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Ancestors, Status, and Self-Presentation in Statius' *Thebaid*[*]

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SUMMARY: Polynices' shamefaced self-presentations in *Thebaid* 1, Adrastus' sympathetic response, and Jupiter's eventual punishment of both characters are read as elements of a debate on the evitability of ancestral stigma and the value of lineage in assessing character and status. In arguing that Polynices can establish an identity independent of his kingroup, Adrastus reveals his ignorance of Jupiter's hostility to and the Fury's ultimate control of Polynices. While the failure of Adrastus' arguments contributes to the *Thebaid*'s negative representation of kinship, more constructive relationships between kin and the absence of hostile divinities permit Statius' speakers to validate similar arguments in the *Silvae*.

> SIR DESPARD MURGATROYD: But what is a poor baronet to do, when a whole picture gallery of ancestors step down from their frames and threaten him with an excruciating death if he hesitate to commit his daily crime?
>
> W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan, *Ruddigore* (1887), Act I

AFFILIATION WITH A DISTINGUISHED KINGROUP typically represents a potent form of symbolic capital for the characters of Greco-Roman epic. When presenting themselves publicly, for example, Homer's Diomedes (*Il.* 14.110–32) and Virgil's Aeneas (*A.* 1.372–80) both emphasize the high status provided by their lines of descent. The characters of Statius' *Thebaid* similarly expect each other to employ ancestry as a component of self-presentation (Helzle 189, Juhnke 61). Kingroup affiliation is a marker of identity that interests the Argive king Adrastus when he encounters strangers: after stopping the fight between Tydeus and Polynices outside the door of his palace, he inquires of

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both *unde orti* (1.444), and upon encountering Hypsipyle as his army passes through Nemea, he asks *dic quis et ille pater* (5.25).[1] Both Tydeus and Hypsipyle identify themselves to Adrastus by naming their fathers and praising them as "great" and "famous" (1.463–64 *magni de stirpe creatum / Oeneos*, 5.38 *claro generata Thoante*). Polynices, however, has no words of praise for his immediate male kin, since for him they represent only sources of embarrassment (Helzle 190). At first he is unable to answer Adrastus' question; later he identifies himself through Cadmus, a distant ancestor, and through his mother, Jocasta (1.676–81), in neither case offering praise and in both communicating shame.

Polynices' choice to identify himself through his mother rather than his father is unexpected in the context of an androcentric epic tradition (Keith 18–19). The combination of his shamefaced reaction to his male kin and his refusal to name his father is virtually unparalleled in Roman epic. Polynices' unusual self-presentation leads to an equally exceptional response from Adrastus, who argues that Polynices' identity can be dissociated from that of his kingroup (1.681–92) and attempts to improve Polynices' status by offering him his daughter Argia in marriage (2.152–72). His arguments prove unsuccessful in the context of the larger narrative.

In this paper, I read Polynices' shamefaced self-presentations in *Thebaid* 1, the sympathetic responses they meet, and the failure of his attempt to escape his ancestral fate as elements of a debate, conducted throughout the epic, on the evitability of ancestral stigma and the value of lineage in assessing character and status. In the paper's first section, I examine the nature of the Theban ancestral stigma. Ancestors and descendants in Cadmus' kingroup operate in an atmosphere of mutual hostility. Though descent from a criminal father is not in itself a guarantee of criminality (consider Virgil's Lausus), the interventions of the Fury ensure that Polynices will become a kin-murderer like his ancestors. In section 2, I discuss the effects of the ancestral stigma on Polynices' efforts at self-presentation. Unlike Adrastus, Polynices appears to believe in an androcentric and imitative model of ancestry and presents himself as shamed by his descent from Oedipus. However, the examples of self-presentation by other stigmatized individuals, such as Statius' Eteocles and Seneca's Aegisthus, show that other rhetorical possibilities are at Polynices' disposal. Sections 3 and 4 examine the accommodating responses offered by Adrastus and Tydeus, Polynices' new relatives by marriage. In accepting

[1] Citations of Statius' *Thebaid*, which are henceforth given with book and line numbers only, are taken from Hill 1983 unless otherwise noted; citations of other authors are from Oxford Classical Texts. Translations are my own.

Polynices as his son-in-law, Adrastus reveals his compassion but also his ignorance of the destructive power of kinship and the extent of Jupiter's hostility. Tydeus, meanwhile, implicitly rebuts Adrastus' arguments regarding ancestral stigma even as he attempts to support his new brother-in-law.

In the paper's final section, I draw on examples from the *Silvae* to argue that the ultimate failure of Adrastus' arguments regarding ancestry and status in the *Thebaid* does not indicate their absolute lack of merit. The *Silvae* use rhetoric similar to Adrastus' as the basis of praise of various addressees, showing that the king's attempt to dissociate an individual from his kingroup could have succeeded in a different poetic environment. The speakers of the *Silvae* laud individuals who have transcended ancestral stigma or retroactively ennobled the previous generations of their families through their accomplishments. They also value the contributions of cognatic kin; prominent women increase the status of their husbands and children. The validation of arguments regarding ancestry and status in the *Silvae* is a consequence of this collection's significant generic difference from the *Thebaid*. Hardie identifies a "dynastic principle" at work in Roman epic, a genre that represents the agnatic line of descent as central to masculine identity, expects sons to reproduce their fathers' exploits, and asserts the importance of generational continuity (Hardie 91–98). By developing the "motif pathétique de l'extinction des espoirs dynastiques" (Ripoll 35), the *Thebaid* presents negative examples of the dynastic principle: sons reproduce only their fathers' crimes, and violence within the kingroup poses a constant threat to generational continuity. Furies, hostile gods, and malevolent ancestors are absent from the *Silvae*, however, and human beings form more constructive relationships with the gods. While the *Silvae* validate efforts to separate individual and kingroup identity, the collective activity of hostile figures in the *Thebaid* ensures that Polynices cannot escape his ancestral stigma and will destroy all who associate with him.

1. *GENTILIS … FUROR:* THE ANCESTRAL STIGMA OF THE THEBAN HOUSE

Several characters in Statius' *Thebaid* identify themselves to others through their kingroup affiliation in order to exploit their status as descendants of distinguished ancestors. Proud upholders of ancestral traditions advertise the names and histories of selected members of their kingroups. In order to focus the attention of their audiences on these ancestors, characters depict their physical images on objects such as armor,[2] clothing, artwork, and

[2] For example, Crenaeus' shield depicts the origins of Thebes (9.332–33), and Phorbas identifies Amphion in the *teichoscopia* by his "ancestral oxhide" (*tauro… auito*) and the

imagines.[3] They emphasize the benefits of their relationships with both proximate and distant ancestors in a variety of rhetorical contexts such as self-introductions, celebrations, prayers, and battlefield vaunts.[4] How characters manipulate the rhetoric of kingroup affiliation becomes an essential part of their public identity. Statian characters also interpret their own experiences by reference to those of previous generations of their kingroups. Their constructions of ancestral history are never value-free,[5] and sympathetic peers become complicit with tendentious or propagandistic reconfigurations of ancestry.

Though several of its characters celebrate their ancestors, the *Thebaid* also problematizes the individual's relationship to his or her kingroup. To a greater degree than in earlier epic tradition, Statius emphasizes the potential for shame, violence, and discontinuity in dynastic lines (Ripoll 35, Hardie 97–98). In contrast with the relatively harmonious relationships between ancestors and descendants in the epics of Homer and Virgil, acts of incest and violence against kin are principal elements in the Theban myth that forms the basis of Statius' narrative. The royal houses of Thebes and Argos each con-

lyre figured on his helmet (7.278–79; for the interpretation of *tauro* as *pellis tauri* see Smolenaars 137–38). The lyre recalls Amphion's eponymous grandfather, whose music built the walls of Thebes (cf. 1.9–10, Hor. *C.* 3.11.1–2); the "ancestral oxhide" associates him with Cadmus, who reached the site of Thebes by following a cow (cf. Ov. *Met.* 3.1–27, Lact. Pl. *ad* 7.279).

[3] Clothing: Jason's sons carry images of their father on their cloaks (5.726), which enables their mother Hypsipyle to identify them. Artwork: Adrastus displays statues of his ancestors in his *atrium* (2.214–23) and Tydeus promises to represent the *maiorum pugnae* (2.732) on his proposed temple for Minerva after surviving an ambush. *Imagines*: the funeral games of Archemorus feature a procession of *imagines* representing Argive ancestors (6.268–95).

[4] Self-introductions: Tydeus introduces himself to Adrastus as the son of Oeneus (1.463–64), and Hypsipyle introduces herself to the Argives as the daughter of Thoas (5.38–39). Celebrations: the Thebans celebrate the *facta maiorum* upon the death of their enemy Amphiaraus (8.227–37). Prayers: Parthenopaeus appeals to his mother's merits in his prayer to Diana (6.635–36), and Hypseus prays to his father Asopos, setting his ancestry against Amphiaraus' patronage by Apollo (7.730–35). Battlefield vaunts: Parthenopaeus contrasts the warlike behavior of his mother with the effeminacy of Amphion's ancestors (9.799–800 *ferrum mea semper et arcus / mater habet, uestri feriunt caua tympana patres*). On speeches in the *Thebaid* see Helzle 145–229, Dominik 1994b.

[5] Like the chorus of Sen. *Oed.* 709–63 (Davis 465–67), Aletes recognizes in his account of Theban history (3.179–213) that present misfortunes recapitulate the sufferings of earlier members of the Theban dynastic line. Other Thebans use their ancestral history as propaganda, however: they celebrate the death of Amphiaraus, for example, by reciting the *facta maiorum* (8.227–28).

tain at least one figure who commits filicide (Athamas and Tantalus), fratricide (Polynices and Eteocles), or incest and parricide (Oedipus). Tisiphone's numerous assaults on the brothers throughout the course of the epic result in the war between Thebes and Argos and the fratricidal duel of *Thebaid* 11 (Franchet d'Espèrey 207–31, Hershkowitz 247–301). Polynices' criminal behavior is thus the result of both his ancestry and Tisiphone's interventions.

The opening scenes of the epic highlight the dangers associated with membership in Cadmus' stigmatized kingroup. Oedipus prays to the Fury Tisiphone to create fatal strife between his sons (1.53–87), and Jupiter resolves to destroy the Argives and Thebans in order to punish the crimes of their ancestors (1.214–47). The proem to the *Thebaid* establishes the expectation of hostile relationships between Theban ancestors and descendants. The narrator claims to include both the *gemitus et prospera Cadmi* (1.15) in summarizing the previous history of the kingroup, but the majority of the narratives alluded to in the proem involve violence against kin; Amphion's building of Thebes (1.9–10) is the only peaceful narrative. Hostility begins even before the city is founded with Agenor's "unyielding" exile of his son Cadmus (1.5–6 *inexorabile pactum / legis Agenoreae*). Cadmus proceeds to sow *proelia* (1.8) at Thebes by planting the dragon's teeth; the fighting between the Sown Men is not only the first Theban civil war, but also a fight between brothers (Heinrich 175–79). Bacchus' relatives enrage him by denying his divinity and persecuting his followers, but the god takes terrible vengeance on members of his kingroup, including his cousin Pentheus and his aunt Agave (1.11 *graues irae cognata in moenia Baccho*). Athamas' murder of his son Learchus after having been maddened by the Fury offers the proem's third example of violence against kin; his wife Ino escapes with their other son, Melicertes, by jumping into the sea.[6]

Statius briefly alludes in the proem to the offenses committed in earlier generations by members of the ruling dynasty of Thebes against others in their own kingroup. The proem's list of ancestral crimes forms part of a recusation enabling the poet to focus attention on the affairs of the immediate kin of Oedipus, his present subject (1.16–17 *limes mihi carminis esto / Oedipodae confusa domus*; Vessey 1986: 2967–74, Ahl 2817–22). The crimes of the ancestors of this *gens dira* (1.4) prefigure the behavior of Laius, Oedipus, and his sons Polynices and Eteocles, the three generations of the "disorded house" that play active roles in the epic. Oedipus and the ghost of his father Laius both assist in creating the discord between the brothers that will lead to their destruction. In the epic's opening scene, Oedipus prays to Tisiphone to punish

[6] 1.12–14; cf. Hyg. *Fab.* 4, Apollod. 1.9.2, Ov. *Met.* 4.416–542; Gantz 176–80.

his sons Eteocles and Polynices (1.53–87). The Fury assaults the brothers in response and creates fatal hostility between them by activating their *gentilis furor*.[7] Sharing his son's anger against his descendants, the ghost of Oedipus' father Laius appears to his grandson Eteocles and orders him to resist his brother's attempt at a peaceful resolution of their conflict (2.102–19).[8] Though summoned from the underworld by the god Mercury at the command of Jupiter, Laius appears to be fully supportive of his destructive mission. His desire to achieve further vengeance on Oedipus by destroying his posterity provides his motive for helping to generate the war at Thebes. Despite a moment of hesitation upon returning to familiar territory (2.65–70), especially at the sight of the bloodstained chariot in which he was murdered, he presses on to attack Eteocles.[9] Rather than attempt to create solidarity between his descendants, Laius contributes to the efforts of Tisiphone and Jupiter to advance the war that he knows will result in the extinction of his line.

While Laius and Oedipus actively seek revenge on their descendants, the brothers' more distant Theban ancestors become enthusiastic spectators of the brothers' mutual destruction in *Thebaid* 11. The ghosts of Theban ancestors rise from the underworld to observe Polynices and Eteocles preparing to fight their duel (11.420–23):

> ipse quoque Ogygios monstra ad gentilia manis
> Tartareus rector porta iubet ire reclusa.
> montibus insidunt patriis tristique corona
> infecere diem et uinci sua crimina gaudent.
>
> The ruler of Tartarus himself orders Theban ghosts to proceed through the open gate toward their kingroup's monstrous acts. Sitting on their ancestral mountains, the grim crowd pollutes the day, rejoicing that their own crimes are being outdone.

[7] 1.126 *gentilisque animos subiit furor*. For discussion of the Fury's first intervention see Criado 19–44, Franchet d'Espèrey 216–26, Hershkowitz 247–48, 260–68, Fantham, Ahl 2822–72, Venini.

[8] Franchet d'Espèrey 94–98 reads Laius' epiphany as a contribution to the narrative's motivation rather than as a mere doublet of Tisiphone's intervention; cf. also Taisne 1994: 178–82, Ahl 2841–45.

[9] Statius contrasts Laius' determination with the resistance of a Senecan ghost suborned to create discord among his kin. In the opening scene of Seneca's *Thyestes,* the ghost of Tantalus opposes the Fury when she directs him to create violence among members of his kingroup; his insubordination forces the Fury to compel him violently to finish his mission (Sen. *Thy.* 86–100). The ghost of Laius, however, assaults Eteocles without compulsion and confirms his active hostility against his descendants during his next appearance in the necromantic ritual of *Thebaid* 4. "Breathing undying hatred" (4.609 *immortale*

Rather than trying to stop the duel and save their descendants' lives, the ghosts of Theban ancestors, as criminals themselves, are pleased by the sight of a greater example of criminality, and the thought that their posthumous reputations will improve furnishes an additional source of pleasure. Future generations will be less likely to remember the crimes of the Theban ancestors because the fratricide, an even greater crime, will occupy their attention.[10] Immediately after relating the duel, however, the narrator offers a contrasting view of memory and ancestral relationships. He prays for all memory of the duel to disappear from the memories of future generations, implicitly negating the Theban ancestors' wishes to improve their own reputations through the contrast with the even more dreadful crimes of their descendants. Though the narrator would like the duel to serve only as an example to kings (11.576–79), his prayer is unlikely to succeed, as the epic narrative itself contributes toward its commemoration (Georgacopoulou 97–98, Hardie 8).

Kinship, then, is one of the *Thebaid*'s many destructive and corrupting forces; its risks include guilt by association, *gentilis furor* (1.126), and the threat of harm from one's ancestors. While Cadmus' kingroup is a breeding-ground for conflict, the members of Aeneas' kingroup in Virgil's *Aeneid* offer a contrasting example of a network of mutually sustaining relationships. In Hardie's terms, they represent the positive expression of the "dynastic principle" in Roman epic. A shared belief in constructive *pietas* directs ancestors to offer themselves as positive models for self-fashioning. For example, Aeneas adapts Hector's prayer for his son Astyanax (Hom. *Il.* 6.476–81) in exhorting Ascanius to learn virtue from the examples of his father and maternal uncle (Virg. *A.* 12.435–40; Keith 8–35, Petrini 106–8), and Anchises showers his future Roman descendants with good wishes as he observes their parade in the underworld (Virg. *A.* 6.752–892). The descendants of Cadmus, by contrast, find themselves threatened by members of their own kingroup. Their behavior toward their ancestors and descendants exemplifies *nefas* and *impietas*.

odium spirans) as he looks at his grandson Eteocles, Laius angrily contradicts Tiresias' attempt to describe him as fully avenged and placated by his descendants (4.612–13). Juhnke 95 emphasizes Laius' anger in the necromantic scene ("das Motiv des 'zürnenden Wissenden'"); cf. also Taisne 1991, Frings 1991: 71–73, Vessey 1973: 235–58.

[10] The ghost of Tantalus makes a similar claim at the beginning of Seneca's *Thyestes* with his prediction that the crimes of his descendants will render him innocent in comparison: Sen. *Thy.* 18–20 *iam nostra subit / e stirpe turba quae suum uincat genus / ac me innocentem faciat et inausa audeat.* In addition to Atreus and Thyestes, "Tantalus is probably including more remote descendants such as Aegisthus and Agamemnon . . . . Tantalus means that he will appear *innocens* by comparison with what his descendants will do" (Tarrant 90).

Both Roman epic and tragedy show the potential of a criminal ancestor (whether proximate or distant) to create criminal descendants. For example, the reckless behavior of Virgil's Sergestus (described at *A.* 5.202 as *furens animi*) that leads to his shipwreck prefigures the crime of his distant descendant Catiline.[11] At the beginning of Seneca's *Thyestes*, the ghost of Tantalus anticipates that his descendants will not only reproduce his criminal behavior but outdo it (Sen. *Thy.* 18–20; see n. 10). At the end of the tragedy, Atreus repeats Tantalus' acts of cannibalism and kin-murder by slaughtering his brother Thyestes' children and serving them to him as food (Sen. *Thy.* 970–1112; cf. Stat. *Theb.* 4.305–8). As might be expected, narratives involving Oedipus and his kingroup also represent the ancestor's behavior as furnishing a destructive example for his descendants. In Seneca's *Phoenissae,* for example, Jocasta realizes that she has given birth to sons who will reproduce their father's impiety,[12] an expectation that Oedipus is able to confirm (*Phoen.* 300 *nefasque nullum per nefas nati putant*).

While Statius' forebears in the writing of epic and tragedy provide examples of descendants who imitate the destructive behaviors of their stigmatized ancestors, they also allow for the possibility of pious variation from the ancestral norm. For example, the crimes of Virgil's Mezentius do not affect the reputation of his son Lausus: at the moment of his death the young man serves as an example of filial virtue for both Aeneas and the narrator (*A.* 10.791–93, 821–30).[13] In Seneca's *Phoenissae*, Oedipus' daughter Antigone displays dutiful attention to her father, persuading him to continue living against his will. His surprised reaction (*Phoen.* 82 *aliquis est ex me pius?*) indicates that his expectations of her behavior are based on an imitative model; she has, however, replaced his *nefas* with *pietas.*[14]

The examples of Virgil's Lausus and Seneca's Antigone suggest that criminal ancestry alone is not a guarantee of criminal behavior. Propensity to assault from the Furies, however, is the aspect of the Theban ancestral stigma

[11] The *gens Sergia* claimed the Trojan Sergestus as their legendary ancestor, an association also drawn by Virgil (*A.* 5.121); Wiseman 154. The representation of Roman history on the shield of Aeneas includes Catiline's punishment (*A.* 8.666–70), and Servius provides an explicit association between Sergestus and Catiline (Serv. ad *A.* 5.121).

[12] Sen. *Phoen.* 369 *peperi nocentes*; cf. her similar claim in Statius, 7.514 *peperique nefas.*

[13] Mezentius believes, however, that his crimes have "stained" the young man's name (*A.* 10.851 *idem ego, nate, tuum maculaui crimine nomen*).

[14] However, the same is not true of Statius' Antigone; Hershkowitz argues (282) that neither she nor Ismene is free "from their family's hereditary preoccupation with sexual perversity, nor does the purity of virginity prove an adequate defence against the sexually charged force of madness."

that guarantees its self-perpetuation. Tisiphone's assault on the brothers in *Thebaid* 1 is only the latest of a long history of assaults on members of Cadmus' kingroup. Examples such as Oedipus' *dulces furiae* (1.68) and the maddening of Athamas (Ov. *Met.* 4.481–511) stand behind the Fury's journey along the "well-known road to Thebes" (1.101 *notum iter ad Thebas*). Tisiphone's repeated assaults on Polynices guarantee that he cannot avoid reproducing his ancestors' acts of violence against their kin; he remains the victim of his *gentilis furor* until beginning the duel with Eteocles.

2. *NEC NOS ... STIRPIS EGENTES:* POLYNICES' SELF-PRESENTATIONS IN *THEBAID* 1

Polynices' stigma affects every aspect of his behavior, including his self-presentations, and he presents himself to Adrastus as a figure of shame. However, other characters who suffer the same stigma of incestuous engendering and descent from kin-murderers, such as Polynices' brother Eteocles (whose reasons I indicate in section 4) and Seneca's Aegisthus, present themselves with self-affirmation. The logic of Polynices' self-presentation reveals his internalization of his ancestors' expectations of criminality.

When Adrastus first asks Polynices and Tydeus to identify themselves, Tydeus makes no effort to conceal his diminished status as a wanderer and exile. He identifies himself fully by indicating his homeland and distinguished kingroup affiliation, as a former inhabitant of Calydon, the son of Oeneus, and a descendant of Mars (1.452–65). When it is his turn to answer Adrastus' question, however, Polynices communicates shame instead of using the opportunity to assert status claims based on ancestry. He reacts indecisively in his first response to Adrastus' request for identification (1.465–67):

> "nec nos animi nec stirpis egentes—"
> ille refert contra, sed mens sibi conscia fati
> cunctatur proferre patrem.
>
> "Nor am I lacking in spirit or ancestry—," he says in reply, but his mind, aware of his fate, hesitates to mention his father.

The shame that it would cause Polynices to identify his father Oedipus (Helzle 189–90, Frings 1991: 9–10, Hill 1990: 110–16) motivates this instance of *aposiopesis*, a rhetorical figure relatively frequent in Statius (Dominik 1994b: 262). Six words into his incomplete utterance, his self-presentation strategy changes from trying to prove himself equal to Tydeus in terms of possessing distinguished ancestry to the sudden realization that it might be more profitable to deflect attention from himself. He shifts from active self-presentation through kingroup affiliation to disengaging himself from a status competi-

tion that he knows he is bound to lose. The prior example of Tydeus provides a useful control on Polynices' behavior; both men have lost status through exile, but only one is embarrassed to reveal his ancestry.

Adrastus' sympathetic reaction here prefigures his support for Polynices throughout the narrative. The king permits his embarrassed guest to avoid identifying himself for the moment. Adrastus reprises his request for identification only after providing hospitality (1.668–72). At that point, however, Polynices' second attempt to identify himself makes the pressure of his ancestral stigma unmistakeable. The embarrassment that the narrator described during his first self-presentation now becomes obvious to others. Even before Polynices begins to speak, his nonverbal behavior communicates shame. Polynices "lowers his sad face" and "slants his gaze," behaviors that indicate shame and anger (1.673–75).[15] He remains silent for a long time (1.675 *longa silentia*) before answering Adrastus' question, recalling his initial delay (cf. 1.466–67 *mens… / cunctatur*) when first asked to identify himself. Polynices begins his second attempt at verbal self-presentation with a lengthy preamble (1.676–81):

> non super hos diuum tibi sum quaerendus honores,
> unde genus, quae terra mihi, quis defluat ordo
> sanguinis antiqui: piget inter sacra fateri.
> sed si praecipitant miserum cognoscere curae,
> Cadmus origo patrum, tellus Mauortia Thebe,
> est genetrix Iocasta mihi.
>
> While paying honors to the gods, you should not ask me the race from which I come, what my country is, my ancient line of descent. It is disturbing to mention these things amid holy rites. But if concern impels you to recognize me, wretched as I am: Cadmus was the first of my ancestors, Mars' Thebes is my land, Jocasta is my mother.

Polynices' preamble explaining why he wants to avoid the question is longer than the answer itself. He claims that he should not be asked about his ancestry, as the well-known impiety of members of his kingroup makes it shameful to mention their names while sacred rituals are in progress (*super hos … honores*, *inter sacra*). Omitting all honorific language, Polynices' self-introduction

[15] DEIECIT *signum uerecundiae* (Lact. Pl. *ad* 1.673), as also in Andromache's dropping of her gaze (Virg. *A.* 3.320 *deiecit uultum*) as she relates her recent history to Aeneas. I accept the MSS reading *laesum* with Lesueur 125 (n. 56), who lists several reasons why Polynices might feel embarrassed to speak to Tydeus, such as his recent maltreatment of Tydeus and his fear of losing his friendship upon revealing his identity (*contra* Hill 1983 ad loc., who adopts Koestlin's *laeuum*).

also contrasts with the epic habit of praising oneself by praising one's ancestors.[16]

After his lengthy preamble, Polynices identifies himself through the indication of his homeland (*tellus Mauortia Thebe*), a distant ancestor of his kingroup (*Cadmus origo patrum*), and his mother instead of his father (*est genetrix Iocasta mihi*). Though not without parallel, his self-introduction is conspicuously different from the androcentric mode of identification used by Tydeus, Hypsipyle, and many other epic characters.[17] Polynices intends his mention of Cadmus to serve as a rhetorical distancing move, redirecting his audience's attention from the crimes of his father into the far-off and presumably safer ancestral past.[18] Though distant, the past represented by Cadmus is still unsafe territory for Polynices. In creating the Theban ancestors by sowing the dragon's teeth, Cadmus also gave rise to Thebes' first civil conflict. Though neither he nor Adrastus realizes it at this point, Polynices has a dangerous affinity with this distant ancestor; he will be the originator of the latest civil war at Thebes. Nor, as Adrastus notes (a point discussed in section 3), is Polynices able to identify himself solely as the son of Jocasta.

Polynices' awareness of his ancestral stigma leads him to divert attention from himself during his self-presentations. Twice unable or unwilling to mention the name of his father, Oedipus, he communicates shame through his non-verbal behavior, introduces his account of his ancestry with an evasive preamble, and provides minimal information. Attempting to efface his affiliation with his criminal father, however, is not Polynices' only rhetorical option. Other characters are willing to identify themselves as products of incest and the sons of kin-murderers. Within the *Thebaid,* Polynices' brother Eteocles does not attempt to obscure his association with Oedipus; in rejecting Tydeus' embassy, he claims that he does not view his descent as a source of shame (2.435–36 *non indignati miserum dixisse parentem / Oedipoden*). Aegisthus in Seneca's *Agamemnon* reveals no shame in his identity as an exile

[16] Examples include Tydeus and Hypsipyle's praises of their fathers, quoted above.

[17] Parthenopaeus also identifies himself through his mother in his prayer to Diana (6.635–36 *si bene quid genetrix, si quid uenatibus ipse / promerui*) and in his vaunt before his combat with Amphion (9.799–800). Unlike Polynices, however, Parthenopaeus does not foreground his mother as an attempt to exclude mention of a father whom he conceives of as stigmatized. For Parthenopaeus' paternity see Dewar 175–76.

[18] *Origo* indicates temporal distance and generational continuity in epic contexts such as Amata's account of Turnus' distinguished ancestry in the *Aeneid* (*A.* 7.371–72 *et Turno, si prima domus repetatur origo, / Inachus Acrisiusque patres*). Polynices' reference to his *ordo / sanguinis antiqui* (1.677–78) is a similar attempt to move his audience's attention to the distant past.

and product of incest in his argument with Clytemnestra over whether they should marry and carry through their plan to murder Agamemnon (*Ag.* 288–301). Despite the stigma conferred by his ancestry, Aegisthus argues *auctore Phoebo gignor; haud generis pudet* (*Ag.* 294).[19] Aegisthus can view his incestuous engendering as the gods' will, as it occurred at an oracle's command and specifically for the purpose of revenge. As I discuss in further detail in section 4, Eteocles, too, has a motive to excuse his ancestry; the consolation of sole rule at Thebes permits him to claim that his descent from Oedipus causes him no embarrassment. Polynices' engendering, however, has only led to exile. His frustration and failure to promote his status in his self-introduction contrasts with the straightforward admissions of others with stigmatized ancestry, whose differing motives permit them to admit these facts without similar shame. As is examined in sections 3 and 4, his father- and brother-in-law use a variety of rhetorical strategies to accommodate Polynices and improve his status in the eyes of others.

3. *NEC CULPA NEPOTIBUS OBSTAT:* ADRASTUS' PERSPECTIVE ON KINSHIP

Characterized by the epithet *mitis* (1.448, 5.668, 7.537, 11.110), Adrastus is one of the few genuinely compassionate characters in the *Thebaid*. He rules peacefully until Polynices brings war (1.390–91) and becomes thereafter "the most consistent advocate of peaceful settlement" (Keith 98; cf. Dominik 1994a: 76–79, 92–94, Ahl 2850–58, Aricò 107–31). His first response to finding Tydeus and Polynices battling on his doorstep is to try to calm and console them. He offers them hospitality upon recalling an earlier oracle identifying these men as his future sons-in-law (1.482–97; cf. 1.395–400). Adrastus calms his guests, bathes and feeds them, and introduces them to his daughters in a lengthy scene (1.482–668) modeled on Dido's banquet at the end of *Aeneid* 1 and Evander's accommodation of Aeneas in *Aeneid* 8. Polynices eventually identifies himself to Adrastus; as was discussed in the preceding section, he represents himself as unavoidably stigmatized by his ancestry. Rather than accede to Polynices' self-definition, however, Adrastus offers him the opportunity to establish a new identity. In persuading Polynices to dissociate his identity from that of his kingroup and to value the family into which he will marry, Adrastus departs from the androcentric "dynastic principle." However, Adrastus' narrative of Linus and Coroebus (1.557–672) undermines his argument regard-

[19] After Atreus seized the throne and exiled his brother Thyestes, an oracle advised Thyestes to beget his son Aegisthus by his daughter Pelopia in order to take revenge (Hyg. *Fab.* 87, Apollod. *Epit.* 2.14, ΣEur. *Or.* 15 Schwartz; Gantz 551).

ing the evitability of ancestral stigma, and the later events of the epic prove them untenable. His offer of hospitality and marriage to a dangerous guest exposes him to the same perils as Virgil's Latinus and Dido, while his failure to understand divine will marks his difference from Virgil's Evander. Statius' use of these Virgilian frames emphasizes his departure from preceding epic tradition in presenting Adrastus' novel perspective on kinship.

Adrastus adopts a threefold persuasive strategy. First, he demonstrates to Polynices that his affiliation with Oedipus is impossible to conceal, despite his guest's efforts at evasion. Next, Adrastus argues that kingroup affiliation need not be the only factor determining Polynices' identity. He can even increase the status of the other members of his kingroup through independent action. In the following book, Adrastus invites Polynices to become a member of his own kingroup by marrying his daughter (2.152–72).[20] Adrastus' arguments are self-interested as well as compassionate. Successfully denying the corrupting force of Polynices' ancestral stigma would ensure that his son-in-law posed no threat to the family's reputation. Adrastus too is the distant descendant of a criminal ancestor (the cannibal and kin-murderer Tantalus) and would therefore himself profit from an argument separating individual identity from kingroup stigma.

Adrastus responds to Polynices' self-presentation first by indicating that his guest's attempts to exclude all thought of Oedipus were unsuccessful (1.681–88):

> tum motus Adrastus
> hospitiis (agnouit enim): "quid nota recondis?
> scimus" ait "nec sic auersum fama Mycenis
> uoluit iter. regnum et furias oculosque pudentes
> nouit et Arctois si quis de solibus horret
> quique bibit Gangen aut nigrum occasibus intrat
> Oceanum et si quos incerto litore Syrtes
> destituunt."

> Then, moved by ties of hospitality (for he recognized him), Adrastus says: "Why do you conceal well-known things? I know you, nor does your fame turn its path so far from Mycene. The kingdom and the madnesses and the shameful eyes are known to whoever shivers under the northern sun, whoever drinks from the Ganges or enters the dark Ocean in the west, whomever the Syrtes abandon on an uncertain shore."

[20] Ahl 2852 observes the suggestive contrast with Polynices' previous experience of a father figure: "A strong paternal hand not only restrains the combatants, but unites them first in friendship, and then in kinship. The contrast with Oedipus is only implicit; but it is powerful. Could a strong fatherly hand have prevented the wars between Eteocles and Polynices too?"

Polynices cannot hope to pass himself off as solely the son of Jocasta (1.681); mention of her name is sufficient to identify Oedipus as well, and the whole world, described in terms of its geographical extremes, has become aware of Oedipus' crimes.[21] As unwilling as Polynices to pronounce Oedipus' ill-omened name amid sacred rites (cf. 1.678 *piget inter sacra fateri*), Adrastus identifies Oedipus only indirectly, by referring to the events that created his stigma (*regnum*, *furias*, *oculos … pudentes*).

Adrastus leaves Polynices no means of diverting attention from himself. Though his bluff-calling may at first appear threatening, it is in fact the first part of a rhetorical strategy leading to eventual acceptance. Having focused attention on Oedipus' stigma and claimed that it cannot be hidden, Adrastus proceeds to contradict Polynices' assumption that it affects him. The king argues that descendants are not to be held responsible for the crimes of their ancestors (1.688–92):

> ne perge queri casusque priorum
> adnumerare tibi: nostro quoque sanguine multum
> errauit pietas, nec culpa nepotibus obstat.
> tu modo dissimilis rebus mereare secundis
> excusare tuos.
>
> Don't continue to complain and to count the misfortunes of your ancestors as your own. Members of my bloodline greatly failed in their duty as well, nor does guilt harm their descendants. Rather, dissimilar to your kin, you should earn the right to excuse them through favorable dealings.

Adrastus distinguishes Polynices' individual personality from the identity conferred by his kingroup.[22] He argues that his future son-in-law should not assume that he shares in his ancestors' stigma; he can distinguish his future meritorious behavior from their past crimes, and, by acquiring a good reputation, he can "excuse" the shame of his kingroup. Given the belief, shared by Polynices himself, that his behavior will be impious (discussed in the preceding section), he might actually have an easier chance of exceeding expectations than the descendant of an unstigmatized kingroup would.

In addition to attempting to separate Polynices from his ancestral stigma, Adrastus argues more generally that descendants are free from their ances-

[21] Virgil's Dido similarly claims to Aeneas that everyone has learned about the fall of Troy (*A.* 1.565–68).

[22] Caviglia 166 argues that Adrastus also implicitly responds to Oedipus' curse: "quasi un' indiretta risposta all' iniziale maledizione di Edipo … è l'esatta antitesi del concetto di maledizione della stirpe, della colpa di uno che fa colpevoli tutti."

tors' guilt (1.690 *nec culpa nepotibus obstat*), thus countering his own guilt by association with his distant ancestor Tantalus, who attempted to serve his son Pelops as a meal to the gods.[23] The crime of this distant Argive ancestor was proverbial for the characters of the *Thebaid*.[24] In order to rule in Argos, therefore, Adrastus has already been required to confront the stigma created by earlier members of the royal kingroup. Rather than attempting to divert attention (in the manner of Polynices) from the potential embarrassment caused by his ancestors' memories, he openly presents his connection with Tantalus in the display of *imagines* at the funeral games of Archemorus (6.280–82):

> Tantalus inde parens, non qui fallentibus undis
> imminet aut refugae sterilem rapit aera siluae,
> sed pius et magni uehitur conuiua Tonantis.
>
> Next comes father Tantalus, not as one who broods over deceptive waters or seizes the empty air as the trees pull away, but as a dutiful man and a table companion of the great Thunderer.

Adrastus chooses to portray Tantalus not as a criminal but as an admired ancestor. He adopts the same head-on rhetorical strategy when he reminds his future son-in-law that he cannot hope to obscure his connection to Oedipus. Polynices might, however, be able to identify himself as *dissimilis* (1.691) to his ancestors by separating himself from the cycle of repetition of ancestral crimes that stretches from Agenor's exile of Cadmus to Oedipus' murder of Laius (Heinrich).

The subsequent events of the narrative contradict Adrastus' arguments. Though Adrastus is currently unaware of it, Jupiter intends to make the Argives suffer because of his implacable anger at their ancestor Tantalus; he uses Polynices as the unwitting agent of their destruction. In the council of *Thebaid* 1, Jupiter belatedly announces his intention to punish the Thebans for the crimes of Oedipus and the Argives for the crimes of Tantalus (1.214–47). The

[23] ERRAVIT PIETAS … *hoc propter Tantalum dicit: sceleribus ne suos quidem caruisse maiores* (Lact. Pl. *ad* 1.690). Heuvel 268 adds Athamas and Niobe as criminal ancestors. There has been scholarly controversy (since Legras 188) over whether Tantalus can be counted as one of Adrastus' ancestors; Franchet d'Espèrey 66, 336–37 and Caviglia 118 represent modern *communis opinio* in describing a loose genealogical connection between Tantalus and the present ruling house of Argos. For the purposes of Statius' narrative, Eteocles recognizes Tantalus as the *auctor* of Adrastus' line (2.436) and Jupiter holds the Argives culpable for his crimes (1.246–47).

[24] E.g., 1.246–47 *fallax / Tantalus et saeuae … iniuria mensae*, 4.590 *truncatus … Pelops*, 7.94–95 *saucius … Pelops*, 7.208–9 *crimina … Dorica*.

god's memory of his own position as the originator of both houses' bloodlines (cf. 1.224–26) fails to mitigate his anger. He views Tantalus' distant kinship relation to the present royal house as a pretext for punishing the innocent Argives.[25] His desire to offend Juno by causing her beloved city to suffer may be a further motivation (Delarue 301). The rout of the Argive army and Adrastus' flight from Thebes in *Thebaid* 11 is the final disproof of the claim that the previous crimes of Argive ancestors have not led to danger in the present generation.

Adrastus' views on the consequences of descent from criminal ancestors and the separation of the individual's reputation from that of his kingroup find few adherents in the *Thebaid*.[26] More prudent characters than Adrastus are aware of the danger that stigmatized ancestors pose to their descendants. Thus Phorbas, for example, hopes that the goddess Diana will put away her anger at Dryas, the grandson of her enemy Orion (7.254–58). However, Mars' instigation and Dryas' hatred for Diana and her followers as the result of her murder of his grandfather (9.841–44) cause him to pursue and destroy her favorite Parthenopaeus. Dryas then dies from an unseen blow (9.875–76); the available inference is that Diana killed him, as she had earlier promised to do in order to avenge Parthenopaeus (9.665–67; Dewar 217). Failure should be the expected result, therefore, when characters in the *Thebaid* attempt to regard individuals as dissociated from their kingroups.

Adrastus' resemblances to Virgil's Dido and Latinus are further indications that his understanding of divine will is dangerously incomplete. Adrastus' introduction into the narrative alludes to Virgil's introduction of Latinus,[27] and both kings propose dynastic marriages that lead to destructive wars (Delarue 330, Keith 74). Secondly, by adapting motifs from the Dido episode

[25] 1.245–47 *hanc etiam poenis incessere gentem / decretum; neque enim arcano de pectore fallax / Tantalus et saeuae periit iniuria mensae* (cf. 7.207–10). Many readers have observed that Jupiter makes an arbitrary decision to punish the Argives in the present generation and advances an unreasonably prolonged memory of Tantalus' crime as his pretext. As the result of Jupiter's "human characterization … it becomes exceedingly difficult to have any confidence either in Jupiter's worth as a moral adjudicator for the poem, or in interpretations which cast him in this role" (Feeney 355). Cf. Criado 44–51, Franchet d'Espèrey 65–66, 336–73, Hershkowitz 260–68, Dominik 1994b: 9–13, 70–73, Ahl 2834–41.

[26] The case of Atys could potentially represent support for Adrastus' views, as he courts Oedipus' daughter Ismene despite the shame of her ancestors and finds her response to stigma attractive (8.556–58 *soceros nec tristibus actis / auersatus erat; sponsam quin castus amanti / squalor et indigni commendat gratia luctus*).

[27] 1.390–91 *rex ibi, tranquillae medio de limite uitae / in senium uergens, populos Adrastus habebat* ~ Virg. *A.* 7.45–46 *rex arua Latinus et urbes / iam senior longa placidas in pace regebat.*

of Virgil's *Aeneid*, Statius identifies Polynices' preamble to his self-introduction as the beginning of disaster for his Argive audience. Polynices echoes Aeneas' prologue to the narrative he relates in *Aeneid* 2 and 3. Aeneas alerts his audience that his tale involves suffering (*A.* 2.10 *sed si tantus amor casus cognoscere nostros*); Polynices does likewise (1.679 *sed si praecipitant miserum cognoscere curae*). Just as *fati nescia Dido* (Virg. *A.* 1.299) cannot recognize the beginning of her own misfortune as she listens to Aeneas' tale (*A.* 1.748–52), so Adrastus fails to realize the threat that Polynices poses to him. The later events of the narrative confirm the parallels suggested by the Virgilian frames. Like Dido, Adrastus will make an offer of hospitality that leads to his own destruction (Hill 1990: 115–16). A character more aware of epic tradition (Feeney 340–44) than Adrastus would have recognized Polynices as the agent of his destruction.

Though recapitulating Latinus' offer of marriage and Dido's offer of hospitality to a dangerous guest, Adrastus falls short of Virgil's Evander in comprehension of divine will. His aetiological account of Linus and Coroebus (1.557–672) reveals his misplaced trust in hostile gods. As Adrastus relates, Apollo twice caused the Argives to suffer collectively for the actions of individuals: the god sent a monster to devastate Argos upon Crotopus' execution of his daughter and a plague after Coroebus killed the monster. This story "should have reminded him [*sc.* Adrastus] that the gods are not so ready to wash away *culpa* from the descendants of the guilty" (Nagel 386–87). Failing to see the point of his own narrative, Adrastus is also subject to a mistaken impression that he fully understands the god's oracle directing the marriage of his daughters to Polynices and Tydeus. In fact, Apollo has purposely kept the full import of the oracle obscure even from his prophet Amphiaraus (1.398–99).[28] The king's ignorance counterbalances the virtues displayed in his pacific and compassionate acceptance of Polynices. Jupiter's resolution to punish Thebes and Argos and Apollo's concealment of the consequences of the marriage suggested by his oracle render the king's claims regarding the evitability of ancestral stigma untenable.

[28] Feeney 356–58 argues that the Coroebus narrative prepares the reader for subsequent examples of the gods' moral failings (cf. Dominik 1994a: 63–70, Vessey 1973: 102). Vessey associates Apollo's vengeful monster with Jupiter's current plan to punish Argos; both are examples of *poena* inflicted on an entire group as retribution for the crimes of a single individual (Vessey 1973: 104). Entire kingroups also pay for the crimes of single ancestors in other genres of Roman poetry; for example, the narrator of Virgil's *Georgics* complains that the Roman race has paid too long for Laomedon's perjury (Virg. *Geo.* 1.501–2; Thomas 152), and Horace's speaker in *Epode* 7 views the civil wars as recapitulating the killing of Remus (Hor. *Epod.* 7.17–20).

4. *SED FALLIT ORIGO:* TYDEUS' ATTEMPT TO DENY POLYNICES' KINGROUP AFFILIATION

During the embassy of *Thebaid* 2, both Tydeus and Eteocles present implicit rebuttals to Adrastus' claims. Their opposition emphasizes the fact that Adrastus occupies a minority position with his arguments regarding the evitability of ancestral stigma. Eteocles reminds Tydeus that he and his brother are equivalent in terms of the status conferred by their ancestry and that Polynices cannot hope to obscure his origins through marriage into a more distinguished kingroup (Helzle 211–12, Frings 1991: 35–36). Eteocles is willing to accept his own ancestral stigma only because sole rule at Thebes provides a sufficient consolation. Tydeus counters by appearing to retreat into fantasy; he claims that Eteocles is the only son of Oedipus and thus the only one truly subject to the ancestral stigma. Neither supports Adrastus' claim that the ancestral stigma is avoidable.

Tydeus arrives at the Theban court seeking the return of power to Polynices in accordance with the agreement to alternate yearly rule that nominally obtains between the brothers (2.389–409). Following the admonition he received from Laius, Eteocles breaks the agreement and refuses to abandon the throne to his brother (2.410–51). He sarcastically pretends to console Polynices with the thought of the better fortune he has achieved in Argos (2.430–38):

> te penes Inachiae dotalis regia dono
> coniugis, et Danaae (quid enim maioribus actis
> inuideam?) cumulentur opes. felicibus Argos
> auspiciis Lernamque regas: nos horrida Dirces
> pascua et Euboicis artatas fluctibus oras,
> non indignati miserum dixisse parentem
> Oedipoden: tibi larga (Pelops et Tantalus auctor!)
> nobilitas, propiorque fluat de sanguine iuncto
> Iuppiter.
>
> Keep the kingdom coming to you in marriage, the gift of your Inachian wife, and pile up Argive riches. Why should I begrudge greater tasks? Rule Argos and Lerna with lucky omens; I [*sc.* rule] the rough pastureland of Dirce and the shores hemmed in by the Euboean tides, not embarrassed to call wretched Oedipus my father. Acquire great nobility (Pelops and Tantalus the originator!), and let a closer Jupiter flow from your united blood.

Though Eteocles is fully aware that only rule at Thebes will satisfy Polynices, he claims that his brother ought to be satisfied with the opportunity to rule in Argos. He appears willing to invite a double blow to his own status by making reference to the "greater deeds" (*maioribus actis*) that his brother may

achieve by ruling in Argos, and by praising Adrastus' resources and line of descent from Jupiter as superior to his own. Eteocles, for his part, claims to be content with a more distant line of descent from Jupiter and control of a weaker kingdom so long as he is permitted to rule it unimpeded. He argues that Polynices has improved his status through making a fortunate marriage and should therefore not be interested in reclaiming the Theban throne. Eteocles is even willing to vituperate his own kingroup in the service of his argument, imagining Argia's distaste for her grieving mother-in-law and accursed father-in-law if she were to move with Polynices back to Thebes (2.438–42).

Though Eteocles may initially appear to use a rhetoric of self-abasement similar to that of Polynices in *Thebaid* 1, his persuasive goals are wholly different. His purpose in downplaying his potential sources of symbolic capital is to emphasize that Polynices will never be able to find an adequate compensation for the sole rule of Thebes. Eteocles presents himself as inferior to his brother in terms of his kingroup affiliation and the resources of his kingdom, yet can nevertheless claim a greater satisfaction with his debased situation. The brothers do not evaluate their status following typical standards, but follow instead the irrational desires planted in them by Tisiphone during her assault at the beginning of the epic (Franchet d'Espèrey 33–39, Hershkowitz 247–301). Tisiphone fills the brothers with *regendi saeuus amor* (1.127–28); the narrator explains that the kingdom they fight over is so poor that their object cannot be control of resources but *nuda potestas* (1.150; Hill 1990: 104, Bonds 233). After Polynices withdraws into exile, he reveals his willingness to consider all other things valueless in comparison to rule at Thebes. The exile's hunger for power makes him willing to trade his life for the opportunity, however brief, to gain the throne and see his brother deposed (1.319 *hac aeuum cupiat pro luce pacisci*). As he rejects Tydeus' request, Eteocles shows his awareness that there is no adequate substitute for the kingship. Polynices' displays of grief as he continues to wait in Argos (3.678–79) confirm that sole rule at Thebes is the only measure of status that matters to him, one for which there is no compensation, and one that no consolation will enable him to forget.

In this unusual rhetorical context, where conventional measures of status have become irrelevant, Eteocles can claim that his stigmatized ancestry scarcely matters to him. He contrasts Polynices' embarrassment with his own willingness to identify his parentage (2.435–36 *non indignati miserum dixisse parentem / Oedipoden*). He knows that his sarcastic wish for Polynices to acquire *larga nobilitas* through marriage cannot be fulfilled. As children of the same father, he and his brother have the same *nobilitas*, and acceptance by Adrastus will not permit his brother to efface the memory of his origins (Helzle

212). Adrastus might have conferred economic benefits on his brother, but no one will forget the basic facts of his ancestry. Like Adrastus, though in a far less tactful manner, Eteocles indicates that Polynices' attempts to disguise his ancestry are bound to be ineffective evasions; unlike Adrastus, however, he never claims to believe in the evitability of ancestral stigma. In his view, the shame of the kingroup attaches equally to both brothers, and sole rule is the only effective compensation.

In his furious response to this argument (2.451–67), Tydeus excoriates Eteocles' injustice in withholding the promised power and enumerates the forces that will compel him to return it. Tydeus offers Polynices support throughout the epic, taking risks, such as his sole embassy to Eteocles in *Thebaid* 2, in service to his brother-in-law, and dying in a battle to restore Polynices to the throne at the end of *Thebaid* 8. Although his quick temper causes him to fight with Polynices on their first meeting, he soon identifies strongly with his new brother-in-law. The characters' sympathy for each other is a result of their parallel situations. Both are in exile and both are violent toward their own kin (Frings 1992: 47–53);[29] each experiences an unusual degree of anger and madness;[30] each uses the other as a replacement for a real-life brother (Henderson 1998a: 234–40). In his lament for his fallen friend, Polynices metaphorically promotes Tydeus from affine (relative by marriage) to agnate (descendant from a common male ancestor). Using language that echoes Catullus' lament for his brother, he imagines a new kinship relation between them in order to emphasize his grief and love for his brother-in-law (9.53 *alius misero ac melior mihi frater ademptus*; cf. Catul. 101.5–6, Helzle 198). Their emotional connection causes Polynices to perceive Tydeus (despite his criminality) as an exemplary brother, better than the one he is related to by blood.[31]

During his argument with Eteocles, Tydeus similarly denies the reality of kinship relations in order to promote Polynices' cause. His desire to support Polynices impels him to argue that his friend is exempt from the shame of his

[29] Tydeus was forced to leave his homeland as the result of murdering his brother; Statius' use of the adjective *conscius* to indicate Tydeus' shame establishes a further parallel with Polynices (1.402–3 *fraterni sanguinis illum / conscius horror agit*; cf. *OLD* s.v. *conscius* 4b). The narrator attributes Polynices' *aposiopesis* during his first self-introduction to his mind's awareness of his shame (1.466 *mens sibi conscia fati / cunctatur proferre patrem*).

[30] The narrator compares their friendship to those of Theseus and Pirithous and Orestes and Pylades (1.474–77), and the motifs of madness and violence against kin in the myth of Orestes make him a particularly appropriate comparandum for Polynices (Hill 1990: 111).

[31] For Roman conceptions of the ideal fraternal relationship see Bannon.

descent. He shares one goal with Adrastus, that of promoting Polynices, but achieves it through rhetorical means that contradict Adrastus' arguments regarding kingroup identity. In his angry response to Eteocles' refusal to yield power, Tydeus imaginatively claims that Eteocles is Oedipus' only son (2.462–66):

> haec pietas, haec magna fides! nec crimina gentis
> mira equidem duco: sic primus sanguinis auctor
> incestique patrum thalami; sed fallit origo:
> Oedipodis tu solus eras, haec praemia morum
> ac sceleris, uiolente, feres!
>
> So this is duty, this is great faith! For my part, I don't consider the crimes of your race unbelievable. Thus was the original ancestor of your bloodline, and thus were the defiled bedchambers of your ancestors. But origins are misleading: *you* are the only son of Oedipus, you violent man, and these are the rewards you shall take for your way of life and your crime!

This argument from ethos recalls Oedipus' and Jocasta's expectations of their own children in Seneca's *Phoenissae* (cf. section 1 above). Like the parents in Seneca's play, Tydeus expected both sons to engage in criminal behavior as the consequence of being descended from a criminal father. In Tydeus' view, however, Eteocles is the only one of Oedipus' sons who has actually recapitulated his father's crimes and should therefore be stigmatized through recollection of their kinship. Polynices, having avoided criminal behavior, cannot be considered a son of Oedipus. Tydeus' language also implicitly weakens a strategy used by Polynices in his earlier self-presentation. His claim that origins are misleading (2.464 *fallit origo*) and his references to the *primus sanguinis auctor* (2.463) echo Polynices' attempt to divert Adrastus' attention from his proximate ancestor Oedipus to his distant ancestor Cadmus (1.677–78 *ordo / sanguinis antiqui*; 1.680 *Cadmus origo patrum*; cf. section 2 above). For the purposes of his argument to Eteocles, however, Tydeus moves the point of Polynices' origin only as far back as the generation of Oedipus. While presenting Polynices favorably, this argument contradicts Adrastus' claim concerning the evitability of ancestral stigma; one cannot, in Tydeus' view, represent oneself as the son of Oedipus and yet free of shame. Even Polynices' most enthusiastic supporter does not believe that he should admit his true paternity.

5. Individual Identity, Kingroup Affiliation, and Genre in the *Thebaid* and *Silvae*

The pressure of his ancestral stigma causes Polynices severe embarrassment during his two efforts to introduce himself to Adrastus (1.465–67, 1.673–81).

In Adrastus' response (1.681–92), however, Statius shows the possibility of reevaluating the relationship between individual identity and kingroup affiliation. Adrastus combines his typical compassion with self-serving attempts to fulfill the oracle predicting his daughters' marriage and to efface the negative associations of his own affiliation with Tantalus. Adrastus advances a minority viewpoint in the world of the *Thebaid,* one that the events of the narrative contradict. Tydeus' and Eteocles' arguments rebut his and reveal a logic of kinship better attuned to the hostile environment created by vengeful gods. Adrastus' approach to representing the boundaries between an individual personality and the identity conferred by a kingroup also contrasts with the literary tradition represented by Virgil's *Aeneid* and Senecan tragedy. Adrastus' perspectives on ancestral stigma and the importance of cognatic kin, however, closely resemble those expressed in the *Silvae.* After briefly reviewing the similarities between Adrastus' consolatory speech (1.681–92) and his offer of marriage (2.152–72) and several passages from the *Silvae*, I shall argue in conclusion that genre determines the success or failure of the ancestry argument in each context. In these two poetic universes, Statius ascribes to human beings different possibilities for reversing or confirming the expectations created by their ancestors and constructs relationships between individuals and their kingroups on different terms.

Adrastus suggests to Polynices that he can "excuse [his] ancestors" (1.692 *excusare tuos*) through his own meritorious actions and retroactively improve their status through his "favorable dealings" (1.691 *rebus … secundis*). Although, thanks to Tisiphone's interference, Adrastus' wish for Polynices remains unachieved in the *Thebaid*, *Silvae* 1.4 shows the fulfillment of a similar aspiration. Apollo, one of Statius' mythological speakers, praises Rutilius Gallicus for having improved the status of earlier generations of his family (*Silv.* 1.4.68–70):

> genus ipse suis permissaque retro
> nobilitas; nec origo latet, sed luce sequente
> uincitur et magno gaudet cessisse nepoti.
>
> He gives birth to his family and his nobility is granted to previous generations. The family's origin is not obscure, but it is outdone by its succeeding greatness and it rejoices to yield to its great descendant.

As Henderson observes, "Statius pictures Gallicus as a classic *parvenu* at the capital, and bullishly proud of it … leaving his origins in his wake" (1998b: 82). While Gallicus' forebears may not have been completely undistinguished (*nec origo latet*), their achievements did not equal those of their "great descendant." Instead of praising Gallicus as having been ennobled by the greatness

of his ancestors, therefore, Apollo claims that his achievements have retroactively (*retro*) ennobled *them*.

After informing Polynices of his individual potential for success beyond the expectations created by his malevolent kingroup, Adrastus attempts to improve his status by offering him his daughter Argia in marriage (2.152–72). As was discussed in section 4, Eteocles denies the validity of this strategy; he argues that although his brother might have acquired *larga ... nobilitas* (2.436–37) through his fortunate match, no one will forget the basic facts of his ancestry. The possibility never materializes for Polynices in the *Thebaid* of being identified to others solely through cognatic kin, as Adrastus' son-in-law or as the son of Jocasta; his descent from Oedipus can never be forgotten. Following the androcentric conventions of the epic genre (Keith 18–19), Polynices' identity remains tied to his agnatic line. Though Adrastus' strategy fails in the *Thebaid*, it is valid in the *Silvae*, which feature an increased role for cognatic kin in the establishment of an individual's identity. In *Silvae* 1.2 and 4.4, for example, Statius praises two men who have improved their own status and that of their descendants by marrying powerful women. In *Silvae* 1.2, Statius' celebration of the marriage of L. Arruntius Stella and Violentilla, the goddess Venus praises the bride as the *gloria patrum* (*Silv.* 1.2.108); she will pass down *decus* to her children (*Silv.* 1.2.272–73). In the assessment of their descendants' future status, her qualities are as important as his: "Violentilla here plays a key role in the creation and perpetuation of a strong family unit. More so than Stella, she is to be the transmitter of values traditionally thought of as male" (Newlands 102). The speaker of *Silvae* 4.4 similarly recognizes the value of superior cognatic ancestry in his praise of Vitorius Marcellus' son Geta. Marcellus was from a non-consular senatorial family, but his wife (a Hosidia) was the granddaughter of Cn. Hosidius Geta, suffect consul in September 43 or 45 (*ILS* 6043; Coleman 1988: 136–37). Statius therefore praises their child as *stemmate materno felix, uirtute paterna* (*Silv.* 4.4.75). That is, cognatic ancestry is as important as agnatic in assessing the status of Stella and Violentilla's children in *Silvae* 1.2; in the case of Geta in *Silvae* 4.4, his mother's *stemma* is more significant than his father's.

While other Roman epics represent ancestors as worthy of emulation by their descendants, the *Thebaid* generally associates descent from Cadmus with repetition of ancestral crimes (Heinrich).[32] The epic's proem, for example, describes the history of the house of Cadmus as a series of violent acts against

[32] In addition to the examples of Virgil's Aeneas and Ascanius, cited above, see Marus' lengthy account in Silius' *Punica* of Regulus' exploits to Regulus' son Serranus (Sil. 6.117–551).

kin (discussed above, section 1). In the *Silvae*, however, Statius' speakers present constructive relationships between ancestors and descendants. They exhort ancestors to provide positive examples and children to emulate them. The speaker of *Silvae* 4.4, for example, represents both Vitorius Marcellus and his father as offering examples to be emulated and surpassed by Marcellus' son Geta (*Silv*. 4.4.71–74):

> ipse canenda geres paruoque exempla parabis
> magna Getae, dignos quem iam nunc belliger actus
> poscit auus praestatque domi nouisse triumphos.
> surge, agedum, iuuenemque puer deprende parentem …
>
> You [*sc.* Marcellus] will perform feats worthy of song and you will provide splendid examples for little Geta. His warlike grandfather is already demanding worthy actions from him and makes it possible to learn of his triumphs at home. Come now, boy, rise and outdo your youthful father …

Though Statius' speaker places high expectations on Geta, they are only positive ones; in contrast to the *Thebaid,* there is no ancestral stigma to be overcome. The example of Claudius Etruscus, the addressee of *Silv*. 3.3, further signifies that descendants in the *Silvae* are largely free of the negative expectations created by their ancestors' careers. Statius represents Etruscus as suffering no ill repute as the result of his ancestor's former servitude or prior offense to the imperial regime (Nauta 229–33). Other examples of positive ancestral examples to be emulated include both Julius Menecrates and his father, who demonstrate their laudable *mores* and *virtus* to Menecrates' third child in *Silvae* 4.8.[33] *Silvae* 5.2 relates the career of Vettius Bolanus in considerable detail to Bolanus' son Crispinus upon the occasion of his appointment as *tribunus militum.* Statius' speaker exhorts the sixteen-year old Crispinus to learn from the example of his deceased father in language that echoes the exhortation of Virgil's Aeneas to Ascanius (discussed above, section 1).[34]

I contend that the varied success of the same arguments in the *Thebaid* and the *Silvae* should be read as a consequence of the different genres of these works. In the *Thebaid,* Jupiter's decision to punish Adrastus and Polynices for the crimes of their ancestors renders fruitless Adrastus' attempts to separate individual identity and kingroup affiliation. The *Silvae*, however, represent both ancestry and divinity as more constructive forces than the *Thebaid*.

[33] *Silv*. 4.8.57–58 *his placidos genitor mores largumque nitorem / monstret auus, pulchrae studium uirtutis uterque.*

[34] *Silv*. 5.2.51, 54 *disce, puer… tu disce patrem* ~ Virg. *A*. 12.435 *disce, puer, uirtutem ex me uerumque laborem.*

Though essential in epic, ancestry is not the most important aspect of identity in the *Silvae*. Rather, as Newlands argues, in these poems "Statius proposes a provocative new concept of nobility to which economic, moral and artistic values rather than hereditary qualifications are essential" (Newlands 6). As Newlands demonstrates, Statius' speakers praise addressees such as Manilius Vopiscus (*Silv.* 1.3), Pollius Felix (*Silv.* 2.2), and Novius Vindex (*Silv.* 4.6) for their displays of wealth in their villas and their art collections, not for their *stemmata*. Many of Statius' addressees in the *Silvae* come from undistinguished families; their present elite status is the result of the accumulation of wealth, not the reproduction of ancestral privilege (Nauta 204–35, White).

Interventions by vengeful divinities cause the ruin of otherwise sympathetic individuals in the *Thebaid*. Drawing on the tradition of Juno in Virgil, Ovid, and Silius (Hardie 57–87), Statius' Tisiphone assaults Polynices and leaves him no ability to evade his *gentilis furor*. As the result of her compulsion, Polynices negates Adrastus' wishes and emulates his destructive ancestors. Adrastus is the most sympathetic of the Seven; his mistaken but well-meaning choice to shelter Polynices and his subsequent suffering arouse the reader's *pathos* (Delarue 329–33). The failure of the king's apparently reasonable arguments regarding kinship in the *Thebaid* contributes to the epic's negative representation of ancestral ideology and generational continuity. One need not go as far as identifying the "abuse of supernatural power" represented by Jupiter's punishment of Adrastus as the epic's "predominant, pervasive motif" (Dominik 1994a: 1) in order to note the essential difference in relationships between human and god in the *Thebaid* and the *Silvae*. The mythological speakers of the *Silvae* are uniformly supportive (Coleman 1999). For example, the god whose vengeance devastated Argos in the *Thebaid* occupies the opposite role in *Silvae* 1.4; Apollo calls on Asclepius to effect Gallicus' miraculous recovery from ill-health (*Silv.* 1.4.58–105). The success of propositions regarding the evitability of ancestral stigma and the distinction between individual and kingroup identity in the *Silvae*, therefore, is a consequence of Statius' representation of more constructive relationships between kin (including cognatic kin) and between human beings and gods.

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