

GRIM PLEASURES: STATIUS'S POETIC *CONSOLATIONES*

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This paper approaches the problem of closure in the *Thebaid* by trying to reconstruct the poet's own concept of the function of his art. A simultaneous reading of meta-narrational statements and laments¹ in the *Thebaid*² with those in the *Silvae*³ shows that Statius co-opts the low, feminine genre of lamentation traditionally constructed as dangerous and excessive in order to seduce his audience with the grim pleasure of indulging in grief. This is an indulgence that philosophical aristocratic consolatory discourse harshly censured,⁴ but it resonated with audience expectations and popular taste. Statius gives voice to unsuppressed private laments that follow the pattern of Juturna's lament in Vergil's *Aeneid*. A few comparisons with scenarios and sentiments embedded in the pseudo-Ovidian *Consolatio ad Liviam* suggest that Statius panders to contemporary tastes in his representation of mourning and creates a consolatory program that defies the precepts of the philosophical *consolatio*. Even though his *Thebaid* withholds closure and flaunts its lack of resolution, it is written and performed to provide solace.

We can glean from both the *Silvae* and the *Thebaid* that Statius writes for an audience that privileges private over public life and values

1 Henderson 1991, 1993 notes the prominent role of laments in the narrative structure of Statius's *Thebaid*. Fantham 1999 explores the implications of Henderson's study by showing how the rhetoric of lament represents a reaction to combat and death.

2 The text of the *Thebaid* used is Hill 1983.

3 The text of the *Silvae* used is Courtney 1990.

4 Malamud's 1998 talk at a Statius seminar in Dublin inspired me to think about the implications of the philosophical *consolatio* for the laments in Statius.

poetry for the opportunities it offers to indulge in uninhibited, cathartic lament. There is certainly a contrast between the *Thebaid* and the *Silvae* in terms of lament versus *consolatio*, especially because the poet himself in *Silvae* 1.5, as Carole Newlands convincingly shows (2002.200, 203), “articulates a poetics that is formulated in resistance to his own *Thebaid*.” The poem may indeed have been painful for the poet himself to write (*Thebais multa cruciata lima*, “the *Thebaid*, tortured with much erasure,” *Silv.* 4.7.26), and perhaps painful to the audience to listen to, but pain, suffering, the horrible, and the grotesque as portrayed in literature have their own pleasures, as noted by many literary theoreticians since Aristotle.⁵ We certainly cannot know precisely the effect of the epic on its audience (here we rely on Juvenal’s sarcastic report about the popularity and sweeping success of the *Thebaid*’s recitals, *Sat.* 7), but as to the effect on the mourning individuals within the epic itself, paradoxically, their pain is often mixed with pleasure and cathartic relief. The centrality of the laments, their pleasurable and therapeutic effect on the mourners, can be observed in the Parthenopaeus episode, in the portrayal of Hypsipyle, Niobe, Ide, Jocasta, and the collective body of the mourning mothers. Through these figures (and many others), Statius opens up his epic to the richness of the private world of lament and the ways in which it impinges on the public realm. By so generously ushering the private world into his epic, he creates a bridge to the *Silvae* and makes the private world dominant in both poems: implicitly in the *Thebaid*, explicitly in the *Silvae*.⁶

THE CENTRALITY OF LAMENTS IN THE *THEBAID*

Laments are so crucial to the plot of the *Thebaid* that sometimes instead of framing battle scenes as in Homer, battle scenes provide a frame for the laments. In the *Iliad*, laments function as a foil to the battle; they are included in the epitaphs that add pathos to a warrior’s death by showing the grief of parents and wife. An important function of the women in the *Iliad* is to serve “as potential commentators on events who articulate some of the greatest issues in the poem and also as artistic creators” (Easterling 1991.147).

5 Arist. *Poet.* 4 1448B 4–24, Lessing *Laokoon* 23–25, Fuhrman 1968, et al. On the apotropaic function of horror stories, see Twitchell 1985.100–01.

6 The explicit poetics of pleasure and the therapeutic retreat from public toil in the *Silvae* are beautifully elaborated by Newlands 2002.203–04, 211, 219. On Statius’s self-conscious awareness of his role as a private and personal poet to the wealthy, see Dietrich 2002.106–08.

Laments and the imagined grief over the death of a warrior are devices meant to humanize the hero, and the world of mourning reflects upon the world of war. In the Parthenopaeus episode of the *Thebaid*, this order is reversed. The *aristeia* and death of the young warrior are digressions from the elaborate description of his mother's anxiety and lament. The war here takes second place to lament. The episode is narrated entirely from the viewpoint of Atalanta, the hero's mother. The mother's dream, in which she foresees her son's death (9.570–670ff.), is much more elaborate than Andromache's anticipatory mourning for Hector in Book 6 of the *Iliad*. From this world of female grief and lamentation, the focus shifts to the battle scene (9.670–711), then we return to the women's world, featuring the grief of Diana (9.712–36). From there we go back to the battle for 130 lines; the episode ends with Parthenopaeus's final words to a friend, requesting comfort for his mourning mother: "labimur, i, miseram, Dorceu, solare parentem" ("We are dying, go, Dorceus, comfort my poor mother," 9.885). The scene is thoroughly permeated with the mother's viewpoint. It is as if the *Iliad* were told from Thetis's perspective, something that Statius actually commences to do in his *Achilleid*.

FORBIDDEN PLEASURES

Laments in the *Thebaid* are a source of forbidden pleasure, relief, and consolation. The epic ends with the image of the Bacchant-like women who rejoice in their laments (12.793–94):

quales Bacchea ad bella vocatae
Thyiades amentes, magnum quas poscere credas
aut fecisse nefas; gaudent lamenta novaeque
exsultant lacrimae

Like raving Thyiads are they, summoned to Bacchus's wars, demanding, you may think, or having just accomplished some deed of horror; their laments rejoice, fresh tears gush forth.⁷

⁷ The translations throughout are my own.

The satisfaction in sorrow and tears as the pragmatic telos of epic recitation is inherent in Greek epic (Green 1999.192), and Statius's affinity for Greek culture due to his Neapolitan-Greek background explains his inclination towards the representation of excessive laments.⁸

It is important, however, to point out that the revival and remaking of this tradition in Statius occurs against the background of contemporary philosophical discourse that explicitly rejects the pleasure derived from laments, as at *Iliad* 24.513, where Achilles "took full satisfaction in laments" (γόοιο τετάρπετο). The joy derived from the laments in Statius (*gaudent*) contrasts with contemporary moralizing thought against laments, especially in Seneca's and Plutarch's *Consolationes*. At *Epistle* 99.26, Seneca fulminates against a saying by Metrodorus, which he quotes in Greek, in order to criticize: Μητροδώρου ἐπιστολῶν πρὸς τὴν ἀδελφήν. Ἔστιν γάρ τις ἡδονὴ λύπη συγγενῆς, ἣν χρὴ θηρεύειν κατὰ τοῦτον τὸν καιρὸν ("From Metrodorus's letters to his sister: 'There is a certain pleasure akin to grief, a pleasure that one ought to pursue at a time like this'"). Seneca translates into Latin and comments: "Quid enim est turpius quam captare in ipso luctu voluptatem, immo per luctum, et inter lacrimas quoque quod iuvet, quaerere?" "For what is baser than to chase after pleasure in the very midst of mourning, and even by means of mourning, and to hunt out amidst one's tears that which will give pleasure?" Similarly, Plutarch in a consolation to his wife states (*Moralia* 609A): "For not only in Bacchic riot must the virtuous woman remain uncorrupted; she must hold that the tempest and tumult of her emotion in grief requires continence no less, a continence that resists not maternal affection, as the multitude believe, but the licentiousness of the mind."

What Seneca and Plutarch denounce as moralists is an integral part of Statius's representation of mourning. The Theban mothers love their laments and rejoice in their misfortunes ("amant miseri lamenta malisque fruuntur," 12.45). The same is true of the Argive women when they get permission to lament their dead. Their laments and tears take on a life of their own ("gaudent lamenta novaeque / exsultant lacrimae," "The laments rejoice and the recent tears are in ecstasy," 12.792–93). Thus Statius consciously gives voice to a type of mourning that is in stark conflict with the

8 The association of laments with Bacchic revelries, has, of course, numerous parallels, starting with the comparison of the mourning Andromache to a maenad (*Iliad* 22.460). See Foley 1993.123 and 127 on laments associated with Dionysiac cult.

moralizing tradition since Plato—who banishes Homer from the ideal state because of (among other reasons) his descriptions of excessive mourning (*Rep.* 10: 603E–605A, 606E–607A). In Rome, it is the philosophical *consolatio* that opposes the excessive expression of grief as unnatural, theatrical, and corrupting. However, it is precisely this aspect of lamentation on which Statius's poetry thrives.

SELF-CENTERED LAMENTS IN THE *THEBAID*

The Roman innovation in the area of laments in epic consisted of introducing the public collective lament as a narrative element that works towards the revitalization of the community (Fantham 1999.222). By contrast, in the *Thebaid*, instead of strengthening and reuniting communities, laments are self-indulgent and destroy communities and friends. The balance of public and private is crucial to Vergil's *Aeneid*,⁹ while, in the *Thebaid*, the collapse of the public into the private becomes part of the poem's structure. The context of the laments in the *Thebaid* may be public, but they are part of a negative dynamic. They often fulfill a self-serving role that causes destruction for the community; in this respect, they are clearly distinguishable from the laments in the *Aeneid*.

The laments of Statius's Hypsipyle take up almost all of Book 5 of the epic and are not only the indirect cause of Opheltes' death, they also upset the harmony between the Argive army and its hosts, the Nemeans. On the private level, however, these laments function as a self-induced *consolatio*.¹⁰ This embedded narrative of woes strengthens the impression that, for Statius, the social function of lament is to provide relief of one's own grief and pleasure for the audience. Hypsipyle is a female poet-figure whom the Argives meet in the woods of Nemea, while she is nursing Opheltes.¹¹ She brings them to a spring and, after quenching their physical thirst, she sets out to quench their intellectual curiosity with the story of the Lemnian massacre. The soldiers are inflamed by a desire to learn her misfortunes (5.41):

9 Wiltshire 1989.64: "The private and the public realms are critically important, and for Vergil, the collapse of either into the other portends the destruction of both."

10 For a detailed discussion of the Hypsipyle episode, see Henderson 1993.182ff., Nugent 1996, and Ganiban 1996.52–94.

11 On the congruence of the voice of the poet and the voice of the woman in the poetic text, especially in regard to Hypsipyle, see Nugent 1996 (includes further bibliography) and Brown diss. 1994, to which I had no access.

“cunctis tunc noscere casus / ortus amor, pater ante alios hortatur Adrastus,” “Then all craved to learn her misfortune, and father Adrastus foremost urged her.” The storyteller derives pleasure from sharing her grim story. This pleasure is her main motivation (“dulce loqui miseris veteresque reducere questus,” “It is pleasant to the unhappy to speak and to recall the sorrows of old time,” 5.48) for retelling her story. As Georgia Nugent 1996 notes, “Hypsipyle’s response to Adrastus’ request that she narrate her painful past uncannily prefigures ‘the talking cure’ which is the discourse of psychoanalysis.” The aim of this paper is to establish that Statius extends the qualities of the “talking cure” to all his poetry; he uses Hypsipyle to act out that function of the poet’s art that provides solace both to the poet himself and to the audience by giving voice to those who otherwise are deprived of a voice.

In the case of Hypsipyle, the encounter with Adrastus’s army is not the first and only time that she engaged in such therapeutic storytelling. After the death of her infant-ward Opheltes (who is killed by a serpent while she is entertaining the Argives and relieving her sorrow), she recalls in her laments the happy hours she spent with the child. She used to tell her story to the child in a lullaby and, in the process, comforted her own grief (*Theb.* 5.615–17):

quotiens tibi Lemnon et Argo
sueta loqui et longa somnum suadere querella!
sic equidem luctus solabar.

How often used I to talk to you of Lemnos and the Argo,
and with my long, sad tale soothe you to sleeping! For so
indeed did I console my grief.

It is, of course, a paradox that Hypsipyle laments not just the death of the child, but also the loss of an opportunity to vent her feelings by using the child as an audience for her laments. The death of the child emblemizes the “suicide of narration” (Henderson 1993.185) both for Hypsipyle and for the audience. The gesture of seeking relief from sorrows in narration and poetry hearkens back to a long trail of ancient precedents.

Antimachus (5 B.C.E.), according to Hermesianax, filled his elegiac poem *Lyde* with γόοι; Callimachus criticized the poem as an elegy written in an epicizing style (Cameron 1995.304). Plutarch states that, “He wrote the so-called *Lyde* to relieve his grief [over the death of his wife],

enumerated the misfortunes of heroes, and thus diminished his pain through that of others" (*Cons. ad Ap.* 9.106BC). The fragments indicate that the *Lyde* must have contained many stories of heroes. Statius, whose poetic career converged with that of Antimachus in choosing the Theban saga for the subject of his epic, emulates his predecessor also in combining *consolatio* with epic. In this respect, he also resembles Erinna,¹² who had "wrought a fundamental change in epic form by converting the Homeric representation of a woman's lament into a literary work in its entirety; that is, she has made a subordinate and sub-literary form into the dominant structuring form" (Gutzwiller 1997.207). After the lament becomes prominent in Hellenistic and later neoteric and Augustan poetry, it makes a comeback and is reintroduced into epic, but enriched with features that had accrued to it since Homer. Statius not only reintroduces laments as a "required component of the rhythm and structure of his epic" (Fantham 1999.226), he also, most consistently among Roman epicists, gives lament a role destructive for the community yet comforting for the individual.

PLEASURE AND CONFRONTATION IN THE LAMENTS

Elaine Fantham points out the relationship between laments in Greece and Rome and their social role as generators of resentment and vengeance (1999.222). A close study of the text of the *Thebaid* provides many examples of how women indirectly challenge existing hierarchies by venting aggressive feelings towards authority in their laments.¹³ Mothers' laments become a magnetic field of dissent by provoking a reaction that perpetuates violence;¹⁴ women do not confront anybody directly, but they inspire men to take revenge with their laments.¹⁵ The confrontational nature

12 We lack direct evidence of Statius's engagement with Erinna, as she is not on the list of Greek lyric poets taught by Statius's father: Hesiod, Epicharmus, Pindar, Ibycus, Alcman, Stesichorus, Sappho, Callimachus, Lycophron, Sophron, and Corinna (*Silv.* 5.3.150–61), but her influence on Roman elegy (see Catullus 66) is well known.

13 *invidiam planxere deis*, 3.197; *placet hos tibi, fulminis auctor?* 10.800.

14 Aletes delivers a consolatory speech ("consilium infaustum dictis mulcebat Aletes," 3.178) to the mothers mourning the victims of Tydeus's ambush, ending with a criticism of Eteocles' rule: "nunc regis iniqui / ob noxam immeritos patriae tot culmina cives / exuimus" (3.206–08).

15 For instance, the mother of Opheltis blames Hypsipyle for the death of her child and demands revenge, but it is Lycurgus who confronts Jupiter with reproaches for the absurd death of the baby prince (6.138–84, 196). In another episode, the river god Ismenos

of laments, their destructive social impact and the private pleasure derived from indulging in grief as depicted in the *Thebaid*, acquires a particular meaning within the framework of the widening gap between the public and the private realms from Vergil's time to the time of Statius. Susan Wiltshire demonstrates how part of the eternal appeal of the *Aeneid* rests upon its search for an appropriate balance between the public and the private, a balance that occasionally collapses and is then resurrected. Vergil's search for this balance comes in the face of the institutionalized separation between public and private resulting from the rise of bureaucracy in the administration of the Roman empire.¹⁶

The tension between the two realms in the *Aeneid* is consistently resolved in favor of the public, centripetal, forces, while, in the *Thebaid*, the private world with its centrifugal/destructive forces prevails. The voices of lament and dissent carry greater weight in the *Thebaid* than in the *Aeneid*. In comparison with his literary predecessors, Statius always innovates in the spirit of "pathetic amplification" (Micozzi 1998.112, 119–21). This is the new world of *ambitosae mortes*, which Tacitus will find most disturbing in their tendency to undermine the community ("in nullum rei publicae usum ambitiosa morte," "in an ambitious death of no use to the state," *Agricola* 42.4). Statius replicates the spirit of *ambitosae mortes* in his portrayal of Argia and Antigone, who defy Creon in burying Polynices.¹⁷ There is even a direct textual reference to *ambitosae mortes*: *ambitur saeva de morte* ("They eagerly desire harsh death," 12.456).

Statius captures this contemporary inclination to excess in mourning and to destructive self-assertion in his portrayal of the mourning Niobe.¹⁸

addresses an indignant speech to Jupiter as a result of his daughter Ismenis's lament for her son Crenaeus (9.376). Eurydice's lament for her son Menoeceus, in which she contrasts her misfortune with the privileges enjoyed by Jocasta as a royal mother (10.793–814), is followed by Creon's rebellion against Eteocles (9.269ff.). The Argive mothers as suppliants of Theseus (12.546–86) all trigger new conflicts with their laments.

16 Wiltshire 1989.143. Of course, depending on the interpretive viewpoint, one may claim the ending of the *Aeneid* as the victory of the private passion for avenging Pallas's death over maintaining the publicly expedient image of *clementia*.

17 The scenario is dramatic: upon the arrival of Creon's henchmen, Argia and Antigone gladly admit that they buried Polynices' corpse (11.457) with a stoic defiance similar to that of Fannia in Pliny's account (*Ep.* 7.5) and Servilia in Tacitus (16.31), and they happily accept death (*animosaeque leti / spes furit*, 12.456–57; "ambae hilares et mortis amore superbae / ensibus intendant iugulos," 12.679–80).

18 For a detailed discussion of excess as an overarching poetic principle with examples drawn from elsewhere in the epic, see Herschkowitz 1998.249ff.

Unlike the voices of dissent in the *Aeneid* that are invariably suppressed and come to function as “an effective catalyst for the reassertion and reaffirmation of authoritative power” (Nugent 1992.273), Niobe’s mournful and dissenting voice is enshrined and transported beyond the constraints of time and authority.

Niobe is a generic exemplum in consolatory discourse, starting with Achilles’ consolation of Priam in *Iliad* 24, of someone who grieved, but then set her grief aside and ate. Seneca uses Niobe in his consolatory letters as well (63.2.3). Three representations of Niobe in Statius, Ovid, and Seneca reveal that rejoicing in violent, confrontational grief differentiates Statius’s Niobe from her literary predecessors. In Ovid’s version (*Meta.* 6.146ff.), Niobe is proud and blasphemous before losing her children, but completely cowed and crushed after her tragedy. Her disaster is Latona’s triumph and enjoyment (“satiague meo tua pectora luctu,” “Glut your heart with my pain,” *Meta.* 6.281); her story is a cautionary tale for the rest of the Thebans. In Seneca, Niobe carries her grief with stoic pride (*superba*), counting the shades of her children without emotion (*Oedipus* 612–14):

interque natos Tantalus tandem suos
tuto superba fert caput fastu grave
et numerat umbras.

And midst her children the Tantalid, at last safe in her
pride, holds up her head with insolent arrogance and
counts her shades.

Statius goes a step further in having Niobe rejoice in the opportunity to revile the gods in the underworld—where she can expect no further punishment, where she can extend her laments to eternity and produce even more violent, confrontational laments (*Theb.* 4.575–78):

ecce autem magna subit invidiosa caterva
Tantalus et tumido percenset funera luctu,
nil deiecta malis; iuvat effugisse deorum
numina et insanae plus iam permittere linguae.

Behold! With numerous escort comes the enviable Tantalid
and, proud in her grief, counts over the bodies. Not humbled
in her woes, she rejoices to have escaped the power of
heaven, and now to give freer rein to her insane tongue.

In Seneca, as in Ovid, Niobe is rendered speechless. In Ovid, Niobe is transformed into a mute statue; in Seneca, she expresses her pride with gestures; in Statius, she is one of the many mother figures who confront the powers above with their grief and laments. What Niobe has gained in the netherworld is the unlimited freedom and pleasure (*iuvat*) to indulge her “insane tongue” in laments.

As Nugent notes (1992.274), in the *Aeneid*, those who cannot advance the (proto-) Roman mission must be excluded from and left behind by society. In the *Thebaid*, these private voices of lament and dissent move the narrative forward. Their literary predecessor in the *Aeneid* is the unrestrained, confrontational lament of Juturna. Christine Perkell points out (1997) that Juturna’s lament problematizes the main ideological axis of the *Aeneid* and contrasts with other private laments in the poem. For instance, the mourning mother of Euryalus, who endangers the military fervor of the Trojans, is quickly removed from the scene and, therefore, her lament as a socially disruptive force is controlled for the poem’s internal audience.¹⁹ The contrary is true, however, in regard to Juturna’s lament at the end of the *Aeneid*, which casts a shadow of doubt on the rule of Jupiter and the ideological order (however complex and ambiguous) of the poem in general. Juturna’s lament immensely complicates the ending and is, significantly, the only Vergilian lament imitated closely in Statius.

While Juturna’s lament is an aberration in the *Aeneid*,²⁰ confrontational laments of the Juturna type are the rule in the *Thebaid*. Since the *Thebaid* is about the power of the forces of hell that drive the narrative steadily in the direction of *furor* and civil strife, laments are there to hasten the descent into mutual destruction and the collapse of the public into the private. In the *Aeneid*, which handles the civil war theme in a much more ambivalent way, laments with a confrontational and demoralizing potential are suppressed. Only the lament of Juturna resembles the laments in the *Thebaid*, or as Fantham points out in reference to the positioning of the lament at the end of the *Aeneid*, “it goes unheard except by Vergil’s audi-

19 Perkell 1997.278. Henderson 1991 n. 191 and Fantham 1999 quite rightly point out the structural parallels between the laments of Eurydice, Menoeceus’s mother, and Euryalus’s mother. However, the two laments function differently in the larger context of their respective epics. While Eurydice’s lament motivates the further actions of Creon, the lament of Euryalus’s mother is devoid of further narrative consequences.

20 Characterized as such by Johnson 1992.144.

ence—and his successor poets” (1999.226). Statius heard Juturna’s lament and expanded it into a pattern of unrestrained confrontational laments as part of a broader trend in the first century C.E. to reinvent and redefine epic and its role in society. Epic now can and does function as *consolatio* indirectly by allowing the free expression of lament and of sentiments that are normally suppressed in the prescriptive philosophical *consolatio*.

UNBRIDLED LAMENTS: A CONTRAST TO TRAGEDY

The *Thebaid*, as Henderson notes (1993.182), represents a remake of epic into Euripidean tragedy. However, it differs from tragedy in this one respect: while tragedy aims at suppressing and controlling laments, Statius exactly replicates the patterns noted by Holst-Warhaft 1992 in regard to ritual laments in the modern Greek village. They do not pose a social threat directly, but once the laments are verbalized and endorsed by a male proponent, they become truly dangerous. In that regard, Statius’s narrative reflects the performative functions of mourning and lament without the restraints and problematization featured in tragedy.²¹

Despite the fact that this epic is often described as rhetorical (Dominik 1994a), rhetoric has no role in countering lament, as it does in Euripides’ *Suppliants*, for instance. The conclusion of the *Thebaid* reenacts Euripides’ *Suppliants* with a remarkable difference. In the tragedy, Theseus comes back from Thebes victorious and brings the corpses of the Seven. The women erupt in laments, but Theseus invites Adrastus to give a funerary oration that praises the valor of the dead. The *Thebaid* ends in a similar way except that rhetoric is not deployed to counter lament. On the contrary, the women indulge fully and joyfully in their laments. Nicole Loraux analyzes (1981.48) Euripides’ *Suppliants* as a movement from mourning to civic speech and as the integration of women into the civic universe and their moving away from the funeral pyre. By contrast, in the *Thebaid*, the elemental force of lamentation is given free rein despite the long traditions that have unanimously labored at suppressing it. It is the women’s laments that incite a new war between Theseus and Creon, and their even wilder laments end

21 As Foley 1993, Loraux 1990, and Holst-Warhaft 1992 have pointed out, tragedy aims at suppressing and controlling women’s laments, especially their violent aspects. The origins of tragedy could be traced to the effort of the state to control and divert the potentially disruptive public voices of women in their laments.

that conflict in a triumphal outburst of lamentation unchecked by the rational control of rhetoric. The laments that end the epic are even unrepresented by the male voice of the poet (Dietrich 1999.50).

Formal *consolationes* are conspicuously omitted from, or shown to be ineffective in, the *Thebaid*. In Euripides' fragmentary *Hypsipyle*, the prophet Amphiaraus saves Hypsipyle from the hands of Eurydice, addresses a consolation to Eurydice (the mother of the dead child killed by a snake due to Hypsipyle's negligence), and makes predictions about Archemorus-Opheltes and the start of the Nemean games.²² The consolation and the predictions are present in almost all attested versions of the myth.²³ In Pindar, Euripides, and *Schol. Clem. Alexandrinus*, the consolation is addressed to Hypsipyle. In Statius, the mother and Hypsipyle receive no formal *consolatio*. It is to Lycurgus and the Argive nobles that Amphiaraus addresses his brief speech of consolation and prophecy (5.734–53), a speech that remains hanging in the air: “finierat, caeloque cavam nox induit umbram” (“He finished his speech, and the night covered the sky with a hollow shadow,” 5.753). After Opheltes' death, Adrastus attempts to console the mourners, but only succeeds stirring up renewed mourning. He is compared to someone making prayers to the sea in vain (*Theb.* 6.45–53).

At the end of the epic, there is a situation in which an address to a lamenting woman would have been natural: this is when Evadne, wife of Capaneus, supplicates Theseus to punish Creon for denying fire to the fallen Argives. As a representative of the Argive wives lamenting for their husbands, she addresses Theseus and the Athenian people asking for help. Theseus does not turn to Evadne in response. Instead, he addresses the absent Creon with threats and then sends his henchman as ambassador to Thebes (12.590ff.). Theseus never recognizes Evadne's presence and never addresses the lamenting women, while in Euripides' *Suppliants*, Statius's model for this episode,²⁴ Theseus enters into a lengthy dialogue with his mother, who acts on behalf of the Argive women (*Suppl.* 87–110).

Statius avoids the pattern of a consolation addressed by a hero to a mourning mother. Is it because this tragic paradigm is not suitable for an epic? In the *Aeneid*, consolations are also very rare, the only notable example being Jupiter's consolation of Hercules over the impending death

22 See Cockle 1987, fragments 60i, 60ii, c. 900ff.

23 For a useful selection of all passages pertaining to the myth, see Bond 1963.147–49.

24 See Legras 1905.139–40.

of Pallas (*Aen.* 10.467–72). The difference is that, unlike Vergil, Statius, as shown above, works against a strong mythic tradition that he reworks by removing the consolations. The exclusion of formal consolations represents an overt rejection of the rhetorical and philosophical *consolatio*, but this is not the entire story. The exclusion is also related to issues of power, issues similar to the ones noted by Nugent in connection with the *Aeneid* where “the women’s voice is wholly excluded from communication with the dominant social sector, the Trojan men” (1992.256). This theory finds support in the writings of Seneca and Tacitus, who, even after one takes into account the differences of genre and time period, address manifestations of women’s public presence in a spirit similar to that of the *Thebaid*.

LAMENTS AND POWER

Statius’s representation of laments plays artfully with his Roman audience’s culture-specific attitude to female lamentation. Women’s laments, as Loraux shows (1990.49–56), were far better tolerated in Rome than in Athens. Legislation allowed for nine to ten months of mourning, as opposed to the one month in Athens. In some cases, the public power of laments is even co-opted by the state: in the *Cenotaphia Pisana*, for instance, the *matronae* are invited to join in the public grief for Gaius (Dessau 1962.140.24–25). In Rome, the tears of matrons have social prestige, going back to the effective tears of the matrons who averted civil strife early in Rome’s history in the story of Coriolanus. Therefore, the presence of laments that no one attempts to suppress separates the epic’s ideology of laments from that of Greek tragedy. This is, perhaps, a function of the fact that the *Thebaid* resonates with the major concerns of its own time, which include anxiety over the public role of women on many levels. This complicates the status of the laments in the epic.

Women’s laments and all manifestations of women’s public presence were surrounded with anxiety concerning their socially disruptive potential on a number of occasions in both pre-imperial²⁵ and imperial Roman history (e.g., the suppression of excessive mourning for Germanicus,

25 Fabius Maximus forbade women to display their mourning publicly after the battle of Cannae (Plutarch *Fabius Maximus* 17.7, Livy 22.55.6). Mothers’ laments were most often banned when in danger of exciting or exacerbating civil strife, as the ban on women’s mourning after the death of Gaius Gracchus (Plutarch *Gaius Gracchus* 17.6).

Tacitus *Annals* 2–3). The epic subtly addresses the question of women's influence on public life from behind the scenes through a powerful male relative, an issue recently recognized as significant in Roman political discourse of the late republic (Hillard 1992.37–64). Tacitus saw this influence as a problem. He discusses the power of women to command armies in the *Annals* (“potiorem iam apud exercitus Agrippinam quam legatos, quam duces,” “Already Agrippina is more powerful among the army than the legates, than the leaders,” 1.69). As power and the ability to influence decisions were transferred to the army (“posse principem alibi quam Romae fieri,” “The princeps can be made in a place different from Rome,” Tacitus *Hist.* 1.4), women's threat to the male monopoly in the public arena shifted into the military realm. The highly contested and ambiguous position of women who accompany their husbands to the provinces is detailed in the debate around Caecina's proposed legislation to ban wives from joining their husbands. The motion is motivated by fear of the ambitions of women and their potential influence over the soldiery.²⁶ Jocasta's pronounced influence over the Argive army in Statius might be read as an echo of such concerns. The meeting between Polynices and Jocasta (*Theb.* 7.481ff.) transforms the tradition in such a way that it emphasizes the public role of the mother and her influence over her son and his troops.²⁷

The meeting between a mother and her son who is in command of an army attacking his native city has a long literary ancestry;²⁸ the Statian episode is in an intertextual dialogue with Euripides' and Seneca's *Phoenissae*. In Statius and Seneca, the interaction between mother and son takes place in public, in front of the troops, while in Euripides it is witnessed only by the

26 Tacitus (*Ann.* 3.33) gives voice to this fear in the following way: “Non imbecillum tantum et imparem laboribus sexum, sed, si licentia adsit, saevum, ambitiosum, potestatis avidum: incedere inter milites, habere ad manum centuriones, praesedissem nuper feminam exercitio cohortium, decursu legionum” (“A gender not only weak and unequal in labor, but if opportunity arises, savage, ambitious, greedy for power: just a woman until recently, now she mingles with the soldiers, takes control of the centurions, commands the exercises of the cohorts, the maneuvering of the legions”).

27 For more on the influence of mothers and their advice in political matters, see Hillard 1983.10–28. For more on the dangerous influence of women in general, see Bauman 1992.

28 For an early version of a Jocasta-like figure who uses the language of masculine authority and political power, see Burnett 1988.119–20 on the Lille Stesichorus. We can be certain that Statius read Stesichorus because he mentions him in the curriculum of authors taught by his father (5.3.154). Due to the fragmentary nature of the Stesichorus papyrus, we can only ascertain that Statius builds on this early representation of a powerful woman who arranges the lots of her family, but we cannot determine the extent to which he does so.

Phoenician slave women. The reactions of the troops to the pleading mother are an important component of the scene in both Roman writers. In this case, the differences of genre prove irrelevant: Seneca, although hampered by the dramatic form, still manages through a messenger report to insert the reaction of the soldiers to the pathetic appearance of the mother in their midst (Seneca *Phoen.* 428ff.).

Along with these similarities, the differences between Statius and Seneca are also significant. In both Roman writers, the mother adopts a more public role than in Euripides. However, Statius's Jocasta, unlike Seneca's Jocasta, has a significant impact on the soldiers and comes close to preventing conflict through the power of her influence on them. In Seneca, Jocasta stands between the two battle lines, engaging in a dialogue with her two sons while the troops fade out in the background. Statius's Jocasta, however, interacts with the troops directly by asking to be led to her son (7.483ff.); her appearance is authoritative and her language scornful: which of the identical helmets hides the enemy that she bore? (7.490–93). She addresses her son with anger (7.496) and commands him to follow her into the city (*iubeo rogoque*, 7.506); she asks him to subject himself to arbitration with her as arbitrator: "regnum iam me sub iudice posce" ("Demand the kingdom under my arbitration," 7.509). Although the scenario that she proposes had been played out unsuccessfully in Euripides, in Statius, it functions as a means of self-assertion (*me sub iudice*). Then in the middle of her speech, she turns away from her son to address the Argive troops (7.519) and ends her address with a public speech in which she asks for the termination of the war. The tears of his mother make Polynices forget the kingdom: "exciderat regnum: cupit ire, et mitis Adrastus / non vetat" ("The kingdom slipped from his mind: he would like to leave, and meek Adrastus does not prevent him," 7.537–38). The troops are moved to pious tears (7.529) as well, and if Tydeus and the Furies had not intervened in a timely fashion, there would have been no war (7.539ff.).

The high public profile of Statius's Jocasta also sets her apart from Coriolanus's mother in the analogous episode in Livy's *Histories* (2.40–41), where the mother-son encounter moves exclusively along the familial axis, and the mother succeeds without really having to adopt a public role. Livy comments that, in that idyllic age, men did not begrudge the women their triumph.

Jocasta's efforts to avert the war fail not only because the outcome is defined by tradition, but also because Statius contrives to associate her on a subliminal textual level with the Furies, the main instigators of the fratricidal

bloodshed (*Eumenidum velut antiquissima*, 7.477; *luctu furiata*, 7.489; *impia belli / mater*, 7.483–84).²⁹ This clearly represents a contradiction. On the one hand, she is a positive force in that she almost succeeds in averting the fratricidal war, but on the other hand, she is identified with the forces that fuel the war, the Furies. Mourning women are often compared with maenads and sometimes to witches,³⁰ but these figures do not pose the threat that Furies do.

This contradiction can be resolved in light of the fact that, in Statius, Jocasta's appearance and influence receive a public dimension quite distinct from her counterparts in Euripides, Seneca, and Livy. Statius's age finds a renewed interest in the story because of the anxieties, recorded in Tacitus, about the usurpation of political and military control by women and the reversal of social hierarchies caused by civil war. Statius therefore chooses to structure his version of the story by bringing the public impact of Jocasta into focus. Even though Statius follows Euripides' and Seneca's *Phoenissae* closely, he innovates in making Jocasta talk directly to the soldiers and step outside the family circle to which she is confined in the tragedies. In Statius, she acquires access to the troops and gains influence over them via her son. Due to this kind of influence, her association with the Furies adds a metaphorical dimension to her power over the armies that was terrifying to many in his audience, as attested in the literature of this period.

The laments in Statius reflect what society construed as a standard vice in women: gratifying their ambitions through their sons. Women's accounts of the social death that they experience through the death of their male relatives are a generic feature of laments starting with Homer (Murnaghan 1999.208), but, in Statius, the phenomenon must also be read against the contemporary philosophical discourse that condemned women's aspirations for power through their sons, as Seneca complains: "viderint illae matres quae potentiam liberorum muliebri impotentia exercent, quae, quia feminis honores non licet quaerere, per illos ambitiosae sunt," "Let those mothers who, with womanly weakness, exercise power through their children and who are ambitious through their children due to the fact that women are not allowed to run for office, beware!" (*ad Helviam* 14.2).³¹

29 See more in Keith 2000.96 for Statius's association of Jocasta with the Furies.

30 When pleasure in grief becomes excessive, the mourning woman becomes a witch, as is the case with Lucan's Erichtho (see Lovatt 1999.141) and Statius's comparison of Ide to a Thessalian witch (3.140).

31 Livia's dominance over her sons (Tacitus *Ann.* 5.1) is, of course, the classic example.

Statius's poem provides a platform for acting out those aspects of women's mourning that Seneca explicitly rejects in this passage. Mothers in the *Thebaid* lament the loss of an honored place in the societal hierarchy and their inability to fulfill their ambitions for power because of their sons' deaths. When she realizes that her sons have failed to achieve a heroic death, Ide, the mother of twins, deplores the end of her ambition to reach the heights of fame through her sons (3.154–56):

vosne illa potentia matris
vos uteri fortuna mei, qua tangere divos
rebar et Ogygias titulis anteire parentes?

Are you those strong defenders of your mother, that glory
of my womb, whereby I thought to touch the gods and
surpass the mothers of Ogygia in renown?

Ide laments not only her personal loss, but also her loss of status in a competitive society. Her lament, by necessity, must lack the component of praise for the acts of the deceased because her sons died an inglorious death and now represent only a casualty statistic (*numerandaque funera passi*, 3.163). What Seneca the moralist denounces, i.e., mothers' aspiration for power through their sons, Statius incorporates as a realistic touch into the core of his psychologizing narrative.³²

Mothers display a similar attitude towards the accomplishments of their sons in a short digression in the catalogue of the Argive troops in which parents exhort their children to die, and a mother is content with a wreath adorning the victim (4.231–33):

gaudent natorum fata parentes
hortanturque mori, deflent iamque omnis ephebum
turba, coronato contenta est funere mater.

Their parents rejoice in their children's fate and urge them
on to die; and while the whole band of youths makes
lamentation, the mother is content with the wreath that
crowns the victim.

32 For more on Statius's psychologizing style, see Krumbholz 1955.93–138.

In Argia's laments for Polynices, the loss of honor (including her father's and her own) figure much more prominently than the loss of life (12.322–24):

hunc ego te, coniunx, ad debita regna profectum
ductorem belli generumque potentis Adrasti
aspicio, talisque tuis occurro triumphis?

My husband, do my eyes behold the same one who
marched ahead as a leader of an army for the kingdom
owed to him? Am I beholding the son-in-law of powerful
Adrastus? Is this the way in which I encounter your
triumph?³³

Through these realistic portrayals of women's laments, Statius validates the private world in a way in which it had not been validated and acknowledged before. He opens the epic genre to elaborate detail in portraying private reactions to events without putting into place a mechanism of negotiation with the public realm such as exists in the *Aeneid*. He is writing for an audience that feels entitled to be preoccupied with its private world (in the *Silvae*, patrons are often praised for choosing the life of *otium*). On a certain level, the poem caters to the emotional and psychological needs of a significant audience-constituency, one that is mourning the death of a loved one. In the same way as Pompeian decorative styles move from alluding to public spaces in a realistic way towards more intimate and private, schematic and decorative allusions to public architectural detail,³⁴ so in Statius's epic world, the collapse of the public into the private that Vergil foresaw and forestalled in his *Aeneid* becomes a fact. Similarly, in the Pompeian houses of the third and fourth style, "the luxurious 'private' life of the rich and

33 For a deeper analysis of Argia's lament and its parallels with the lament of Euryalus's mother in the *Aeneid*, see Dietrich 1999.47; on her assimilation to the voice of the poet and the manipulation of the story to enact reconciliation, see Lovatt 1999.38–39.

34 Wallace-Hardrill 1994.29: "The proper backdrop for the public figure is no longer highly public, indeed regal and verging on the sacred; instead a more intimate and private luxury is in place. Whereas the first style is the art of public places, such as Vitruvian regal *atria* and *tablina*, the third style, so one might argue, is the art of private places, private dinner parties for chosen amici. The shift in emphasis would correspond to a shift in the locus of political power: no longer won out in the open, in forum and senate, power is generated through informal contacts, at drinking parties, in the corridors and bedrooms of the palace."

powerful of the imperial period is precisely their public façade, and access to it is carefully guarded" (Wallace-Hadrill 1994.52).

Statius is by no means a dispassionate spectator of the destructive cycle of civil war into which his Thebes and his Rome seem to descend.³⁵ He is deeply disturbed by his contemporaries' disengagement from public affairs³⁶ and, in one of his bitter metapoetic asides, he designates not his fellow citizens (*cives*)³⁷ as the recipients of the didactic message of his epic, but *reges*,³⁸ although he has little hope of being heard by them either.³⁹ So it turns out that Statius's "public poem," the *Thebaid*, does not have an accessible public audience that can be effectively moved to act in a way that would end the destructive cycle of civil wars. No wonder the epic explores so keenly the world that lies on the borderline between public and private: the world of mourning and lament. Private loss also dominates many of Statius's poems written for individual patrons in the *Silvae*.

STATIUS AS A CONSOLATORY FIGURE

As Perkell shows (1997.284), the *Aeneid* "inscribes readers who authentically lament loss." This is a function of epic reflected in the anecdote about the grieving Octavia who faints when she hears Vergil recite the

35 There are numerous studies exploring Statius's engagement with the Rome of his day under the garb of mythological Thebes, e.g., Ahl 1984, 1986; Dominik 1994a, 1994b.

36 The attitude of the public to the civil war of 69 was not the same as to the civil wars of the earlier century. As Tacitus reports, the citizens had become spectators and viewed the conflict between the Flavians and the Vitellians as one concerning only generals and their armies: "aderat pugnantibus spectator populus, utque in ludicro certamine, hos, rursus illos clamore et plausu fovebat" ("The populace stood by watching the combatants, as if they were at the games in the circus, by their shouts and applause they encouraged first one party and then the other," *Hist.* 3.83).

37 Like Lucan, who projects *cives* in his *Bellum Civile* as his implied audience: "quis furor, o cives, quae tanta licentia ferri?" ("What madness is this, citizens, what indiscriminate use of the sword?" *B.C.* 1.8).

38 "vosque malis hominum, Stygiae, iam parcite, divae: / omnibus in terris scelus hoc omnique sub aevo / viderit una dies, monstrumque infame futuris / excidat, et soli memorent haec proelia reges," "And you, Stygian goddesses, be sparing with the evils of mankind. In every land and throughout the ages let one day only have seen this kind of crime; let posterity forget this monstrosity and let only the kings remember these battles!" (*Theb.* 11.576–79).

39 The kings are not a receptive audience and their memories are not easy to maintain. When Creon ascends to the throne, the poet exclaims: "pro blanda potestas! / et sceptri malesuadus amor! numquamne priorum / haerebunt documenta novis?" "O flattering power and ill-counseling love for the scepter! Shall the new rulers fail to remember the deeds of the earlier ones?" (*Theb.* 11.655–57).

lines pertaining to Marcellus (*Vita Donati* 32, *Serv. Aen.* 6.861). This complex and undefined relation between epic and *consolatio* is exemplified by the frequent use of the *Aeneid* as a quarry for sepulchral poetry (Hoogma 1959). Similarly, in the lament for his son in *Silvae* 5.5, Statius explicitly projects an audience of parents who mourn the loss of their children, and he represents himself as having helped these parents cope with the tragedy (5.5.38–39):

ille ego qui (quotiens!) blande matrumque patrumque
vulnera, qui vivos potui mulcere dolores.

Yet I am he who was able—how many times—to soothe
by appeasing words the pain of mothers or fathers and the
sorrow of bereavement.

In the preface to *Silvae* 2, Statius addresses Melior, a father who has just lost his son. But it is not only through the *Silvae* that he performs this consolatory role. The *Silvae* come at a later stage in his career, after he has been successfully reciting epic poetry before various audiences for years. *Quotiens* in 5.5.38 probably also includes his earlier epic recitals. The poet explicitly refers to his epic recitals as *questus* (lament) (5.2.160–63):

sed questus solitos si forte ciebo
et mea Romulei venient ad carmina patres,
tu deeris, Crispine, mihi, cuneosque per omnes
te meus absentem circumspectabit Achilles.

But if I utter my usual laments and the Roman fathers
come to hear my song, I shall then feel your absence,
Crispinus, and my Achilles will look for you in vain on
every bench.

In addressing a young patron who is about to depart on a military campaign, Statius envisions with sadness his absence from the audience at his recitals. *Questus* normally would describe elegy, but we know that Statius regularly performed his epic compositions in public. In this context, “Achilles” refers to Statius’s last epic composition, the *Achilleid*, which the poet recited to an audience of senators, as he did his *Thebaid* earlier. The passage explicitly connects lament with epic recital and represents the author, Statius, as a performer of poetic laments.

In a similar fashion, Statius also assigns the function of lament-consolation to the poetry of his admired predecessor Lucan, who appeases and comforts the dead (*Silv.* 2.7.101–03):⁴⁰

iussus praecipitem subire Lethen
dum pugnas canis arduaue voce
das solacia grandibus sepulchris.

You are ordered to approach Lethe's rushing stream while
you sing of battles and with inspired voice give comfort to
the mighty dead.

The relatedness of epic and consolation is clear in Statius's choice of the verb *mulcere* to describe his recitals before senators (cf. 5.5.38–39 above) (*Silv.* 5.3.215–17):

qualis eras Latios quotiens ego carmine patres
mulcerem felixque tui spectator adesses
muneris!

How great was your pride every time I used to delight
[comfort, appease] the Latin fathers with my song while
you were present, a happy witness of your own show
[*munus*].

Mulcere is also used for Aletes' consolatory address to the mourning women ("consilium infaustum dictis mulcebat Aletes," "Aletes was soothing the unhappy assembly with his words," 3.178). In this case, *mulcere* clearly refers to *consolatio*. The calming down of a seditious crowd also falls into the semantic range of *mulcere*, as in Vergil: "ille regit dictis animos et pectora mulcet," "He rules over the spirits with his words and soothes the hearts," *Aen.* 1.153. The passage describes the ability of the general to appease the spirits of the rioting rabble in the famous statesman simile from the storm scene in *Aeneid* 1. Interestingly, Statius assigns this appeasing function to the public performance of all his poetry.

40 Like Statius's epic, Lucan's is known to senators and equestrians through regular recitals: "et doctos equites et eloquente / cantu purpureum trahes senatum," *Silv.* 2.7.46–47.

A structured and explicitly aimed consolation is doomed to failure before genuine grief, like the grief that the poet himself experienced on the death of his adopted son (*Silv.* 5.5.38–41):

ille ego lugentum mitis solator, acerbis
auditus tumulis et descendentibus umbris
deficio medicasque manus fomentaque quaero
vulneribus.

I, the gentle consoler of the afflicted, whose voice was
heard in the hour of untimely death by spirits departing, I
now am at a loss, and seek healing hands and remedies for
my wounds.

Poetry can appease and comfort only to a certain point. Statius has appeared as a consolatory figure to others, but now he fails to comfort himself (*deficio*). He is not alone in this failure: even the mythical poet Orpheus could not be comforted after his wife's death (*Silv.* 5.1.27–29). Statius announces his consolatory role while, at the same time, implying the ineffectiveness of the direct preaching of the prescriptive *consolatio*. He has devoted much of his poetry to unrestrained lament in order to give his audience an opportunity to take the full satisfaction of sorrow, but he does not idealize the destructive effects and consequences of those laments. With this strategy, he may have provided a more effective *consolatio* than the prescriptive one. From the preceding analysis of the representations of mourning, it becomes apparent through the poetic choices that he makes that Statius favors the non-prescriptive *consolatio* that gives voice to the free expression of grief and lament.

Although the *Thebaid* is an epic poem written for public performance and the *Silvae* was written for private patrons, the two poems have in common the valorization of the private realm and a lack of concern for the suppression of grief.

NON-PRESCRIPTIVE CONSOLATIONES IN THE *SILVAE*

As the *Thebaid* routinely represents the excesses of mourning,⁴¹ so in the *Silvae*, representations of the display of grief by actual living patrons is largely exaggerated. It is not very likely that Claudius Etruscus had to be held back from throwing himself on the pyre upon the death of his ninety-year-old father (3.3), or that Flavius Ursus beat himself black and blue on the death of his *puer delicatus* (2.6), or that Abascantus displayed excessive signs of mourning when his wife Priscilla died (5.1.21–24).

These representations of excessive and grotesque mourning match conventions and topoi for the free expression of grief and lament found in the *Consolatio ad Liviam*, a consolatory elegy addressed to Livia on the death of her son Nero Drusus in 9 B.C. In this work of unknown origin from the reign of Tiberius, ascribed to Ovid, the representation of both Nero's and Livia's grief is excessive. Nero's face is pale and his hair disheveled;⁴² Livia makes a public display of her mourning ("luctus, ut in Druso, publicus ille fuit," "That grief of hers, as the one for Drusus, was on public display," 66), with torn out hair and frenzied appearance ("quo raperis laniata comas similisque furenti? / Quo ruis? Attonita quid petis ora manu?" "Where are you driven with disheveled hair and resembling a madwoman? Where are you rushing? Why do you assault your face with your hands?" 317–18). The poet implies a comparison between Livia and the mourning Niobe (111–18), including a thinly disguised hostile outburst against the gods (129–39). These excesses in Livia's mourning form a distinct contrast with the portrayal of Livia's grief in Seneca, whose Livia is an example of self-restraint when contrasted with the unceasing laments of Octavia (*Consolatio ad Marciam* 3.1–2).

Alex Hardie demonstrates (1983.109–10) how Statius differs in his *epicedia* and *consolationes* from any earlier Latin examples of the genre and

41 Ide resembles a Thessalian witch in her mourning (3.140–46), Polynices is prepared to commit suicide after the death of Tydeus (9.76ff.), Eurydice, Opheltes' mother, wishes to kill Hypsipyle and then throw herself on the funeral pyre of her son (6.170ff.), Argia is prepared to face death at the hands of Creon's henchmen (12.457–63), the Argive and Theban women revel like Bacchantes in their mourning at the end of the epic (12.782–809).

42 Vidimus attonitum fraterna morte Neronem
pallida promissa flere per ora coma
dissimilemque sui vultu profitente dolorem:
ei mihi, quam toto luctu in ore fuit! (*ad Liviam* 85–88)

how much closer he is to his Greek models. He notes that the *Consolatio ad Liviam* only superficially resembles Statius, differing in its elegiac and epistolary form and lack of a formal encomium to Drusus. I find, however, that even where Statius follows Greek rhetorical models superficially, he Romanizes them and aligns himself with the *Consolatio ad Liviam* in one important aspect: his defiance of the philosophical *consolatio*.

Hardie shows Statius's closeness to his Greek predecessors in the consolatory genre through parallels between *Silvae* 2.6 and Aelius Aristides' *Epicedion for Eteon* (*Oratio* 31K). In my view, despite the similarity in the general rhetorical structure of the two works (introduction, praise, *consolatio*), Statius's poem turns the rhetorical paradigm upside down. In Aristides, praise takes up almost the entire speech, spilling over into the *consolatio* as well. Statius deviates from the Greek model in that praise takes up less than a third of *Silvae* 2.6, the rest focuses on the mourner. Statius establishes the primacy of the patron's grief; the praise of the slave boy is only there to validate his grief. The object of mourning is a slave boy, so even his praise is intertwined with praise of the master. In effect, as the object of the praise is subordinate to the mourner, so in Statius's poetic program, praise is subordinate to the representation of grief. The poem only superficially resembles the Greek model, which includes two paragraphs of introduction (grief is justified), twelve paragraphs of praise, and four paragraphs of *consolatio*. In effect, Statius devotes twenty lines to urge his patron to give free expression to his grief; thirty-six lines on the praise of the boy intertwined with praise of the master and justification for his grief; thirty-four lines on the description of the mourner, his misfortune, and the lavish funeral, and a mere twelve lines on the *consolatio*. Statius stands much closer to his Roman antecedents in placing a significant emphasis on the topos of *insinuatio* and even going beyond its standard framework.

The topos of *insinuatio* (the pretence that the poet endorses and encourages the laments of the mourners), by its very nature, presupposes a non-prescriptive approach to mourning by subtly rejecting the rigors and restraint preached in the philosophical *consolatio*. It shares the viewpoint of the person in mourning and defends his or her right to give free rein to tears, as in the *exordium* of the *ad Liviam* (7–10):

Et quisquam leges audet tibi dicere flendi?
 Et quisquam lacrimas temperat ore tuas?
 Ei mihi, quam facile est (quamvis hoc contigit omnes)
 Alterius luctu fortia verba loqui!

Who would dare to set rules for your weeping? And who could diminish with words your tears? O my, how easy it is (although this happens to all) to speak encouraging words to another's grief!

Similarly, in *Silvae* 2.6: "Quisnam haec in funera missos / castiget luctus?" "Who would reproach the laments uttered at this funeral?" The stock device of the exordial *insinuatio* is usually followed by consolatory motifs that do not chime well with the initial declaration that the poem represents a lament and supports laments. The contradiction remains deliberately unresolved and forms part of the topos. The parallels to this device in Horace (*Carm.* 1.24.2ff.) and Ovid (*Am.* 3.9.3 and 9) confirm the pattern (Schoonhoven 1992.4).

Statius also deploys this device in his *consolationes* and *epicedia* in the *Silvae*. However, the topos receives quite a different emphasis at his hands. For Horace and Ovid, the *insinuatio* consists of declaring at the beginning that the poem is a lament and then proceeding to deliver a *consolatio*. In the *ad Liviam*, the *insinuatio* (quoted above) seemingly rejects the preaching of restraint and gives to the mourner permission to engage in her grief. Statius goes a big step farther, by actually *urging* the mourner to lament (*Silv.* 2.6.1–2, 11–12):

Saeve nimis, lacrimis quisquis discrimina ponis
Lugendique modos . . .
 . . . ne comprime fletus,
ne pudeat; rumpat frenos dolor iste diesque.

You are too cruel, whoever you are, who require restraint in tears and moderation of mourning . . . Do not restrain your weeping; feel no shame. Let your grief break the restraints and the appropriate time [allotted for mourning].

He follows his own advice and engages in violent outbursts of poetic lamentation himself (5.5.22–23):

vincetur lacrimis, et te, Natura, pudebit.
tanta mihi feritas, tanta est insania luctus.

His tears will be outdone and even you, Nature, will feel shame. So great is my recklessnes, so great is the insanity of grief.

Because most of his poem has turned out to be a lament, the poet identifies with the mourner to such an extent that he speaks in the first person plural: “quid terga dolori, / Urse damus?” (“Why do we give in to grief, Ursus?” 2.6.93). Only after poet and audience have indulged in tears fully does Statius gently caution his patron against falling in love with his wound (“quid damna foves et pectore iniquo / vulnus amas?” “Why do you cherish your loss and perversely love your wound?” 2.6.94–95), the kind of thing that Statius represented the Theban mothers doing in the *Thebaid* (“amant miseri lamenta malisque fruuntur,” “The miserable ones love their laments and rejoice in their misfortunes,” 12.45; *gaudent lamenta*, “the laments rejoice,” 12.793). And this is, of course, the rejoicing in grief that Seneca and Plutarch condemned, as discussed above. In *Silvae* 2.6.95, Statius borrows from the philosophical *consolatio* just a half line, enough to show his awareness of it and his unwillingness to be part of it.

In fact, elsewhere, too, the poet offers his *consolatio* in the form of weeping together with the patron, thus tightening the equation between poetry and lament and rejecting the severity of the prescriptive approach: “nec te lugere severus / arceo, sed confer gemitus pariterque fleamus,” “I am not so strict as to hinder your mourning. Share your wailing and let us weep together!” (2.1.34–35).

Severus is a stock adjective applied to philosophers.⁴³ Through his refusal to be *severus*, Statius far exceeds the framework of the exordial *insinuatio* and injects into the topos a pointed resistance to the prescriptive philosophical *consolatio*. The poem itself becomes a lament that the poet shares with Atedius Melior. The rejection of philosophical moderation ushers in the triumph of poetic art (here equated with lament) over reasoned *consolatio*.⁴⁴

43 *tristis ac severus philosophus*, Lucilius 754.

44 Myers 2002.192 convincingly shows that at least one poem in the *Silvae*, namely 2.4, represents a parody of the formal *consolatio*.

CONCLUSION

Through its “open, feminine” ending,⁴⁵ the *Thebaid* implies that there is no solution and there can be no satisfactory resolution to civil strife between brothers or citizens. But even though the poem is withholding closure and a satisfactory solution,⁴⁶ it is not withholding solace. While Lucan provided *solacia grandibus sepulchris* (*Silv.* 2.7.103), solace for the victims of a specific civil war in Roman history, Statius's aim is broader, because the end to the cycle of civil war seems nowhere in sight. Indeed, the poet deplores the lack of a mature, responsive rhetorical audience for his poetry, an audience that would have the power to act upon reasoned persuasion and prevent such future bloodshed. Neither the *cives* nor the *reges* represent such an audience (see the discussion above, p. 123). Therefore, simply by giving voice to the voiceless, the *Thebaid* provides a “talking cure” for the poet himself and for an audience in mourning. Poetic representation itself is pleasurable and carries with it cathartic solace. The depiction of painful events that hold no hope for resolution represents a form of solution, because it offers solace. In the *Silvae*, where the poet repeatedly portrays himself as a consolatory figure and rejects the *severitas* of the prescriptive rhetorical *consolatio*, we get glimpses of the consolatory and therapeutic purpose that Statius envisions for his abundant and excessive portrayal of grim pleasures throughout his poetry. Through the transforming power of art, the expression of human pain and grief (often manifested in women's laments) is sublimated into an indirect form of cathartic *consolatio* both through the exaggerated topos of *insinuatio* in the *Silvae* and through the detailed and psychologically realistic laments in the *Thebaid*.

In the context of the increasingly problematic balance between public and private within the framework of an entrenched imperial system, Statius addresses his audiences' deepest anxieties about the untimely loss of life, the chaos in society, and the public role of women. Women's confrontational laments in the *Thebaid* hearken back to Juturna's lament and represent an ideological continuation of the *Aeneid*'s ending. The collapse of public into private, only foreshadowed in the *Aeneid*, becomes a reality in Statius's world. But if the poem could not offer a solution, it could at least offer solace

45 See Dietrich 1999.45 for the term and its detailed explanation.

46 “The goal of the entire plot of Book 12 is burial, yet the burials in Book 12 themselves show that burial is no solution, that there is no solution” (Lovatt 1999.144).

and thus achieve recognition and fame among both contemporaries and later generations: the cherished dream of every artist, including Statius (*Durabisne procul*. . . , “Will you endure in the time to come. . .” *Theb.* 12.810). Thus by turning his epic into an open platform for a public, non-prescriptive, cathartic expression of unrestrained lament, Statius did what it took to achieve the enormous popularity that his epic recitals reaped. Of course, he paid a price for it, as his *Thebaid* was immediately effeminized in the eyes of the critics of his own time (see *amica Thebais*, Juv. 7.82–83).⁴⁷ The gendered nature of the poem remains a fascinating field for further exploration.⁴⁸

Only on weekdays did the Romans wear their austere stoic personae, on holidays and in times of *otium*, they did not feel comfortable in their stoic *Romanitas*. They turned instead to their villas decorated with Greek art and to artists who represented or acted out before them the opposite of what they were taught to admire in public.

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47 The Callimachean representation of epic poetry as a common whore (*Epigr.* 28.3 [ed. R. Pfeiffer]) has only an indirect bearing on Juvenal in that it illustrates how enduring the formulation of literary criticism in sexual terms has been over time. For more on patronage, publication, and prostitution, cf. Myers 1996.16ff. For a complete discussion and bibliography on Statius in Juvenal’s *Sat.* 7, see Bartsch 1994.125ff., 268ff., and Markus 2000.151, 171–75. “While it is true that Juvenal’s satiric voice is particularly fond of feminizing the objects of its scorn, in this instance, it may also pick out something significant about Statius’ text” (Nugent 1996.69).

48 Modern critics have mined other, subtler and more sophisticated allusions that shed light on the perception of the *Thebaid* as a woman: see Malamud 1995 and Nugent 1996 for allusions to Creusa, and Pagan 2000 for allusions to Eurydice. “The text itself becomes a Woman” (Malamud 1995.25). See also Dietrich’s analysis (1999.46ff.) of how Argia’s voice and that of the lamenting women in Book 12 are associated with weaving and poetic *texta*.

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