

“Where do these warrish hands and heart of Venus come from?” Statius’ subversion of Ovidian *militia amoris* in the *Thebaid*

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Abstract: Statius’ *Thebaid* has long been recognized as a highly allusive epic, but one system of its allusions—that which engages with Latin love elegy—has received less study than others. To address this oversight, I argue in this article that Statius makes marked references to techniques and tropes of Ovidian elegy in his use of love language throughout the *Thebaid*. After cataloguing a range of the epic’s Ovidian elegiac intertexts, I argue that Statius sustains an allusion to *Amores* book one in *Thebaid* book five. In *Thebaid* book five, Hypsipyle provides an inset narrative of Venus’ intervention in Lemnos: under the influence of the spurned love goddess, the Lemnian women slaughter the entire male population. In my reading, Hypsipyle’s narrative represents a characteristically Statian subversion of his literary models. In book one of the *Amores*, Ovid develops the ‘warfare of love’ (*militia amoris*) trope as a tongue-in-cheek revision of both previous epicists’ and elegists’ more morose and austere poetics. Statius, conversely, recasts the light and humorous elements of Ovid’s *militia amoris* into his own aesthetic mould, whereby love becomes as horrifying and destructive a force as war in the cosmos of the *Thebaid*. That is, Statius mirrors Ovid’s own techniques of subversive allusion to mark his poetics also as both indebted to and innovating on elegiac precursors. But in Statius’ case, the world of elegiac *amor* becomes graver rather than lighter, more severe than humorous. In sum, Statius’ subversive allusions to Ovidian elegy in his *Thebaid*, particularly in book five, transform Ovid’s *levis* love (*Am.* 3.1.41) into its most monstrous counterpart.

In the digressive fifth book of Statius’ *Thebaid*, the Argives hear from Hypsipyle about the mass slaughter wrought on her home island of Lemnos. The Lemnians, the soldiers are told, had long denied Venus her worship (5.57–60) which caused the love goddess to abandon their island (70–2) and render their marriages sexless and bitter (72–4). This loveless atmosphere thus drove the husbands to wars (and perhaps new brides) abroad (75–80, 142). Yet the elder woman Polyxo, acting under the alleged influence of the rejected love goddess herself (134–8), summons

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the abandoned women to council and spurs them to discover a way to 'renew' Venus (*qua renovanda Venus*, 110) through vengeful slaughter, a way to recover sex by the sword. They agree to murder their husbands as they return from battle to free themselves up for new marriages.

This reclamation of sexuality through martial violence generates, in Statius' hands and Hypsipyle's words, an intricate conflation of the Roman poetics of love (*amor*) and warfare (*militia*).¹ In what I perceive to be a moment of heightened self-consciousness from Statius in Hypsipyle's story, we hear how, amidst the bloodshed on Lemnos, Bacchus intervenes to help Hypsipyle and her father Thoas, Bacchus' own son, escape the city's devastation. Shocked by what he witnesses, the wine god utters the question which animates this article: "where do these warrish hands and heart of Venus come from?" (*unde manus, unde haec Mavortia divae pectora*, 5.282–3). I submit that, with this question, Statius invites us to think outside of the world of the poem and consider a broader, metapoetic dynamic: which earlier literary depictions of Venus inform his own grisly version in this book—this frightening amalgam of sexual and military passion?

My contention is that, through his depictions of love elsewhere in the epic but especially via systematic allusions to Ovid's *Amores* book one in *Thebaid* book five, Statius identifies Ovidian elegy as the most significant intertext for his creation of this war-mongering love goddess.²

1. Note that martial and erotic poetry of various registers have a convoluted interrelationship stretching back to Homer. Recall Aphrodite's remarkable wounding on the battlefield in *Il.* 5.311ff. and Demodocus' song of the affair between Aphrodite and Ares in *Od.* 8.256–369. Furthermore, many of our extant epics dedicate hundreds of lines or even entire books to erotic challenges which confront military heroes. Think of Paris and Helen in *Il.* 6, Calypso and Odysseus in *Od.* 5, Nausicaa and Odysseus in *Od.* 6, Hypsipyle and Jason in *Ap. Arg.* 1 and *V.F. Arg.* 2, Medea and Jason in *Ap. Arg.* 3 and *V.F. Arg.* 7, and Dido and Aeneas in *Aen.* 4, to name only the most famous. Lucretius, furthermore, famously reappropriates martial epic's interest in *amor* for the purposes of his own didactic epic (*DRN* 4. 1037–1287).

2. By having Bacchus pose the question of intertexts in this scene Statius indicates that Greek tragedy, a genre whose attentions are frequently turned to the violence engendered by *eros*, is in the allusive mixture too. Yet, as with his allusions to elegy, as I detail in this article, Statius' treatment of Bacchus as deity and tragedy as genre in this book are subversive and revisionary; the 'tragic' is recast in light of the other conflicting genres at work. For instance, as Schiesaro puts it, "Venus encroaches on the territory of Bacchus by staging her own Bacchae in the Lemnian episode of book 5" (Alessandro Schiesaro, "Alius furor. Statius' Thebaid and the Metamorphoses of Bacchus," in *Dionysus and Rome*, ed. Fianchra Mac Góráin (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2019), 193–217, 193, cf. 204–6). On further tragic elements of the Hypsipyle narrative cf. Ruth Parkes, "Finding the Tragic in the Epics of Statius," in *Elements of Tragedy in Flavian Epic*, ed. Sophia Papaioannou and Agis Marinis (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2021), 107–128, esp. 122, 126–8. There have been other recent overviews of Statius' relationship to both Greek tragedy (Agis Marinis, "Statius' Thebaid and Greek Tragedy: The Legacy of Thebes," in *Brill's Companion to Statius*, ed. William J. Dominik, Carole E. Newlands, and Kyle Gervais (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 343–361) and its Roman iteration in the Senecan corpus (Anthony Augoustakis, "Statius and Senecan Drama," in *Brill's Companion to Statius*, ed. William J. Dominik, Carole E. Newlands, and Kyle Gervais (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 377–392). Furthermore, Rebeggiani has argued that even the political dimension of the *Thebaid* emerges most significantly through the author's interactions with tragedy (Stefano Rebeggiani, *The Fragility of Power: Statius, Domitian, and the Politics of the Thebaid* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018)). To introduce his study of the politically charged historical allusions in Statius' epic, Rebeggiani first identifies that "keeping his poem in the tragic mode" is "the most significant strategy Statius

Statius, in fact, marks the *Amores*, a work perhaps as subversive as the *Thebaid* in its respective generic context,³ as a key intertext at the outset of the ‘Lemnian episode’ (5.70) sketched above. Yet, in the phraseology of said passage, in which Hypsipyle claims “You fled headlong, tender *Amores*, from Lemnos” (*protinus a Lemno teneri fugistis Amores*), Statius indicates that his treatment of the *Amores* in this Lemnian episode will not be mere homage but also a kind of artistic rebuff: Ovid’s presence in *Thebaid* book five is as a structuring absence. This identification of Statius’ intertextual aim as revisionism rather than citation is in keeping with Bessone’s recent description of a general ‘style of paradox’ at work in Statian epic which includes allusive practices that are ‘impertinent’, by which term Bessone refers to “the procedures of blatant forcing, of sense or form, that bend celebrated formulations into an unexpected, provoking, and surprising use.”⁴ To fully appreciate how, in the case of Ovidian elegy, the Flavian poet reappropriates the Augustan in the service of subversion rather than emulation, I will first isolate and assess patterns of representation around the terms *amor*, *amare*, and *Venus* throughout the *Thebaid* entire, all the while acknowledging how these patterns relate to the tropes, topics, and themes ex-

enacts to establish a bond between the audience and his characters” and thus that this “tragic vision marks the space within which his political discourse unfolds” (Rebeggiani, 3–5).

3. While Statius declares his indebtedness to Vergil, the Roman paragon of imperial epic (*Theb.* 12.810ff.), his relationship to all epic precursors (and near contemporaries like Lucan) is a highly complex issue, not least because we are missing what was likely one of Statius’ most crucial intertexts—the highly regarded *Thebaid* by Antimachus of Colophon from the fourth century BCE. For what details we have of that lost work, cf. Victor J. Matthews, ed., *Antimachus of Colophon: Text and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 64–76. Scholars of the last few decades have found much fodder for research in Statius’ engagement with various epic models. Ganiban appraises how Statius creatively, and often agonistically, defines his relationship to Vergil, and in so doing also comments on the former poet’s own relationship to previous epic tradition (Randall T. Ganiban, *Statius and Virgil: The Thebaid and the Reinterpretation of the Aeneid* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)). Asso outlines how Statius asserts his epic credentials by engaging not just with the Theban mythic cycle but also the ‘Argo saga’, the mythological basis for the epics of Apollonius and Valerius Flaccus, but also a critical thematic touchstone for Virgil and Lucan (Paulo Asso, “Statius’ Argonautic Background,” *Classical Philology* 115, no. 4 (2020): 659–676). The incorporation of Hypsipyle as inset narrator in *Thebaid* book five which features heavily in my article is also a crucial element in this epic system of intertexts (Asso, 664–7). Furthermore, Statius’ epic does not only engage with Ovid’s elegy, but also his epic. Keith, for example, has written extensively on Statius’ intertextual use of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*: cf. Alison Keith, “Ovidian Personae in Statius’ *Thebaid*,” *Arethusa* 35 (2002): 381–402; Alison Keith, “Ovid’s Theban Narrative in Statius’ *Thebaid*,” *Hermathena* 177/178 (2004/2005): 181–207; Alison Keith, “Poetae Ovidiani: Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in Imperial Roman Epic,” in *A Handbook to the Reception of Ovid*, ed. John F. Miller and Carole E. Newlands (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), 70–83. Newland’s article—on Statius’ description of locations which recall *loci amoeni* from various passages in the *Metamorphoses* only to be corrupted, in the *Thebaid*, by de-praved human beings—is influential in terms of the revisionist intertextual relationship between Statius and Ovid which I attempt to articulate in this paper (Carole E. Newlands, “Statius and Ovid: Transforming the Landscape,” *TAPA* 134, no. 1 (2004): 133–155). See fns. 10–13 below for more discussion on the lines of influence from Ovid to Statius.

4. Federica Bessone, “Allusive (Im-)pertinence in Statius’ Epic,” in *Intertextuality in Flavian Epic Poetry*, ed. Neil Coffee et al. (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 133–168, 133–4 *et passim*.

plored and innovated upon in the *Amores*. These observations will then provide the framework for a close analysis of the elegiac features of *Thebaid* book five, wherein a positively frightening Venus comes to the fore with clear, yet complex, Ovidian colouring.⁵

I Love's Menace: *Amor* and *Venus* in the *Thebaid*

Love is a multivalent force in the *Thebaid*; yet, like many other seemingly positive values and virtues in the poem, Statius chiefly emphasizes its dismal aspects.⁶ As with much of the horrific in this epic, however, the poetic *doctrina* used to render it transforms the dreadful into the enjoyable or, at least, artistically admirable. A listener or reader observes the *Thebaid*'s fallen cosmos (one of *ira, furor, bellum, odium, metus, nefas, horror, caedes* etc.) from an aesthetic distance. Even if it is difficult to consistently empathize with the *Thebaid*'s characters or locate a clear moral calculus within the work, it is impossible to ignore its author's mastery over his wide-ranging craft.⁷ Statius' use of love language is as strong an indicator of his auctorial aplomb and

5. McCallum understands Vergil to be doing something similar with *amor*, in the back half of the *Aeneid*, to what I perceive Statius doing in the encompassing war-scape of the *Thebaid*—namely, complicating Ovid's depiction of love's levity in the *Amores* with its contrastive direness in the world of martial epic. (Sarah L. McCallum, "Taking Love Seriously: Amor and Erotic Elegy in Vergil's 'Italian Iliad'" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2012)). However, since Statius himself seems an even more playfully 'Ovidian' poet than Vergil, I see his 'corrective' to the *Amores* as taking on a rather more consciously metapoetic and aesthetically inventive form. McCallum's similarity of topic and approach has also convinced me that a book-length treatment of Statius' use of *amor* is not only possible but would be a welcome companion piece to her own thorough study.

6. Note that there are several positive representations of affection and tenderness in the *Thebaid*. For instance, there are devoted friends, couples, and family members throughout. Additionally, the roles of Theseus and the *ara Clementiae* (12.481ff.) in the epic's final book hint at an overriding positive representation of virtues like mercy and allyship. What I want to highlight in this article, however, is that virtually every time a seemingly positive virtue or relationship is described in the specific terms of *amor* or *Venus*, Statius undermines our expectations to expose love's frightening sides.

7. Dominik, Newlands, and Gervais summarize how Statius' bold and experimental verses, for all their affection and intertextual density, made him susceptible to criticism from modern readers and in his own age as a derivative author (William J. Dominik, Carole E. Newlands, and Kyle Gervais, "Reading Statius," in *Brill's Companion to Statius*, ed. William J. Dominik, Carole E. Newlands, and Kyle Gervais (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 3–27, 4–7). While his epic was immediately popular with the contemporary audience (cf. *Juv.* 7.82–6) Statius, a year after its publication confesses: "I am still worried about my *Thebaid*" (*adhuc pro Thebaide mea...timeo*, *Silv.* 1.1.7–8). Furthermore, Butler's appraisal encapsulates the direction of early 20th century criticism of Statius' *Thebaid*: while his "technical skill is extraordinary" and "variety of phrase infinite," "we soon weary of him" since he "lacks emotion of depth and colour" (Harold E. Butler, *Post-Augustan Poetry: from Seneca to Juvenal* (London: Oxford University Press, 1909), 206). A more favourable, contemporary approach to Statius begins in the work of Cancik (Hubert Cancik, *Untersuchungen zur lyrischen Kunst des P. Papinius Statius* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1965)) and continues with Vessey (D. W. T. C. Vessey, "Flavian Epic," in *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature II: Latin Literature*, ed. Edward J. Kenney and W. V. Clausen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 558–596, 572–80). These scholars' generous readings spurred a re-evaluation and renewal of interest in the

sense of poetic inheritance as his treatment of any other literary topoi in the work. Outside of book five, to which I will return in the latter part of this article, the use of *amor/amare* and *Venus* occur in five different types of contexts, all which frame, to different degrees, the emotion as suspect and even frightful. Through this cynical portrayal of love, Statius essentially reverses the core project of Ovid's *Amores*. Although I recognise that the *Thebaid*'s debt to love elegy goes much wider and deeper than Ovid and warrants further evaluation, in this article I will mostly limit my attention to Statius' appropriation of book one of Ovid's *Amores*.⁸

1.1 Statius' Revision of Ovidian Elegy

Ovid, exposing his neoteric sensibilities, attempts in his *Amores* to recast the negative tropes surrounding love inherited from early elegy, those which emphasize the lamentation associated with lost love as well as the genre's funereal origins, into a more blithe and playful mould.⁹ To do this, he subordinates the poetics of military epic (and its associated god, Mars) to that of elegy (and its associated goddess, Venus) and in so doing renders both traditionally serious genres more comic.¹⁰ Statius, in turn, reasserts the serious consequences of love contra Ovid by pursuing the same amalgamation in reverse: the peccadilloes of love's warfare transform into highly consequential battle lusts. Yet in reversing Ovid's course like this, Statius never betrays his own similar sense of playful Callimacheanism and delight in poetics *per se*.¹¹ One might thus say that

poet (Dominik, Newlands, and Gervais, "Reading Statius," 7–13).

8. In *Silv.* 1.2, Statius refers to both Propertius and Tibullus in the same breath as "Naso" (253–5) and quotes from both elegists' works.

9. Thorsen supports this notion, pointing out that throughout the *Amores*, Ovid "produces recusationes ('excuses') not only for being a poet instead of something useful like a soldier or lawyer, but also, as a poet for not writing of serious matters" (Thea S. Thorsen, "Ovid the Love Elegist," in *The Cambridge Companion to Latin Love Elegy*, ed. Thea S. Thorsen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 114–130, 120). Furthermore, Elegia herself, who appears in *Am.* 3.1, triumphs over the more serious genre of Tragoedia, and "stresses that she and the god of love are *levis* (*Am.* 3.1.41) and that her gentle touch...has refined even Venus" (Thorsen, 121). Keith fleshes out the distinctive neoteric quality of this representation of Elegia (whose 'lightness' suits the Callimachean demand for 'delicacy' or *leptotês*) and how it is refracted throughout the *Amores* (Alison Keith, "Corpus Eroticum: Elegiac Poetics and Elegiac Puellae in Ovid's *Amores*," *Classical World* 88, no. 1 (1994): 27–40).

10. Ovid's understanding of Mars as a deity of epic and Venus as a deity of elegy features also in his *Fasti*. But that poem, through the conflation of these two gods and their generic association, becomes "at times a rather epic kind of elegy" just as "with even greater complication, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is a rather elegiac kind of epic." cf. Stephen Hinds, "'Arma' in Ovid's *Fasti* Part 1: Genre and Mannerism," *Arethusa* 25, no. 1 (1992): 81–112.

11. Cf. Federica Bessone, "Polis, Court, Empire: Greek Culture, Roman Society, and the System of Genres in Statius' Poetry," in *Flavian Poetry and its Greek Past*, ed. Anthony Augoustakis (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 215–233. Bessone's chapter does justice to various aspects of Statius' exploitation of genre and poetic influence in his corpus and she devotes attention to the Callimacheanism of the *Thebaid* as a key part of a complicated and extensive relationship Statius develops with the Alexandrian poets throughout all his extant poetry (Bessone, 230–3). For a general account of Flavian authors' abiding interest in the Alexandrian-influenced, neoteric sensibility which char-

Statius, as an equally subversive love poet, 'out-Ovids' Ovid.¹² How Statius models not only his content but also his poetics—frequently serio-comic in tone and generically mutable—on Ovid more generally has been of interest to scholars of late, particularly in regards to the genre bending *Achilleid*, whose narrative of Achilles' transvestitism verges on the farcical in its self-conscious blurring of several would be categorical binaries.¹³ While Vergil and tragedy have long been the obvious intertexts of interest for scholars of Statius, the comic flavour of Ovid's love elegy (not to mention his epic) have an important part to play in our understanding of how Statius crafts his distinctive aesthetic in relation to the literary past.

1.2 Dubious Loves Beyond Elegy: Friendship and the Desire for Power

Admittedly, in a few select passages of the *Thebaid*, *amor/amare* appears to be used to denote affection in a straightforwardly positive way and without any undermining or generic play with elegiac precedent. Most of these instances (1.272, 1.697, 3.104, 4.384, 7.156) describe the love of a god—for a region, ritual, augur, and city respectively.¹⁴ Beyond these moments, however, any

acterized much late Roman Republic verse, see Michael Dewar, "The Flavian Epics and the Neoterics," in *Intertextuality in Flavian Epic Poetry*, ed. Neil Coffee et al. (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 107–131. For an account of how *Thebaid* book five captures "the spirit rather than the letter of Alexandrianism" by emulating the distinctively Hellenistic genre of epyllion and Callimachus' *Hecale* in particular cf. Peter J. Heslin, "A Perfect Murder: The Hypsipyle Epyllion," in *Family and Flavian Epic*, ed. Nikolett Maniotti (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 89–121, 118.

12. In Dewar's appraisal, Statius "is probably more familiar with *recherché* poetry of all kinds, Greek and Latin, than almost any Roman poet except Ovid" (Dewar, "The Flavian Epics and the Neoterics," 130). Chinn provides a useful list of "recent studies of Statius' Ovidianism" to which this article is a humble addition (Christopher Chinn, "Statius' Ovidian Achilles," *Phoenix* 67, nos. 3/4 (2013): 320–342, n.1). Interestingly, already in Butler, that infamous early twentieth century critic of Statius, we can locate a scholarly history of comparison between the Flavian poet and Ovid: "in this respect [Statius] has been not inaptly compared to Ovid. Ovid said of Callimachus *quamvis ingenio non valet, arte valet* (*Am.* 1.15.14). Ovid's detractors apply the epigram to Ovid himself. This is unjust, but so far as such a comprehensive dictum can be true of any distinguished writer, it is true of Statius. Scarcely inferior to Ovid in readiness and fertility, he ranks far below the earlier writer in all poetic essentials. Ovid's gifts are similar but more natural; his vision is clearer, his imagination more penetrating" (Butler, *Post-Augustan Poetry*, 207).

13. Bessone offers a fresh exploration of various aspects of the "Ovidian" irony" undergirding the *Achilleid*, a work which, like the *Metamorphoses*, "shapes an 'epic of ambiguity' challenging genre (and gender) boundaries" (Bessone, "Allusive (Im-)pertinence in Statius' Epic," 163–5). See Heslin for the complex dynamic of allusion-cum-rewriting that Statius pursues with Ovid in that epic (Peter J. Heslin, *The Transvestite Achilles: Gender and Genre in Statius' Achilleid* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 261–70, 274–6). Heslin's identification of a shared interest between Statius and Ovid in notions of 'hybridity'—from human gender to animal species to poetic genre—has inspired more recent work, such as that of Chinn, who identifies how "Statius' attempts at outdoing Ovid's narrative variety and hybridity...underlines his hyper-Ovidian gender and species play" to create "an Ovidianism that outplays Ovid at his own game" (Chinn, "Statius' Ovidian Achilles," 340).

14. Note, however, that at 4.384 Statius, in the mouth of a praying Bacchanal, describes Bacchus' *amor* for Thebes as having "fallen away" (*lapsus*), thereby still communicating some dismallness around the notion of divine *amor*. One other use of *amare* feels uncomplicatedly sincere: when Amphiaras, in the midst of his *aristeia*,

overt mention of *amor* or *Venus* is couched in dubiousness or irony. I will first outline two of the five categories of love in the *Thebaid* which are less expressly elegiac than the other three. While we might expect a Roman audience to be naturally predisposed to recognizing these two types of love—friendship/kinship and the love of power—as positive or even exemplary *prima facie*, such *amor* in this poem sounds an uneasy note. For instance, the former category is used to describe the friendship of Polynices and Tydeus, but this relationship prompts comparison with the fraught analogue it replaces: the fraternal bond between Polynices and Eteocles. Thus the friendship of Polynices and Tydeus by extension brings to mind the Theban curse of kindred or civil warfare—the *fraternas acies* of the poem’s opening line. In fact, when Adrastus predicts a new friendship between the two exiles, describing the possibility of “love to come” (*venturus amor*, 1.472) as a corrective for their initial hostility (*praemiserit iras*, 1.472), his choice of words mirrors the narrator’s despondent apothegm earlier in the book which claimed, in reference to Polynices, that only the “tyrant-to-be is beloved” (*venturus amatur*, 1.170), while the present tyrant, Eteocles, is despised. Adrastus’ hope for friendly or civic love is here placed directly in the forbidding context of failed kindred love and pervasive civil unrest.¹⁵

Later, Statius even frame this friendly love between the exiles in overtly elegiac terms, saying “such a great love, after their quarrels, has bound their minds” (*tantus post iurgia mentes / vinxit amor*, 2.365–6). Here he employs the elegiac genre’s standard ‘slavery of love’ (*servitium amoris*)—and, connectedly, ‘love-as-madness’ (*amentia*)—tropes to suggest that this amicable affection promises all the sorts of distresses which traditionally face the elegiac *amator*.¹⁶ This

slays Alcahous with a rock, Statius amps up the pathos of the scene by alluding to the latter’s now bereft family which includes “sons who love the shores” (*amantes litora nati*, 7. 719) of their homeland. This brief mention of love clashes strongly with how *amor* is presented elsewhere in the poem. Such a moment, however, seems to be engaging more directly with the conventions of epic than elegy. In the former genre, a pining affection for country and family by those at war is often expressed using the language of love (Cf. Johannes J. L. Smolenaars, *Statius Thebaid VII: A Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 340–2). Yet, one could possibly make an argument for including this passage in a category of elegaic *amor* in the *Thebaid* which includes loves related to grief, loss, and lamentation (more on which below). Something similar is perhaps occurring in the respective associations of *Amor* with *Somnus* and *Somnus* with *Mors* in the description of Mulciber’s paintings which decorate the ‘abode of Sleep’ (*Theb.* 10.84ff.).

15. I should also mention a third play on this phrase which turns up at *Theb.* 3.553. There the narrator, in seeming sympathy with the plights of prophets Melampus and Amphiaraus upon divining the dread web of fate that has been cast over their world, wonders aloud where and when the mortal “love of what is to come” (*amor venturi*) originated. As in the parallel phrases from book one, again both the desire and expectation for a changed, positive future are condemned in this world as naïve.

16. ‘Love-as-bondage’ language features in the Roman elegists before Ovid, e.g. *Prop.* 3.24.14–5: “captured in the cruel cauldron of Venus I was beginning to cook; my hands were bound with rope behind my back (*corruptus saeue Veneris torrebam aeno; vinctus eram uersas in mea terga manus*). Ovid integrates the trope into his *Amores* as one element of his favourite, broader conceit of love’s warfare (*militia amoris*) which I discuss in more detail later in this article. For now, it is worth noting, as Drinkwater puts it, that “on occasion the *militia* and *servitium amoris* tropes overlap” and so “each poet has his own particular preferences. As Propertius is the master of *servitium*, so

framing of the exiles' relationship helps us to then understand the elegiac connotations which extend to Statius' description of Polynices' lament over Tydeus' dead body in book nine.¹⁷ There, via Statius' careful word choice, Polynices' memory of the pair's "fine quarrels on the first night, reciprocating blows and that pledge of enduring love—brief anger!" (*primae bona iurgia noctis / alternaeque manus, et, longi pignus amoris, / ira brevis*, 9.61–3) suggests the words of an elegiac narrator bemoaning a lost lover.¹⁸

The *Thebaid* thus insists across multiple books that even a love relationship highly esteemed among the Romans—that between two friends—threatens disaster in this cosmos and distress for those embroiled in such affection. Yet, when we considering the Labdacid curse which looms over the whole epic and the fraternal conflict with which the epic opens, it is unsurprising that *amor amicitiae* has little chance of thriving or benefitting those involved in a world where its deeper manifestation as kindred love is even doomed. Beyond the poem's structural basis in kin conflict, Statius also undermines kindred love in select passages: Amphiaras' love for the Argives (*vester amor*, 3.625) is what prompts him to share the prophetic insights about impending war which stir the people into a frenzy of panic; Bacchus' domesticated tigers roaming the Aonian countryside are said to be loved by their fellow citizens, the cattle, (*ipsa has—quis credat?—amabant / armenta*, 7.572–3) just before Tisiphone rouses these same tigers to rage and slaughter; Hippomedon's loving protection of Tydeus' corpse (*corpus amat*, 9.114) marks the beginning of a hubristic outburst which leads to his death; Diana's appearance to Parthenopaeus as his loving friend Dorceus (*devinctus amore pudico*, 9.808) does nothing to dissuade the hero from his overweening hubris; and the frenzied pitch at which the Argives throng to find their loved ones upon Theiodamas' return from the night raid on Thebes, recalling nestlings reaching for their mother's "loving wings" (*amantibus...alis*, 10.462), merely adds potency to the horror of the murders. In one further example of this, Statius employs another elegiac trope—'love as con-

Ovid's favourite weapon is *militia*" (Michael O. Drinkwater, "Militia Amoris," in *The Cambridge Companion to Latin Love Elegy*, ed. Thea S. Thorsen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 194–206, 195). That being said, Ovid also makes clear his dependence on the *servitium amoris* trope from Propertian elegy in *Am.* 2.17.1–2: "if there will be anyone who thinks that slavery to a girl is repulsive, by his judgment let me be convicted as repulsive" (*Si quis erit, qui turpe putet servire puellae, / illo convincer iudice turpis ego*).

17. Statius, as we will see in our discussion of book five, often employs sexual language in tandem with scenes of lament or references to epitaphic poetry to signal his awareness of the funereal context associated with love elegy's origins. Elegy-as-lament is ubiquitous in Propertius and Tibullus, acknowledged in the broader Ovidian corpus (cf. *Ars. Am.* 236 and *Her.* 15.7) while only muted, parodied, or deconstructed in the *Amores* (e.g. 3.9.3–4). Perhaps the most linguistically striking example of Statius' conflation of lament with sexual love is in the description of the Argive families weeping for the fallen soldiers, wherein the narrator states "the wretched love lamentation and enjoy distress" (*amant miseri lamenta malisque fruuntur*, 12.45).

18. In support of this reading, in his commentary on these lines, Michael Dewar notes: "Polynices speaks of their friendship in terms which recall love elegy: for the erotic tone of *primae ... noctis* cf. Prop. 3. 20. 13 '*nox mihi prima venit! primae data tempora noctis!*', and for 'eternal love' cf. *Ars. Am.* 1. 38 '*ut longo tempore duret amor*'" (Michael Dewar, *Thebaid IX* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 70).

querer' (*amor victor*): Dymas' distraction at his friend Hoplaus' death, which is compared to a mother lion's fierce love for her whelps which "conquers her heart" (*vincit / pectora*, 10.418–9), leads directly to his own death.¹⁹

The second of the categories of *amor* mentioned above corresponds with the desires of a tyrant or emperor: a love for power and its related authority and esteem. Just like friendly and kindred *amor*, the first century CE Romans naturally respect such a love. It is a quality supported by the imperial project of *romanitas* in general, which transformed a traditional 'love of country' (*amor patriae*) into a manifest destiny of empire without end.²⁰ Yet, Statius also regularly interrogates this type of *amor*; the desire for power in the *Thebaid* is never anything but negative. Early in the poem the "love of rule" is described as "savage" (*regendi saevus amor*, 1.128) and Statius mars any empathy we might have had for Polynices' affection towards Thebes when he describes it as like that of a "ruling bull banished from his beloved vale" (*dux taurus amata / valle carens*, 2.323–4). Rather, this language encourages us to assume that such a bullish Polynices too would have been as susceptible to the seductions of tyranny as his brother proved to be.²¹ Indeed, Tydeus rightfully accuses Eteocles of being blinded by his own "love for sweet rule" (*dulcis amor regni*, 2.399) before Eteocles rejects his embassy, by claiming that the Theban *patres*, out of "love" (*amor*) over his achievements, cannot be dissuaded from venerating him (2.45). Then, once Eteocles is unseated from his throne, the same dread "love of the sceptre" (*amor sceptri*, 11.656) impels Creon's impious edicts about the brothers' burial, suggesting that this cycle of contaminating, tyrannical love is never-ending. As for the authority in battle that attends the love of power, in the gathering of the armies we are told that Hippomedon the general is a teacher to his troops of the "love of fair virtue" (*pulchraeque...virtutis amorem*, 4.128). Once we confront the true horrors of this particular war in subsequent books, however, as well as Hippomedon's Giant-like hubris in book nine, this claim could not feel more ironic.²² Fi-

19. 'Love-as-conqueror' language features in all our major Roman elegists. Drinkwater asserts that Ovid, whose erotic language is the most militaristically charged in the elegiac tradition, "exploits this idea most fully" (Drinkwater, "Militia Amoris," 202). We can find examples of love as a militaristic conqueror of (or *through*) lovers in the following passages of the *Amores*: 1.5.15–16; 1.7 *passim*; 2.9.3–4; 2.12 *passim* (cf. 2.14.1–3); and 3.11.5, wherein Ovid himself conquers love.

20. Cf. *Aen.* 4.345–61. Note, however, that Virgil also leaves room for skepticism about such *amor* when taken to the extreme, as in Anchises' description of the power lust that drove Brutus to invoke the death penalty on his two sons when they threatened their city with civil war: "love of country will conquer him and boundless desire for praise" (*vincet amor patriae laudumque immense cupido*, *Aen.* 6.823).

21. Bessone argues that Statius' *regendi saevus amor* (1.128) recalls *Luc.* 1.4, 92–3, 123–4, *Aen.* 7.461), and *Thy.* 84–5 but also has a strong "erotic connotation" that can be traced to previous accounts of Medea's *saevus amor* (*Ecl.* 8.47–8, *Enn. Med. Ex* 216, *Sen. Med.* 849–51) (Bessone, "Allusive (Im-)pertinence in Statius' Epic," 153–5). For the related 'love as ruler' trope from elegy, the opening poem of the *Amores*, in which Ovid declares that "Love rules in his empty breast" (*in vacuo pectore regnat Amor*, 26), provides the readiest intertext for any of Statius' allusions to *amor regnator*.

22. Cf. Helen V. Lovatt, *Statius and Epic Games: Sport, Politics and Poetics in the Thebaid* (Cambridge: Cam-

nally, all the constructive *amores* exhibited in the funeral games of book six, which are based in love for glory in the contest—of Admetus' horses for running (335), Phlegyas for the discus toss (673), Pollux for boxing (744), and the likening of Tydeus' wrestling match against Agylleus to an *amor*-inspired battle between bulls over a heifer—seem to jar with the rest of the poem, which everywhere suggests that the *amor* which fuels such conflict and competition has a corrupting, autocratic edge. Yes, as Lovatt puts it, in contrast to the *Iliad* or *Aeneid*, “in the *Thebaid*, each hero has his game, as each hero has his *aristeia* later on in the poem” and thus “the games function as a microcosm of the war.”²³ In this poem then, the noble love for athletics becomes eclipsed by its mirror image of myopic bloodthirstiness in battle.

1.3 Ovidian Elegiac Love with a Twist: Erotic Myth, Romance, and *Militia Amoris*

As we have seen, Statius frames both friendly love and the love of power as negative forces in the *Thebaid*, occasionally using tropes favoured in Ovidian elegy to underscore this. This has been particularly true of the depictions of *amor* we have so far covered in the epic as ‘binder’, ‘victor’ or ‘ruler’, over the mind/soul/heart of the *amator* or *amata*, as in elegy. Statius' use of *amor* language, however, in three further categories—mythological asides, romantic contexts, and descriptions of warfare—makes his indebtedness to Ovid the most patent. This is because in the *Amores* Ovid often consults paradigmatic myths²⁴ to trace parallels between sexual and martial encounters resulting in what is called the “warfare of love” (*militia amoris*) trope.²⁵ In *Am.* 1.1, the programmatic poem for book one and the part of the collection most directly preoccupied with elegy's relationship to epic, Ovid famously relates how *arma...violentaque bella* (1.1.1) were

bridge University Press, 2005), 119–28.

23. Lovatt, *Statius and Epic Games*, 19.

24. In one of the most meta-poetically self-conscious poems of the *Amores*, Ovid's narrator pledges to immortalize his lover through poetry in a way which will make her as famous as the love stories of myth have become (1.3.19–26). He then goes on to cite the stories of Io, Leda, and Europa. The latter love tale, as one foundational to Thebes, features often in the *Thebaid*. Furthermore, the premise of Ovid's *Heroides* is the general elegiac potential of mythology. Also, aetiological myths, most of them erotic in content, provide much of the Callimachean flair of the *Fasti*. But notably, throughout *Am.* 1.7, rather than the erotic myths we might expect, Ovid appeals to war-based myths to describe sexual love. Thus, in book nine of the *Thebaid*, Statius channels Ovid's interest in the overlaps between war and sex by bringing the erotic myths of *Am.* 1.3 squarely into the military arena of his epic. He compares Crenaeus, the son of the river nymph Ismenis, right before his death at Hippomedon's hands, to Europa in the terms Ovid once described her, arguably using language even more sensuous than the earlier poet's (9.334–6).

25. I owe much thanks to Drinkwater for locating many of the references to this trope cited in the following two paragraphs (Drinkwater, “*Militia Amoris*,” 194–206). In his *Ars Amatoria*, Ovid makes his baldest declaration that his is a poetry of *militia amoris*: “love is a form of warfare” (*militiae species amor est*, 2.233). He describes this notion less didactically, and more strikingly (betraying his pointedly subversive attitude towards epic), in *Amores* book two: “I sing of undertakings at home and of my own private wars” (*resque domi gestas et mea bella cano*, 2.18.12).

what he had intended to write before Cupid's intervention (1.1.3–4). The presence of this love deity in what was meant to be a martial epic threatens, according to the narrator of the poem, to reverse the nature of the cosmos and the offices of its overseeing divinities (1.1.5–16). The only way the poetic project of the *Amores* can be saved is if Ovid's narrator fully succumbs to the arrows of Cupid. Ovid conveys this with an image as suggestive of warfare as sexual penetration—two different physical encounters imagined as leading to literal and figurative death respectively: “Cupid quickly, his quiver open, selects an arrow made for my demise” (*pharetra cum protinus ille solute / legit in exitium spicula facta meum*, 1.1.21–2). Ovid thereby exploits, in a single stroke, martial epic's and love poetry's shared use of the imagery of war and death, flattening the contrasts between their uses of literal and figurative language to this end. By the end of the poem, even though Ovid has bid farewell to both the metre (*modis*, 1.1.28) and topics (*ferrea cum...bella*, 1.1.28) of martial epic, he continues to coopt its language for his own ends. If his narrator, we feel, has been prevented from applying his arsenal of military language to the epic he meant to write, he has no choice but to adapt it to the elegiac concerns which Cupid has literally implanted in him.

This poem paves the way for a pattern of imagery that crops up relentlessly in the *Amores*, even if we limit our purview to book one.²⁶ But in all of the examples of war language in Ovid's collection, we find that a supreme horror in the ancient world—that of physical pain and death in battle—steadily becomes tempered, often through consistently *humorous* juxtaposition with the comparatively trivial trials of domestic love.²⁷ Whereas earlier elegists like Propertius and Tibullus had used patterns of imagery, especially those related to lament, to present love as the ultimate woe in human life, Ovid subverts the history of the genre by superseding elegy's basis in despair with Cupid's and Venus' affection for joy. Cupid's intervention in Ovid's poetics features the god's laughter (*risisse Cupido / dicitur*, 1.1.3), a setup which frames the narrator's subsequent despair (*questus eram*, 1.1.21; *me miserum!*, 1.1.25) as parodic. This unique quality of Ovidian elegy is an important consideration for garnering a full appreciation of Statius' use of *amor* in the *Thebaid*. Whereas Ovid succeeded in taking the sting out of real human love through an attitude of levity towards love's warfare, we will see how Statius employs his own poetic artistry and militaristic milieu to insert some gravity and horror *back* into his audiences' notions of love.

26. Cf. especially 1.9.1 *et passim* and 1.11.11–2, 25.

27. Cf. n. 14 above. Murgatroyd, in his short corrective to much scholarship surrounding Ovid's quintessential *militia amoris* poem—*Am.* 1.9—asserts that, when a particularly learned poet presents an “improbable thesis and is consistently guilty of a variety of flaws in argumentation, one can only conclude that in this regard he is being deliberately flippant and provocative, in line with the poem's overall atmosphere of irreverent mischief” (Paul Murgatroyd, “The Argumentation in Ovid ‘Amores’ 1.9,” *Mnemosyne* 52, no. 5 (1999): 569–572, 570). I see such a temperament, as set out in *Am.* 1.1, to be characterising the use of the *militia amoris* trope throughout the *Amores*. It is important to note, however, that Ovidian love affairs often include rape. This has sometimes resulted in modern appraisals which follow Ovid's lead in downplaying the seriousness of sexual abuse, a trend I by no means intend to follow here.

Statius is thus at his most Ovidian when he blends our remaining three categories of *amor*—the three ingredients of Ovid's *militia amoris*—together: war, love, and erotic mythology. Perhaps the most striking Ovidian elegiac situation outside of *Thebaid* book five occurs wherever Statius describes the affair of Mars and Venus which led Vulcan to fashion a cursed wedding necklace for their daughter Harmonia (2.265ff., 3.260ff., 4.187ff.). This necklace, via inheritance, casts a pall over the marriage of the bright-eyed, youthful lovers Polynices and Argia, later even causing the death of Amphiaraus in battle. In these three passages Statius blends myth, sex, and war into a quintessentially elegiac cocktail. The curse of Thebes is framed as a direct result of the affair between Love and War.²⁸ A close study of these typical 'Ovidisms' across the *Thebaid*, both in combination and isolation, will set us up well to appreciate the full exploitation of Ovidian elegiac in book five, wherein the language of myth, sex, and war mix as effectively as in book one of the *Amores* but to contrastive ends.

Before tackling book five, therefore, we need to further appreciate how Statius highlights love's damaging implications using these three types of Ovidian touches in the rest of the *Thebaid*. In the first place, Statius mentions several mythological accounts of *amor* which call to mind, sometimes directly, Ovid's use of mythological sex tales both throughout his *Metamorphoses* and in his elegiac poetry. Indeed, a narrator's appeal to mythological exempla to describe a current amorous situation is a stock-in-trade of Roman love elegy.²⁹ In light of this, Statius deftly has Hypsipyle, who is an elegiac exemplum of Ovid's in her own right, narrate the elegiacally charged book five.³⁰ Statius cues us to anticipate this generic self-consciousness early in the *Thebaid* when Adrastus offers the first mythological exemplum of love to describe Phoebus' rape of Psamathe (*occultum...amorem*, 1.574) which took place at the streams of Nemea (*Nemeaei ad fluminis undam*, 1.575), the very locale where Hypsipyle will narrate the so-called 'Lemnian episode' of book five. Additionally, near the end of the epic, Statius briefly references

28. The similarity to the mythology surrounding Rome's origins—wherein Aeneas is a son of Venus and his descendants, Romulus and Remus, are born of Mars—is hard to ignore. But to tease out all the sociopolitical implications of this connection would take me beyond the purview of this article. McNelis identifies Statius' ekphrastic interest in the necklace of Harmonia as a foundation myth for the Labdacid curse to be a key aspect of his Callimacheanism—that is, his affinity for extended accounts of *aetia*—which he also shares with Ovid (Charles McNelis, *Statius' Thebaid and the Poetics of Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 50–75). As we have come to expect, however, Statius' emulation of Callimachus vis-à-vis the necklace also serves revisionist ends: the necklace “determine[s] and represent[s] the poem's structure and narrative” as “put in place by Vulcan, the Cyclopes and the Telchines, all of who represent similar poetic values” (such as grandiosity and lengthy narrative chronicling) at odds with those of Callimachus, even if “in later books of the *Thebaid*, Statius alludes to Callimachus in ways that counter this ‘Telchinic’ strategy.” (McNelis, *Poetics of Civil War*, 75). As with Statius' treatment of Ovid, therefore, we have with this Callimachean necklace another instance of his allusive ‘style of paradox’ (cf. Bessone, “Allusive (Im-)pertinence in Statius' Epic,” 133–8 *et passim*).

29. Cf. Fritz Graf, “Myth in Ovid,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, ed. Philip R. Hardie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 108–121, 111–5.

30. Cf. *Her.* 6.

Boreas' rape of Orythia (*Geticos...amores*, 12.631) in a decidedly Alexandrian description of the Elis region, indicating his appreciation for *Met.* 6.675–721 as well as the general affection for recherché sexual mythology which he shares with Ovid.

Regarding the use of elegiac love language in an outright erotic context, Statius, as mentioned previously, focuses on the doomed nature of the relationship between Polynices and Argia, whereas Ovid's approach to such a pair in the *Amores* would have surely been more celebratory or at least tongue-in-cheek. Polynices refers optimistically to the proposed wedding as the sort of *Venus* he and Tydeus had been lacking in their perpetual misery (2.191–2), yet the relationship, full of and associated with keen, vigorous, youthful *amor* as it is (2.232–4, 335, 341, 343; 3.704–5) will ultimately just bring further woe, especially to Argia (12.114–5, 177–80, 194–5, 459). Outside of this relationship, Statius highlights a couple of other erotic pairings in elegiac language, taking similar pains to underscore spousal love's inevitable devastation in the *Thebaid*'s hostile cosmos: Ismene's betrothed Atys is introduced in amorous language (8.557–60) before we are reminded starkly that “war forbids their matrimony” (*bella vetant taedas*, 8.561) and witness a crushing final scene between the two in which Atys, while dying, cannot bear to say farewell to his lover (*aspicit et vultu non exsatiatur amato*, 8.650). We also receive a brief snapshot of the impact that Tydeus' frenzied act of cannibalism had on his wife, Argia's sister, Deipyle, which her *amor* makes her temporarily forget in her grief for him (12.121). All told, the *Thebaid* is antagonistic towards *amantes* themselves while its poet is alert to how he can best amplify the paradoxically painful pleasures inherent in their experience.

Finally, direct associations between *amor* and *militia* throughout the *Thebaid* comprise Statius' most striking response to Ovidian elegiac poetics which he fully indulges in book five. While book one of the *Amores* makes much of the *militia amoris* trope, adapting its usage to achieve a tone of levity and celebration wanting in Ovid's elegiac precursors, Statius manages to subvert Ovid's subversion and so transform love as warfare into the love of warfare—*militia amoris* into *amor militiae*. Instead of using elegy to evaluate love's vicissitudes detachedly and humorously, Statius uses its methods to aestheticize war and the deaths it yields.³¹ Statius himself seems to share a love of war and death with many of his characters—at least a love for its artistic potentialities as a theme and the evocative language required to adequately capture its effects. Such sorts of descriptions are ubiquitous in the poem: the Thebans lying in wait for Tydeus are consumed with a “desire for slaughter” (*caedis amor*, 2.612); as battle becomes more inevitable, Mars displaces fears with “love for himself” (*amore sui*, 3.424), instils in the Argives an *amor* to take up arms rather than stay at home with their families (3.582), inspires particular affection in Capaneus (*Capaneus Mavortis amore*, 3.598), and later eliminates, as *Bellipotens*, any *amor* in men for their fatherland or life (8.386–7); Parthenopaeus is “struck with bold love

31. While Statius' use of Ovidian language in the context of war yields unique results, the poetic beautification of death scenes via erotic language and imagery is not unique to him. One thinks, for instance, of Virgil's stirring aestheticization of the final lovers embrace shared by the youths Nisus and Euryalus (*Aen.* 9. 422–49).

for war" (*audaci Martis percussus amore*, 4.260) and later, during his aristeia, enjoys battle like a freed lion "loves the fields" (*amat campos*, 9.743);³² Panic (*Pavor*, 7.127), sent by Mars, inspires "love for death and slaughter" (*mortis amor caedisque*, 7.138) in the Argive army; Amphiaras, mid-aristeia, "burns with insatiable desire for harsh war" (*ardet inexpleto saevi Mavortis amore*, 7.703); and love impels the Theban wives to arm their husbands for war in response to the Argive night raid (*illas cogit amor*, 10.570).

More provocative even than this love of war is its most extreme appearance as a love of death: the Thebans' mutilation of Tydeus' corpse is described as an act of love (*hic amor*, 9.186) in a clearly sardonic allusion to Aeneas' famously pietas-laden words of *Aeneid* 4. 347; Menoeceus, in the preliminaries to his famous suicide, is persuaded by *Virtus* to fall in love with death (*letique invasit amorem*, 10.677), later prompting his mother in grief to ask where such a *mortis amor* came from (10.804); and, lastly, both Antigone and Argia experience a "love of proud death" (*amore mortis superbae*, 12.679) when facing execution by Creon. Such a shocking and pervasive use of both *amor Martis* and *amor mortis* in the *Thebaid* represents a reversal of Ovid's model from the 'warfare of love' to 'love of warfare'. This, combined with Statius' signalling of Ovidian technique via his use of mythological exempla, alongside a consistently grievous portrayal of romantic love which contrasts Ovid's celebration of same, sets the stage perfectly for our full appreciation of how Statius' poetics of *amor militiae* in book five both homage and adapt book one of Ovid's *Amores*.

2 From *Levis* to Warrish: Statius' Transformation of Ovid's *Amores* in the 'Lemnian Episode' (*Thebaid* 5)

Book five is among the most densely intertextual segments of the *Thebaid*. This is especially due to Statius' use of Hypsipyle as a particularly conspicuous inset 'poet'. Statius here employs a well-worn technique of epic (recalling Odysseus, Aeneas, Sinon, Echo et al.) in having a character temporarily become an internal narrator, forcing the audience to determine the degree to which the character's deceit and cunning (traits associated with the Hypsipyle of both Apollonius' and Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*) are being used to shape the story to their advantage.³³ Beyond this, Statius' Hypsipyle is an amalgam borne from a long lineage of spurned female lovers in epic (especially Medea and Dido here) who apply every means at their disposal to preserve themselves

32. Jamset's observations about how Statius eroticizes Parthenopaeus through virginal, elegiac descriptors, including in the scene of the young hero's death, support my broader argument for a poetics of *amor militiae* across the *Thebaid* (Claire Jamset, "Death-Loration: The Eroticization of Death in the 'Thebaid'," *Greece & Rome* 51, no. 1 (2004): 95–104.

33. Statius draws attention to this convention by having the opening of Hypsipyle's speech (5.29–30) mirror the opening of Aeneid's similarly narratologically charged account of the fall of Troy to Dido (2.3), the most famous inset narrative in the Latin epic canon.

in the midst of love's turmoil, resulting in a brand of epic verse highly indebted to tragedy and, in the Roman epicists, love elegy.³⁴ Readers and listeners are encouraged to follow the referential lines of interest to them from this veritable bounty of intertexts. For our purposes, we can take our cue, as we have in our approach to the rest of the poem, from how love language frames Hypsipyle's narrative and reminds us of the techniques and features of Ovid's *Amores*.

2.1 Homage to Ovid

Before the narrative proper begins, Hypsipyle is already cast in the mould of elegiac mythological exemplum preferred by Ovid. When the Argive army meets her at Nemea, her appearance is one of beauteous sorrow (*pulchro in maerore*, 4.740) and the sort of dishevelment associated in elegy with heavy grief: *neglecta comam nec dives amictu* (4.743).³⁵ As such, Hypsipyle's descriptors here anticipate a more grievous narrative to come, both in her recollections and in the impending death of her young son. As is evident in some of the passages referenced earlier (especially those from book twelve), Statius often uses scenes of death and lamentation to indulge his most elegiac poetics. This is a way to acknowledge the genre's original association with funereal contexts.³⁶ In fact, it is in such scenes of lament that the epic often threatens most blatantly to turn into elegy. In such lamentation descriptions, however, Statius, still channeling Ovid's spirit while at the same time innovating on his example, hints at the aesthetic delights that accompany elegy. That Hypsipyle's *maeror* of 4.740 is called *pulcher* reflects the same sentiment that Statius' narrator expresses before Hypsipyle's tale of anguish commences: "it is sweet for the wretched to describe and recount old woes" (*Dulce loqui miseris veteresque reducere questus*, 5.48).³⁷ While the elegiac content will veer towards the horrific in book five, rather than the

34. Hypsipyle's reference to *alios amores* at 5.458, draws an explicit connection between her own poetic contexts and those of *Medea* in Euripides, Apollonius, and Valerius Flaccus. The adjective *alios* concisely articulates a fundamental principle of Statius' use of allusion and intertextuality, as explored in this paper: tradition is recast (and recast again), that is 'made other', through innovation. The intertextual use of Dido and *Aeneid* 4 in *Thebaid* 5 is too capacious to adequately cover here but follows this axiom and is well-treated by Nugent (S. Georgia Nugent, "Statius' Hypsipyle: Following in the Footsteps of the Aeneid," *Scholias* 5 (1996): 46–71) and Ganiban (Ganiban, *Statius and Virgil*, 75–95).

35. Burkowski documents how loose or unkempt hair frequently appears in elegiac passages preoccupied with grief and pain (*Tib.* 1.9.13–16; 1.10.37–8;; *Prop.* 2.8.33–4; 2.26.4; 3.7.59–60; *Am.* 2.14.39–40) or in the context of mourning (*Tib.* 1.3.5–8; *Prop.* 2.15.45–6; *Am.* 3.9.3, 11, 51–2) (Jane M. C. Burkowski, "The Symbolism and Rhetoric of Hair in Latin Elegy" (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 2013), 182ff.). Often in Ovid, however, hair either conspicuously kempt or unkempt indicates the eroticism of a *puella* (*Am.* 1.7.11–18; 1.9.37–8; 3.6.45–66, 71–2; *Ars. Am.* 1.525–64; 3.153–8) (cf. Keith, "Corpus Eroticum," 28).

36. Cf. n. 17 above.

37. With this sentiment Hypsipyle again reminds us both of Dido's rapture (*longum...amorem*) to hear the Trojans' woes (*Aen.* 1.748–56), but also of Aeneas' famous conviction that painful experiences can bring pleasure with the proper remembrance ("perhaps even these things will one day be recalled with pleasure," *forsan et haec olim meminisse iuvabit*, *Aen.* 1.203).

light-hearted tonality we find in the *Amores*, Statius promises the poetry will be no less sweet than Ovid's.

Furthermore, in the introduction to the Lemnian episode, Adrastus notes that Hypsipyle immediately reminds him of the type of woman who may have unwillingly borne the progeny of a god—a regular exemplum of love's woes both in Ovid's love elegy and *Metamorphoses*. It is fitting then that he uses the highly marked word *amor*, functioning as a double metonym for Hypsipyle's imagined divine rapist and the imposition of the entire elegiac poetic tradition on her character in the *Thebaid*, to describe this: "...or some love, not meek, fallen from the stars, impregnated you" (*seu lapsus ab astris / non humilis fecundat amor*, 4.751). As if this reference to Hypsipyle's status as one more woman in a long line of elegiac mythological exempla were not pronounced enough, Statius not much later curiously describes the Argives' interest in Hypsipyle's inset tale in similarly suggestive language: "then the desire arose in all of them to learn about her troubles" (*cunctis tunc noscere casus / ortus amor*, 5.41–2). This usage of *amor*, denoting the desire to hear a tale of woe—a love for love elegy and the myths associated with it—is unique in the *Thebaid* and certainly marks book five as over-aware of its indebtedness to elegy. It is also an unmistakable allusion to the Carthaginian episode in Vergil's *Aeneid*, a section of that epic poem which too briefly threatens to mutate into elegy. Dido, succumbing to Cupid's influence (as he sits on her lap in the guise of Ascanius) shares the Argive's marked desire (*tantus amor*, 2.10) for the Trojans' sad story (*casus cognoscere nostros*, 2.10) right before her own life, over the course of book four, becomes its own sad story of desire born out of Vergil's interest in the tension generated by the collision of epic and elegy in a single poem.³⁸ Statius, therefore, having designated his Hypsipyle as another elegiac incursion into epic, in this case more Ovidian than Vergilian, prepares his hearers for the collision of epic *militia* and elegiac *amor* in her ensuing narrative—not merely as an homage to Ovid's *Amores*, but a revision of the earlier poet's negotiation of war and love.

2.2 Undermining the *Amores*

The actual details of Hypsipyle's narrative, which portrays love and war as Venus and Mars in contrasts and combinations which would surely have captivated Ovid (yet are curiously backgrounded in Hypsipyle's *Epistula* 6 of the *Heroides*), requires some more contextualizing here. I will first offer a cursory overview of how these two gods interact in the rest of the *Thebaid* to provide the framework for their collision in book five. In book three, after Zeus has encouraged Mars to continue inciting desire for war in the hearts of the armies (*cuncta perosi / te cupiant*,

38. It seems that because Dido forsakes her queenly responsibilities and succumbs to the individualized passions of elegy, the emblematically epic Aeneas must reject her and move on. This episode in Vergil's poem thus becomes as much an exercise in pathos as a commentary on normative articulations of genre in Rome. Cf. David O. Ross, *Virgil's Aeneid: A Reader's Guide* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 32–5.

3.231–2), Venus intervenes and laments Gradivus' lack of compassion for their daughter's kin (3.262–90). Mars sympathizes with her tears, admitting that she alone of divinities can check his power, and “tear the sword from [his] right hand” (*potestas...hunc ensem avellere dextrae*, 3.296–9) before claiming that he is constrained by the dictates of the Fates and Zeus (*sed nunc fatorum monitus mentemque supremi / iussus obire patris*, 304–5). We might almost trust his sincerity if we had not heard, only a short while earlier, that Mars found these orders of Zeus delightful (*Gaudet ovans iussis*, 260). In the cosmology of this epic, while Love and War are bound to one another, the pleasures of Mars will always overshadow and defraud the will of Venus. In book nine (821ff.) Venus, who is notably embracing Mars (*Gradivum complexa Venus*, 9.822), disapproves of Diana's protection of Parthenopaeus. Her complaint convinces Mars to spur Dryas to kill the boy. Here we see that only when Venus' desires align with slaughter does Mars take them seriously: the distinctions between their respective offices are ever blurring. What is more, Diana, like Venus, also cannot resist the overwhelming authority of the war god who is, by contrast, completely at ease in this epic (9.838–40). The final mention of the relationship between Venus and Mars occurs in book ten. While the gods quarrel about the destruction visited upon their respective favourite cities, we hear: “Venus weeps for the peoples of Harmonia and, in fear of her husband stands at a distance and observes Gradivus in silent anger” (*flet Venus Harmoniae populos metuensque mariti / stat procul et tacita Gradivum respicit ira*, 10.893–4). The same anxieties plague the goddess as in book three and she is similarly powerless to prevent Mars from his slaughter of her daughters' people. Additionally, that the goddess of love herself, due to her inability to escape war's authority, weeps for the ruined progeny of Harmonia—not least for the marriage of Polynices which is ultimately cursed by her own affair with Mars—is an eloquent metatextual parallel to how Statius coopts the delights of Latin love elegy to instead limn martial epic's gruesome slaughter, effectively reversing the project of *Am.* 1.1.

Such an overview of the role of Venus in the *Thebaid* as subordinated to the dictates of Mars colours our understanding of how Hypsipyle describes the goddesses' actions in book five. On Lemnos we find a hellishly bellicose Venus, not merely under Mars' thumb as in the rest of the *Thebaid*, but fully embracing of both the god and his ethos. Statius here indulges his fantasy of love fully *becoming* war and elegy's pleasures *becoming* those of martial epic, just as Ovid had realized the opposite in the *Amores*. In her very first lines of the epic, Hypsipyle describes how, in her tale, the deeds of the bed will be infested with the deeds of war (*arma inserta toris debellatosque pudenda / ense mares*, 5.31–2). We are quickly reminded that Lemnos is a favourite locale of Mulciber (5.50–1), that husband whom Venus spurned for an affair with Mars, and so is fittingly a site of hostility to the love deity: “we dedicated no fires to Venus; there was no shrine for the goddess” (*nullos Veneri sacravimus ignis, / nulla deae sedes*, 58–9). Statius thus finds a geographical context in which the affair of Venus and Mars is a heightened and major point of contention (cf. 5.69 for a further reminder) to allusively cast Venus, a deity who should be involved in love poetry, as a sort of martial epic ritual antagonist reminiscent of the *Aeneid*'s Juno.

The Vergilian echo in *Theb.* 5.59–60 (cf. *Aen.* 1.11) needs little explication, other than to point out that Juno's epic *ira* makes way for the more elegiacally charged *dolor* of Venus.

Venus' loosening of her "nuptial girdle" (*iugalem / ceston*, 5.62–3) and loss of her "Idalian doves" (*Idalias...volucres*, 5.63) symbolize her transformation from the goddess who oversees Ovid's Cupid, one devoted to sexual pleasure and the play surrounding it, to one wholly devoted to destruction. Her infernal retinue of Furies (5.64–9) make her usual associations with the evening (cf. *Am.* 1.6.59–60) horrifying rather than titillating. In this context we can now appreciate the full impact of the direct apostrophe to Ovid's *Amores* which immediately follows these symbolic descriptions. Ovid is called into Hypsipyle's (and, by extension, Statius') poetic world only to be made to leave: "immediately you fled from Lemnos, tender *Amores*" (*protinus a Lemno teneri fugistis Amores*, 5.70).³⁹ On Hypsipyle's Lemnos, and more moderately in the *Thebaid* entire, Ovid's influence is acknowledged so it can be overthrown; Statius adopts the love poet's interests and techniques but radically revises his characteristically unserious posture towards love's vicissitudes. Sex, like everything pleasurable in the *Thebaid*, brings about Hate (*Odium*), Rage (*Furor*), and Disharmony (*Discordia*) in its conflation with war, here both the literal war between the Lemnian men and the Thracians (5.72–4) and the comparable war the women will conduct (5.143–51). As Polyxo puts it (she herself perhaps recalling the *anus* of *Am.* 1.8), the war-dominated situation on Lemnos (as paralleled in Thebes) requires a means "by which Venus might be made new" (*qua renovanda Venus*, 5.110).⁴⁰ Ovid's Venus, unforgettably embodied by the naked Corinna in the ardent tryst of *Am.* 1.5.17–24, finds her replacement in this much bleaker poetic world; this Venus cares only for the *sword's* nakedness (*nudo stabat Venus ense*, 5.135). The bloodthirsty frenzy that infests the hearts of the Lemnian woman should be exclusively the interest of Mars and gods of death, who indeed do look on in approval (5.155–7), but here Venus (and her attendant tradition of love poetry), is the most impactful deity: "but everywhere Venus, intermingled, was deceiving; Venus was holding weapons; Venus was setting anger in motion" (*sed fallit ubique / mixta Venus, Venus arma tenet, Venus admovet iras*, 5.157–8).

The night of the husbands' return from war, therefore, which otherwise might have been spent in love-making—witness the free flow of wine (5.187–8) and the ready, reclining wives (5.190–3)—transforms into a night of slaughter. Hypsipyle puts it elegantly into elegiac, love-as-fire imagery: the wives "fan in their wretched husbands a fire doomed to die" (*miseros perit-*

39. The use of the adjective *tener* here also alludes directly to Ovid's self-styling as an "master of tender love" (*artificem...tenero Amori*) in *Ars. Am.* 1.7, and a "loosener of tender Loves" (*tenerorum lusor Amorum*) in his *Tristia* (3.3.73, 4.10.1) not to mention his address to Venus as "mother of tender Loves" (*tenerorum mater Amorum*) in *Am.* 3.15.1. Statius is teasingly replacing Ovid as the master of *Amor* here by dismissing him from the *Thebaid*, as well as substituting Ovid's maternal, nurturing Venus with a savage, destructive counterpart.

40. Note that Statius has Polyxo appeal to the story of Procne to bolster her speech, using another favourite mythological exemplum of Ovidian elegy and epic for the horrors of love (cf. *Met.* 6.412–674; *Am.* 2.6.7–10; *Ars. Am.* 2.383–4; *Rem. Am.* 61).

uro adflaverat igni, 5.194).⁴¹ The wine which promised sex now serves to symbolically prefigure the banquet of blood which Hypsipyle and Thoas will pass as they flee the city. The two see a literalized commingling of the setting of love and its poetry with the gore of war—“wine mixed with blood just now returning to its goblets in a torrent from open throats (*iugulisque modo torrentis apertis / sanguine permixto redeuntem in pocula Bacchum*, 5.256–7). When father and daughter appeal to Bacchus for help, we see that even that god has been all but neutralized by the prevailing war-drunkenness of the Lemnian women (5.265ff.).⁴²

Of the details Hypsipyle shares from the night in question, one account stands out in particular for its indebtedness to and subversion of Ovidian love elegy. In the description of Gorge’s slaying of her husband Elymus (5.207–17), Statius obviously coopts language and several tropes of the love-making scenes from the *Amores*. The horror is palpable, but we appreciate the poetic skill Statius employs to undercut Ovidian juxtapositions of war and love. The proposition of a sexual tryst following a boozy dinner, of which Elymus’ wine-breath (*efflantem somno crescentia vina*, 5.209) and stupor (*infelix sopor*, 5.211) are reminders, creates a link from Elymus’ amorous expectations to the atmosphere of *Am.* 1.4, a poem concerned with illicit flirtation at a *cena*. While the elegy vibrantly captures arousal and anticipation around sex, the Gorge narrative replaces sexual gratification with that following vengeful murder. Moreover, when Gorge rummages around in Elymus’ clothes and strews them about (*disiecta rimatur veste*, 5.210), we are reminded ironically of Corinna’s scanty (*rara*) tunic which Ovid’s narrator tears from her in his passion (*deripui tunicam*, *Am.* 1.5.13). But here we are told that Gorge is actually searching for somewhere to apply a mortal wound (*vulnera*, 5. 210) against her husband.

Furthermore, the rest and relaxation normally associated with the culmination of sex (*Am.* 1.5.25) here flees Elymus (*refugit*, 5.211) at the threat of death’s more permanent sleep (*admota sub morte*, 5.211). Elymus’ embrace (*amplexu*) of his wife is represented in militaristic terminology (*incertum hostem*, 5.212; *occupat*, 5.213) which reminds us of the pugnacious sex in Ovid (*pugnabat...pugnaret...victa est...*, *Am.* 1.5.14–6), except that here the warfare is literal and the sex is symbolic: a literal penetration by the sword (*ferro*, 5.214) occurs in lieu of the penetration Elymus might have been anticipating. Statius includes another reversal of expectation to remind us that his allusivity is revisionary: it is the female, as a representative of the female love deity Venus, who does the deadly penetrating. Finally, the closing lines of the scene bring out further elegiac language. Both *blandus* (5.216) and *collo* (5.217) occur frequently in *Amores* book one. The former most often connotes a cunning sort of flirtatiousness which is not fully to be trusted (cf. *Am.* 1.2.33; 1.4.66; 1.6.15; 1.7.42; 1.8.103; 1.11.14; 1.15.18) and the latter denotes a body

41. ‘Love as fire’ (*ignis*) is another pervasive image in the Roman elegiac corpus. Notable usages from Ovid crop up in *Am.* 1.2.9 and 2.19.15, as well as 2.16.11–12 where Ovid meta-poetically jokes about fire’s use as a love metaphor. Beyond the word *ignis* itself, more generalized language of burning, as with the *uror* of *Am.* 1.1.26, is also common.

42. Cf. n. 2 above. Also note again that it is Bacchus here who, despite his divine status and associations with sexual love (cf. *Am.* 1.6.59–60), defeatedly poses the question which gives this paper its title (5.282–3).

part associated with erotic attraction (*Am.* 1.4.6, 35; 1.5.10) but also sexual violence (*Am.* 1.6.42; 1.8.98). The possible negative implications of both words, then, which are rendered harmless or humorous by turns in Ovid, are fully realized in the gruesome recontextualization of the Gorge scene.

3 Conclusion: Ovid Outdone

Even more could be said about the arrival of the Argonauts on Lemnos to demonstrate how Statius further develops his own dire poetics of love, albeit in a less heightened fashion, throughout the rest of book five. But I expect that the Flavian poet's direct engagement with Ovidian *amor* has by now become clear. The first few hundred lines of book five comprise the pinnacle of Statius' subversive development of *amor militiae* in lieu of the Ovidian *militia amoris*, a technique both anticipated and refracted, as we have seen, in the rest of the *Thebaid*. To conclude, then, we can turn to a final brief passage wherein Statius reiterates the *Thebaid*'s intertextual relationship to Ovid that we have been exploring. In his catalogue of Arcadian allies Statius alludes to Zeus' rape of Callisto (4.293–4), a favourite sex story of Ovid's (cf. *Met.* 2.409–530; *Fast.* 2.153–92). He then apostrophizes some abstract divine *Amores*, as he will again at 5.70, claiming that they found the incident humorous: *quae risistis, Amores* (4.293). Statius signals his sophisticated relationship to Ovidian elegy already in this moment. The apostrophe to the *Amores* here, which recurs at 5.70, is evidently another allusion to the title for Ovid's elegiac masterwork. On a surface level, Statius is using one well-known erotic myth to signal the intense elegiac overtones to come in book five's Lemnian 'myth'. Beyond that, however, he is indicating that he will engage with an Ovidian poetics of love—famously reliant on levity and humour—in the process (cf. *risisse Cupido / dicitur Am.* 1.1.3–4). Even before the Lemnian episode begins, we are primed to read its Venus with Ovid on our minds.

As we have seen, however, in his dramatization of the Lemnian episode Statius will reverse the goals of Ovidian Alexandrianism. The earlier poet had followed a tradition of engagement with poetic models whose allusive play with tropes and forms helped him take the tragic sting out of love to highlight its comic side; the later poet, in turn, coopts similar techniques to instead assert the aesthetic delights to be found in the horrors of *amor*. Statius' epic transmutation of Venus into the more savage Mars thus replaces Ovid's elegiac tempering of Mars within the traditional realm of Venus. The domestic love 'battles' of the *Amores* transform, in Statius' poem, into bellicose bloodlusts of cosmic proportion.

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	Statius, <i>Achilleid.</i>
<i>Aen.</i>	Vergil, <i>Aeneid.</i>
<i>Am.</i>	Ovid, <i>Amores.</i>
<i>Ap. Arg.</i>	Appollonius, <i>Argonautica.</i>
<i>Ars. Am.</i>	Ovid, <i>Ars Amatoria.</i>
<i>DRN</i>	Lucretius, <i>De Rerum Natura.</i>
<i>Ecl.</i>	Vergil, <i>Eclogues.</i>
<i>Enn. Med. Ex</i>	Ennius, <i>Medea Exul.</i>
	Euripides, <i>Medea.</i>
<i>Fast.</i>	Ovid, <i>Fasti.</i>
<i>Her.</i>	Ovid, <i>Heroides.</i>
<i>Il.</i>	Homer, <i>Iliad.</i>
<i>Juv.</i>	Juvenal, <i>Satires.</i>
<i>Luc.</i>	Lucan, <i>De Bello Civile.</i>
<i>Met.</i>	Ovid, <i>Metamorphoses.</i>
<i>Od.</i>	Homer, <i>Odyssey.</i>
<i>Prop.</i>	Propertius, <i>Elegies.</i>
<i>Rem. Am.</i>	Ovid, <i>Remedia Amoris.</i>
<i>Sen. Med.</i>	Seneca, <i>Medea.</i>
<i>Silv.</i>	Statius, <i>Silvae.</i>
<i>Theb.</i>	Statius, <i>Thebaid.</i>
<i>Thy.</i>	Seneca, <i>Thyestes.</i>

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