Her disappearance is necessary for the continuation of the battle. Argia, on the other hand, remains not only on the scene but also in the forefront of Book 12.

Virgil's presentation of Euryalus' mother indicates the strong association between the female voice in epic and a dissatisfaction with male epic values. Ovid also uses a female voice marginalised into weaving to express an alternative view to the traditional male epic values. Ovid's story of Procne and Philomela makes a concrete connection between the suppressed female voice and weaving. Having been raped by Tereus, her sister's husband, Philomela makes an eloquent speech.⁴⁰ Her voice is then suppressed in the most physically graphic way as Tereus rips out her tongue (*Met.* 6.555-57). Having lost the ability to speak, Philomela devises a way to communicate through weaving (*Met.* 6.574-80), using her weaving to express her outrage at the violence done to her. Philomela and her sister Procne unite to punish Tereus by feeding him his son. The cooperation of the sisters against the tyranny of Tereus is similar to that of the Argive women in *Thebaid* 12 who unite in order to confront Creon's abuse of power in forbidding the funerals of the Argive men. Statius makes specific reference to the Ovidian story at 12.476-80 in a simile likening the Argive women to Getic birds, or nightingales.

The story of Arachne, also told by Ovid, is another clear example of the association of the female voice and weaving in the Latin tradition. It is not the *quality* of Arachne's weaving which gains her punishment from Minerva, but the subject matter. Just competing with a goddess is already a challenge to authority, but the stories woven in her tapestry are also an affront to established power. While Minerva's tapestry depicts the traditional roles of the Olympian gods, Arachne's is an indictment of the gods with its tales of incest, violence and rape. Arachne's tapestries also include the repressed female voice by concentrating on 'the victimisation of human females'.⁴¹ Arachne's is a subversive voice and is silenced by Minerva, who transforms her into a spider.

The Arachne passage at the opening of *Metamorphoses* 6 brings together many of the issues of the female voice in weaving as well as the poetic voice. Eleanor Leach discusses the relationship of Arachne's tapestry to Ovid's own poetry and poetic vision in the *Metamorphoses*. She argues that the tapestries of both Arachne and Minerva must be read together for a full picture:

Both Minerva's and Arachne's versions of mythology and metamorphosis assert the power of the gods: the one as a force of order, the other as a force participating in the flux of nature. As creator of the poem, Ovid maintains a vision embracing both points of view.⁴²

However, Ovid's sympathy lies with Arachne because 'Arachne's vision is personal, limited and rebellious; it represents the human artist's determination to assert his version of truth in the face of an uncertain and authoritarian world'.⁴³

In her discussion of ekphrasis Leach views the tapestries as a reflection of the *Metamorphoses*; the works of art function together for a more complete poetic world view.⁴⁴ Leach seems to underestimate the importance both of the subject matter of Arachne's tapestry and of Ovid's account of her punishment. The

tapestries of Minerva and Arachne clearly do not bear the same relationship to the main narrative of the poem. Arachne almost duplicates stories told by Ovid in the first five books of the poem; Minerva's representation of divine order is nowhere to be seen. Arachne's punishment, as well as that of the Emathides in Book 5, emphasises not only how the authoritarian point of view 'overwhelms the human perspective',⁴⁵ but how vindictively and violently the gods seek to destroy any criticism of their conduct.

The figure of Arachne would be familiar to Statius not only through the story of Ovid, but in the story on the frieze of the Forum Transitorium. D'Ambra discusses the remaining figures on the frieze from the forum and identifies one group as the punishment of Arachne by Minerva. The figure of Minerva is significant for Statius because she was the patron deity of the emperor Domitian, who was responsible for the building of the Forum Transitorium and its temple to Minerva. D'Ambra associates the figures on the frieze with a program enforcing chastity and matronly virtues,⁴⁶ but there is another possibility. The forum monumentalises the final passage of the Argiletum into the Forum Romanum. The Argiletum is connected to poetic production by Statius' contemporary Martial who mentions the booksellers' stalls that line the street.⁴⁷ Domitian was censor for life.⁴⁸ His use of the Arachne paradigm may be intended to cover the poetic *texta* nearby.

In the face of these examples of women's voices identified with their weaving, Statius consciously demarginalises the female voice by *separating* it from the process of weaving. In the passage from *Thebaid* 12 when Argia recognises Polynices, Statius does not include a description of what was woven by Argia on the cloak of Polynices. He has no need for ekphrasis in this passage, because Argia is there to give the reader her interpretation of the events in her own words. In *Thebaid* 5 Statius' Hypsipyle does not weave the story of the escape of Thoas, as does Valerius Flaccus' character: rather Statius narrates the events on Lemnos through the voice of Hypsipyle herself, dedicating over a full book to her story. Ironically, Hypsipyle's voice displays itself through a kind of weaving—*quid longa malis exordia necto?* ('Why do I weave a lengthy introduction⁴⁹ to my misfortunes?', 5.36)—the weaving of a poetic narrative.⁵⁰

But how are Argia's voice and female voices in general connected to the poetic position of the poem? Argia is critical of the tyranny of Creon in Thebes. She is ready to defy him by burning Polynices' corpse. Dominik says that in her efforts to place Polynices on the pyre, Argia is 'in accordance with human and divine law in the face of tyrannical opposition'.⁵¹ Argia is critical of the battle for power that led Polynices to the battlefield at Thebes. Statius brings her voice centre-stage—it is not the soft protestation or unsuccessful alternative view, but a full-bodied, clear-voiced indictment of the abuses of power in the *Thebaid*.

The female voice in the *Thebaid*, particularly in Book 12, is associated with lament. The women lament the dead and emphasise the human cost of war. This voice is present in the *Aeneid*, but self-consciously marginalised through its lo-

calisation in figures such as Euryalus' mother, who is removed from the scene, or through its appropriation by male figures such as Aeneas in Book 11. In Statius the lamenting voices of women are the final note heard in the poem before Statius' own voice. Lamentation not only serves to emphasise the toll of war on the survivors, but also verbally memorialises those lamented. This verbal commemoration is also a function of epic poetry.⁵² Statius brings this lamentation to the forefront, rather than marginalising it as Virgil does. Henderson argues that Statius is offering a re-reading of Virgil by emphasising 'an incipient tendency in Virgilian narrative so that it may reappear, amplified and strengthened, in full view. Not the Warrior display of *Arma uirumque*, but its disfiguration and displacement before the pain of Woman's Bereavement.'⁵³

In his epilogue, Statius pulls away from the focus on the female voice and ends with his own. In his address to his poem, Statius asks that it follow behind the *Aeneid* at a respectful distance: *nec tu diuinam Aeneida tempta, sed longe sequere et uestigia semper adora* ('Do not test the divine *Aeneid*, but follow a ways behind and honour always its tracks', 12.816f.). Vessey reads this statement as Statius' recognition of his inferiority to Virgil.⁵⁴ But clearly Statius means more than that his poem is inferior. By asking his text to follow the *Aeneid* he turns the text into the figure of a woman, not simply a Juvenalian *amica*,⁵⁵ but a Virgilian Creusa or Eurydice, following their husbands in vain, only to disappear. Malamud argues that Statius' epilogue compromises the female voice heard in the lamentation for Parthenopaeus,⁵⁶ but I believe it is not the validity of the voice that is dismissed. Statius is deliberately representing his own text as marginalised, as if it were a female voice in an earlier epic or woven into a tapestry,⁵⁷ marginalised by the culture and Flavian power. But this self-marginalisation is itself paradoxical if not ironic. Like the women in the text, the *Thebaid* itself aspires to centrality and effect. Significantly, the poet's concluding allusion to Ovid's Arachne episode through the important figure of *Liur* (*Theb.* 12.818; *Met.* 6.129) is preceded by an inversion of Minerva's command to Arachne (*uiue quidem*, 'live indeed', *Met.* 6.136). In exhorting his poem to 'live' (*uiue*, *Theb.* 12.816), Statius usurps the Minervan position and replays Ovid's own confidence in the power of the poetic voice (*uiuum*, *Met.* 15.879). Salvation may lie not in Rome, but in Italy's youth (*Italia iuuentus*, *Theb.* 12.815). The return to Naples is not too distant (*Silv.* 3.5).⁵⁸

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NOTES

1. There are a number of new readings of the ending of the *Thebaid*. See esp. P.R. Hardie, 'Closure in Latin Epic', in D. Roberts, F. Dunn and D. Fowler (eds.), *Classical Closure: Reading the End in Greek and Latin Literature* (Princeton 1997), 139-62; Susanna Braund, 'Ending Epic: Statius, Theseus and a Merciful Release', *PCPS* 42 (1997), 1-23.

2. Cf. L. Legras, *Étude sur la Thébaïde de Stace* (Paris 1905), 148: 'C'est le duel d'Éteocle et de Polynice qui doit mettre fin à la guerre et terminer l'action principale'; for the relationship of

Eteocles/Polynices to Aeneas/Turnus see P. Venini (ed.), *P. Papinii Statii Thebaidos Liber XI: Introduzione, Testo Criticale, Commento e Traduzione* (Florence 1970), xviii; id., *Studi Statiani* (Pavia 1971), 22; R.M. Ogilvie, *Roman Literature and Society*, (Brighton 1980), 232: 'There has to be a final duel in which Polynices and Eteocles re-enact the fight of Turnus and Aeneas.' Ogilvie does not account for the 'final duel' occurring before the actual end of the poem. M.A. Malamud, 'Happy Birthday, Dead Lucan: (P)raising the Dead in *Silvae* 2.7', in A.J. Boyle (ed.), *Roman Literature and Ideology: Ramus Essays for J.P. Sullivan* (Bendigo 1995), 169-98, at 191f., sees the final duel as Lucanian, rather than Virgilian: 'At the narrative climax of the poem, the mutual slaughter of Eteocles and Polynices, Statius is at his most Lucanian, exploding into an impassioned apostrophe to his protagonists in which the desire to commemorate is poised against the desire to conceal (11.574-79)'. See also Venini *Studi*, 45ff., for Lucan's influence in *Thebaid* 11.

3. A.J. Gossage, 'Statius', in D.R. Dudley (ed.), *Neronians and Flavians* (London 1972), 184-235, at 192f.: 'Some severe criticisms have been made against the *Thebaid* from time to time. Besides occasional obscurities of detail and lapses from good taste which mar certain passages, it is held that the poem is episodic and lacks unity, that some of the episodes, especially Adrastus' narration in Book I and the whole of Books V, VI, and XII, are unnecessary excrescences, irrelevant to the main story, that the double motivation of the action obscures the poet's main purpose, and that there is no central hero.' See also W.C. Summers, *The Silver Age of Latin Literature* (London 1920), 51f.: 'Nothing could be much worse than the composition: the first six books drag terribly, scenes and similes recur, the characters are very rudely drawn, the two brothers overshadowed by the other chiefs'; J.W. Duff, *A Literary History of Rome in the Silver Age: From Tiberius to Hadrian* (London 1927), 377: 'If Statius had studied the construction and proportion of his story more exactly, if he had condensed some and rigidly excised others of his episodes, the *Thebaid* would have gained in unity and attractiveness, while his readers and his reputation might have been increased by the reappearance as separate poems of the best among the banished portions.'

4. Lancaster, *The New Yorker*, Jan. 1 1996, 9-10.

5. F. Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford 1966), 6: 'In their general character our fictions have certainly moved away from the simplicity of the paradigm; they have become more "open". But they still have, and so far as one is capable of prediction must continue to have, a real relation to simpler fictions about the world. Apocalypse is a radical instance of such fictions and a source of others.' See also P. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, tr. McLaughlin and Pellauer (Chicago 1984), ii.22-28, for Kermode's influence on the story of endings.

6. P. Brooks, *Reading for the Plot* (New York 1984), 314.

7. 'Baring Striptease's Humor', *Los Angeles Times*, May 22 1996.

8. D. Fowler, 'First Thoughts on Closure: Problems and Prospects', *MD* 22 (1989), 75-122, at 78. See also id., 'Second Thoughts on Closure', in Roberts, Dunn and Fowler (n.1 above), 3-22, at 3f.

9. Hardie (n.1 above), 139.

10. D. Quint, 'Repetition and Ideology in the *Aeneid*', *MD* 24 (1991), 9-54, at 9.

11. Fowler, 'First' (n.8 above), 82.

12. Contrast to B.H. Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago 1968); Fowler, 'First' (n.8 above); P.R. Hardie, *The Epic Successors of Vergil* (Cambridge 1983); Quint (n.10 above).

13. O. Skutsch, *The Annals of Q. Ennius* (Oxford 1985), 553: 'Ennius intended to end the *Annals* with an account of the campaign conducted by his patron M. Fulvius Nobilior in Aetolia, of which he was a witness himself, concluding with Fulvius' triumph in 187 BC and the founding of the temple *Herculis Musarum*.'

14. Virgil contrasts his poetic activities with Octavian's military achievements, which can be interpreted as an assertion of his poetry's endurance.

15. See A.J. Boyle, *The Chaonian Dove: Studies in the Eclogues, Georgics, and Aeneid of Virgil* (Leiden 1986), and Hardie (n.1 above) for readings of the end of the *Aeneid*.

16. Cf. *Aeneid* 12.1, *Turnus ut...*, which focuses on the final challenge for Aeneas and Turnus' defeat as resolution of the problems in Italy.

17. Horace *Odes* 2.5 opens with *nondum*.

18. Virgil's use of *interea* at 5.1 is very effective in contrasting the actions of Dido in Book 4 with Aeneas' departure from Carthage.

19. For the connection of the proem and *Georgics* 3 see J. K. Newman, 'De Statio Epico Animadversiones', *Latomus* 34 (1975), 80-89, at 81.
20. Malamud (n.2 above), 190.
21. Contra Braund (n.1 above), 8f., who argues that Statius is emphasising closure: 'To express this in its strongest form, Statius' triple supplement to the *Aeneid* could be taken as a critique of the lack of closure provided by the end of the *Aeneid*, as a sign that the "message" needed to be spelled out more explicitly, as Statius' own epic signature.'
22. Smith (n.12 above), 117: 'The passage of time, however, is continuous; and although temporal sequence provides the poet with an excellent principle of generation, it does not provide him with a termination point. He—his story, his poem—must, at some point, stop; but the conclusion, with respect to time alone, will always be an arbitrary one.'
23. Smith (n.12 above), 118.
24. Fowler, 'First' (n.8 above), 78. See also Fowler, 'Second' (n.8 above), 3f.
25. See Braund (n.1 above), 12-16, for presentation of Theseus as bringing closure to the *Thebaid*, esp. 14: 'As a figure of supreme power, it is he and he alone who can bring the narrative to a close.'
26. D.W.T.C. Vessey, *Statius and the Thebaid* (Cambridge 1973), 308.
27. Cf. F.M. Ahl, 'Statius' *Thebaid*: A Reconsideration', *ANRW* 2.32.5 (1986), 2803-912, at 2897: 'The difference between Theseus and the other warriors of the epic is that he has a simple solution to what is now a straightforward problem. Like Maeon, he confronts a tyrant, weapon in hand. Unlike Maeon, he uses his weapon on the tyrant: he attacks the problem not himself, and thus brings at least temporary halt to the cycle of war.'
28. Cf. F.Ahl, *Kings, Man, and Gods in Thebaid of Statius* (Diss. Texas 1966), 57: 'In a very real way, the world of peace at home, and the carrying of civilisation overseas are found in Theseus' person and city.'
29. Vessey (n.26 above), 311: 'It is mercy that distinguishes a king from a tyrant; it is the glory and the salvation of monarchs.'
30. Vessey (n.26 above), 308.
31. Vessey (n.26 above), 315.
32. See W.J. Dominik, 'Monarchical Power and Imperial Politics in Statius' *Thebaid*', in A.J. Boyle (ed.), *The Imperial Muse: Flavian Epicist to Claudian* (Bendigo 1990), 74-97, for the presentation of monarchy in the *Thebaid*, esp. 83: 'Assumption of monarchical power foredooms its possessor and disposes him to a lack of feeling and humanity.'
33. Cf. Ahl (n.27 above), 2893, on the presentation of Amazons: 'They are humiliated captives, not aggressive invaders as in Aeschylus, where they are forcibly dispossessed of the Areopagus by Theseus. Although their limbs and their chastity are threatened, not by the tyrannical Creon, but by Theseus, liberator of the Argive women, they utter no complaint.'
34. Theseus' shield bears the story of Theseus' exploits in Crete with the Minotaur, and the story of Ariadne's role in helping him achieve his goal (*Theb.* 12.665-76).
35. Hippolyte's pregnancy foreshadows the birth of Hippolytus which will lead to the tragedy of Phaedra (*Theb.* 12.539).
36. S. McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis 1991), 9f. Gendered language is also used of verse, for example the term 'feminine ending' in H. Gross (ed.), *The Structure of Verse* (New York 1979), 282: 'Feminine ending: A hypermetrical line with a final unstressed syllable.' In Latin literature verse and style are also gendered.
37. Cf. the use of terms such as *mollis* and *durus* ('soft' and 'hard') to refer to poetic forms and Seneca's criticisms of Maecenas' literary style, *Ep.* 114. There is also the masculine and feminine caesura in Latin verse; cf., Lane's treatment of dactylic hexameter (G.M. Lane, *A Latin Grammar* [New York 1926], 463): 'A caesura which comes immediately after the thesis of a foot is called *masculine*; one which falls in the middle of the arsis (i.e. after the first short of a dactyl) is termed *feminine*. The Roman writers show a strong preference for masculine principal caesuras, and in general their treatment of the caesura is more strict than that of the Greek poets.'
38. Cf. *Aen.* 9.491 (*et funus lacerum tellus habet*, 'and the earth holds your mangled corpse') and *Theb.* 12.328f. (*proiectus caespit nudo/hoc patriae telluris habes*, 'you, thrown down on naked earth, hold this of your paternal land').
39. *illam incendentem luctus Idaeus et Actor/Ilianei monitu et multum lacrimantis luli/corripiunt interque manus sub tecta reponunt* ('by command of Ilioneus and the copiously

weeping Iulus, Idaeus and Actor seize her as she inflames grief and place her back inside between their hands', *Aen.* 9.500-02).

40. Cf. A. Richlin (ed.), *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome* (New York 1992), 158-79.

41. W.S. Anderson, *Ovid's Metamorphoses Books 6-10* (Norman OK 1972), *ad loc.*

42. E.W. Leach, 'Ekphrasis and the Theme of Artistic Failure in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*', *Ramus* 3 (1974), 102-43, at 103f.

43. Leach (n.42 above), 104.

44. Leach (n.42 above), 118.

45. Leach (n.42 above), 118.

46. See E. D'Ambra, *Private Lives, Imperial Virtues: The Frieze of the Forum Transitorium in Rome* (Princeton 1993), 104-08.

47. Martial *Epigrams* 1.3.1f.; 1.117.9-12.

48. See K. Coleman, 'The Emperor Domitian and Literature', *ANRW* II.32.1 (1986), 3087-3115, at 3111-15, esp. 3112, for Domitian's relationship to literature and censorship.

49. *Exordium* may also be translated as 'warp of web.'

50. Statius also compares the conversations of women to weaving at *Theb.* 8.636: *italia nectebant*.

51. W.J. Dominik, *Speech and Rhetoric in Statius' Thebaid* (Olms 1994), 132.

52. Statius discusses how Lucan's epic *Bellum Civile* is a proper monument to Pompey the Great: *Pharo cruenta/Pompeio dabis altius sepulcrum* ('you will give Pompey a higher monument than bloody Pharos', *Silvae* 2.7.71f.)

53. J.G.W. Henderson, 'Form Remade/Statius' *Thebaid*', in A.J. Boyle (ed.), *Roman Epic* (London 1993), 162-91, at 188.

54. Vessey (n.26 above), 1: 'All (Statius, Valerius Flaccus, Silius Italicus) accepted Virgil as their master and the *Aeneid* as the perfect exemplar of their genre, to be imitated and worshipped, but never equalled.'

55. *carmen amicae/Thebaidos* ('the song of his Theban girlfriend', Juvenal *Sat.* 7.82f.)

56. See Malamud (n.2 above), 193: 'The penultimate ending of the *Thebaid* begins with words....which reveal epic's impulse to grieve, and to commemorate, and thereby to re-install the seductive and dangerous values of *pietas* and *patria*. But—and this is important—this is the story Statius does *not* tell. His mourning women do *not* resolve into the figure of Atalanta grieving for her dead child. The ferocious ethic of the battlefield is precisely *not* balanced at the end by the doleful voice of the victimised female. Instead, Statius raises the possibility of such a commemorative text—and then changes, literally, the subject. The women in the text are dismissed, while the text itself becomes Woman.'

57. Statius also makes the connection of weaving to poetic production explicit in the *Silvae* when he discusses the poetry of Pollius: *seu nostram quatit ille chelyn seu dissona nectit/carmina siue minax ultorem stringit iambon* ('he strikes my own lyre or weaves together discordant songs or, threatening, draws out avenging iambic', *Silv.* 2.2.114f.).

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