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# *Sicut in Caelo et in Terra*

## **Amphiaraus, Thiodamas, and the Theology of Statius' *Thebaid***

Ludovico Pontiggia, Cambridge

[T]he Earth  
Though, in comparison of Heav'n, so small,  
Nor glistening, may of solid good containe  
More plenty then the Sun that barren shines,  
Whose vertue on it self workes no effect,  
But in the fruitful Earth; there first receavd  
His beams, unactive else, thir vigour find.  
(Milton, *Paradise Lost*)

**Abstract.** L'articolo inquadra il ruolo dei veggenti Anfiarao e Tiodamante nella teologia della *Tebaide* di Stazio. Nella prima parte, si mette in relazione la crisi religiosa di Anfiarao con la crisi della provvidenza che culmina col congedo di Giove e gli altri dèi nell'undicesimo libro. Nella seconda parte, si interpreta il geocentrismo di Tiodamante, in opposizione al teocentrismo del predecessore, come modello cosmico in grado di garantire alla Terra una maggiore centralità, e all'uomo una maggiore autonomia, rispetto al Cielo: un modello che Teseo farà proprio nel finale. In entrambe le sezioni, Stazio sfrutta l'intertesto lucreziano e il suo anti-provvidenzialismo prima per mettere in crisi la religione di Anfiarao (*pars destruens*), poi per proporre un modello positivo di un mondo (quasi) indipendente dagli dèi (*pars construens*).

**Keywords.** Anfiarao, Tiodamante, Stazio, Lucrezio, teologia, rituale, guerra civile.

In a seminal study on the divine machinery of the *Thebaid*, Denis Feeney praised Statius' use of the gods as "an astonishing exercise of resilient originality in the face of a tradition which must have threatened any sense of adequacy he possessed".<sup>1</sup> Such an astonishing originality, Feeney argues, lies in the process of disempowerment and marginalisation which the gods undergo throughout Statius' epic, increasingly reduced to a merely cosmetic ornament. At the climax of the poem, in a shocking and unprecedented scene, Jupiter even summons the other Olympians and orders them to turn their gaze away from Thebes, thereby dramatising the dismissal of the *deorum ministeria* that Lucan had enacted all along in his epic (11.119–135). Shortly afterwards, even the Furies withdraw, having been

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\* This article, drawn from my MA dissertation, is the revised version of a paper I presented in Besançon and, remotely, in Geneva. I would like to thank all those who had the patience to read, comment and improve various drafts of this work: above all, Julene Abad Del Vecchio, Federica Bessone, Stefano Briguglio, Lavinia Galli Milić, Philip Hardie, Lisa Piazza, and the anonymous referee of *Museum Helveticum*.

<sup>1</sup> D. C. Feeney, *The Gods in Epic. Poets and Critics of the Classical Tradition* (Oxford 1991) 339.

made superfluous by the more powerful *furor* of Eteocles and Polynices (11.537–538). Humans are left alone on the epic stage to fend for themselves. Most of the gods are not to come back, certainly not Jupiter, and the few who do come back get no more than a walk-on part.<sup>2</sup>

It is in this virtually godless environment that Theseus, the *homo ex machina*, is eventually called on to make up for the shortcomings of the divine apparatus. The Argive women resort to Theseus because Jupiter, along with the other gods, has disappeared (*ubi numina, ubi illest / fulminis iniusti iaculator? ubi estis, Athenae?*, 12.561–562). The Athenian king succeeds in restoring order in Thebes, one which, however, does not envisage a (full) reintegration of the gods into the human world, but rather a transferral of the divine power previously wielded and abdicated by Jupiter into the hands of a human ruler. Statius thus pushes Theseus beyond Aeneas, whose final elevation to a Jovian status is still set in a section where Jupiter has just proved to hold the reins of human affairs (*Aen.* 12.919–929). In *Thebaid* 12, Statius' hero shows that an enlightened ruler can do not only *better* than the gods, but even *without* them. The theological hierarchies that had long since characterised the epic tradition are thus shattered and substantially reshaped.<sup>3</sup>

In this article, I will explore this shift from a theocentric to an anthropocentric religion by focusing on two different characters, by nature inclined to investigate and reflect on divine matters: the seers Amphiaraus and Thiodamas.<sup>4</sup> In the first part, I will analyse the religious crisis experienced by Amphiaraus in *Thebaid* 3 as part of the crisis of Jovian providence and Olympian religion that climaxes with the ousting of the divine apparatus in Book 11. In the second part, I will argue that, in *Thebaid* 8, Thiodamas proposes a different model of religion, centred on Earth and mankind at the expense of a marginalised divine apparatus. I will thus argue that the succession from Amphiaraus to Thiodamas anticipates, early on in the poem, the transition from a “vertical” to a “horizontal” religion that will be fully accomplished in *Thebaid* 12.

I will also show that Amphiaraus' religious crisis and Thiodamas' solution to it are often mediated via the didactic language of Lucretius' *De rerum natura* and its materialistic worldview in which gods – assuming they exist – do not interfere

<sup>2</sup> See Feeney, *loc. cit.* (n. 1) 337–391. On Statius' theology see also, among many, C. Criado, *La teología de la Tebaida estaciana: el anti-virgilianismo de un clasicista* (Zurich/New York 2000).

<sup>3</sup> See K. F. L. Pollmann, *Statius, Thebaid 12. Introduction, Text, and Commentary* (Paderborn 2004) 39–43; F. Bessone, *La Tebaide di Stazio: epica e potere* (Pisa/Rome 2011) 45–74; ead., “Religion and Power in the *Thebaid*”, in A. Augoustakis (ed.), *Ritual and Religion in Flavian Epic* (Oxford 2013) 145–161. Many scholars do not agree with Bessone's interpretation of the finale of the *Thebaid*, to which I fully subscribe. An analysis of the critical debate, with previous bibliography, in Criado, *loc. cit.* (n. 2) 235–236; F. Bessone, “Critical Interaction: Constructing Heroic Models and Imperial Ideology in Flavian Epic”, in G. Manuwald/A. Voigt (eds.), *Flavian Epic Interactions* (Berlin/Boston 2013) 87–105. On Aeneas and Jupiter see P. R. Hardie, *Virgil's Aeneid: Cosmos and Imperium* (Oxford 1986) 147–154.

<sup>4</sup> On Amphiaraus and Thiodamas in the *Thebaid* see the recent monograph by N. Jäger, *Amphiaraus: Ritual und Schwelle in Statius' Thebais* (Berlin/Boston 2020). Quite regrettably, however, large portions of it offer only little more than a commented paraphrase of the text.

in human affairs: indeed an appropriate intertext for setting the scene for Theseus' final restoration of a cosmos no longer subject to the gods' pernicious influence.<sup>5</sup> I will first argue that, in Book 3, Epicurean anti-providentialism is used to deconstruct and refute the Stoicising idea, shared by Amphiaraus, that Jupiter and fate preside over human events (*pars destruens*). I will then contend that, in Book 8, Lucretius' materialistic nature helps Thiodamas to build a new positive model of cosmos, one in which the agency of the gods over human affairs is radically downsized and stronger barriers are erected between Heaven and Earth (*pars construens*). Although it may be tempting to read some of the *Thebaid*'s characters as figures espousing an Epicurean stance, in this particular contribution I refrain from doing so: the article's primary aim is simply to show that elements of Epicurean anti-providentialism contribute to the emancipation of Earth from Heaven that is so peculiar to the theology of the *Thebaid*.

## Amphiaraus and Jupiter

Before the Argives set out to Thebes, Adrastus asks Amphiaraus and his senior companion Melampus to seek interpretation of the gods' will and predict the outcome of the war. The two priests first seek a response in the cattle entrails: haruspicy fails, so they resort to auspicy (3.456–459). Amphiaraus opens the ritual with a Hymn to Jupiter, ending with the request to disclose the future to the Argives (471–496). Ill omens begin to appear in the sky, leaving the two priests puzzled (502–523), when suddenly seven eagles gather to attack a flock of swans (524–547). Amphiaraus immediately understands the allegorical meaning of this ornithomachy: the seven eagles stand for the Seven (*Inachii sint hi tibi, concipe, reges*, 533), while the swans stand for Thebes (*has rere in imagine Thebas*, 528).

This omen is a *Thebaid* in miniature. The doom of each of the seven eagles alludes to the fate of its corresponding Argive leader later on in Books 7–11, though narrated in a different order – Capaneus, Parthenopaeus, Polynices, Adrastus, Hippomedon, Tydeus, Amphiaraus (*Theb.* 3.536–547):

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<sup>5</sup> Similar studies on the Epicurean features of other characters of the *Thebaid* already exist. On Coroebus see S. Briguglio, *La notte di Argo. Commento a Stazio, Tebaide, 1*, 390–720 (Alessandria 2020) 3–13. On Capaneus see A.-M. Taisne, “Le De rerum natura et la Thébaïde de Stace”, in R. Poignault (ed.), *Présence de Lucrèce. Actes du colloque tenu à Tours (3–5 décembre 1998)* (Tours 1999) 170; P. Chaudhuri, *The War with God: Theomachy in Roman Imperial Poetry* (Oxford 2014) 256–297; C. Reitz, “Is Capaneus an Epicurean? A Case Study in Epic and Philosophy”, in F. Bessone/M. Fucocchi (eds.), *The Literary Genres in the Flavian Age: Canons, Transformations, Reception* (2017) 317–331; L. Pontiggia, “La folgore di Giove e la teomachia di Capaneo nella Tebaide di Stazio”, *MD* 80 (2018) 165–192.

“cernis inexperto rorantes sanguine ventos,  
 et plumis stillare diem? quae saeva repente  
 victores agitat leto Iovis ira sinistri?  
 hic excelsa petens subita face solis inarsit  
 540 summisitque animos. illum vestigia adortum  
 maiorum volucrum, tenerae, deponitis, alae.  
 hic hosti implicitus pariter ruit; hunc fuga retro  
 volvit agens sociae linquentem fata catervae;  
 hic nimbo glomeratus obit; hic praepete viva  
 545 pascitur inmoriens; spargit cava nubila sanguis.”  
 “quid furtim inlacrimas?” “illum, venerande Melampu,  
 qui cadit agnosco.”

539 solis mss. : solus Alton 546 q. f. i.? Amphiarao attribuunt scholium et edd. nonnulli

This catalogue evokes the section of the proem where Statius himself asks the Muse Clio whose death he should relate first – whether Tydeus’, Amphiaras’, Hippomedon’s, Parthenopaeus’, or Capaneus’ – and thereby provides a trailer of the poem (1.41–45).<sup>6</sup> Amphiaras himself recommends a metapoetic reading of the omen (*has rere in imagine Thebas*, “imagine they are Thebes” or “imagine this is the *Thebaid*”, 3.528).<sup>7</sup> By interpreting Jupiter’s will through this omen, then, Amphiaras reflects more generally on the involvement of Jupiter within the *Thebaid*, that is, on the poem’s Διὸς βουλή.<sup>8</sup>

The verdict is a grim paradox. On the one hand, the very fact that the omen happens directly after Amphiaras’ prayer, and its accuracy, vouch for the existence of a Jovian fate, in keeping with Stoic theories on divination.<sup>9</sup> Jupiter must be directly involved in the Theban war staged by the birds in the sky. On the other hand, the fact that Jupiter directs his wrath (*Iovis ira sinistri*, 538) against some eagles, the birds sacred to him (*armigeras summi Iovis*, 532), is not simply a fitting image of civil war, corresponding to Jupiter’s decision, itself theologically problematic, to exterminate his own offspring (*nunc geminas punire domos, quis san-*

<sup>6</sup> The vision of Lucan’s Roman *matrona* (Lucan. 1.678–694), alluded to at the end of Amphiaras’ ornithoscopy (*illum qui cadit agnosco, Theb. 3.546–547 ~ hunc ego qui iacet agnosco*, Lucan. 1.685–686), similarly provides a trailer of the *Pharsalia* (and beyond) and can be regarded as a re-statement of the proem by an internal character with prophetic insight (*quis furor hic, o Phoebe?*, 681 ~ *quis furor, o cives?*, 8; *Emathias acies*, 688 ~ *Emathios campos*, 1): see Feeney, *loc. cit.* (n. 1) 275.

<sup>7</sup> See A. Walter, *Erzählen und Gesang im flavischen Epos* (Berlin 2014) 169, 178; R. Cowan, “Knowing Me, Knowing You: Epic *Anagnorisis* and the Recognition of Tragedy”, in S. Papaioannou/A. Marinis (eds.), *Elements of Tragedy in Flavian Epic* (Berlin/Boston 2021) 51–52. For *Thebae* = *Thebais* cf. *Theb. 1.2*.

<sup>8</sup> See A. Tuttle, “Argive Augury and Portents in the *Thebaid*”, in Augoustakis, *loc. cit.* (n. 3) 71–87.

<sup>9</sup> On the Stoic colour of the Hymn to Jupiter and the following ornithoscopy see L. Legras, *Études sur la Thébaïde de Stace* (Paris 1905) 168–174; D. W. T. Vessey, *Statius and the Thebaid* (Cambridge 1973) 153–154; F. Ripoll, “Les scènes d’ornithomancie dans les épopées latines d’époque flavienne”, *Latomus* 61 (2002) 939–945.



*guinis auctor / ipse ego, descendo*, 1.224–225), but also resembles one of the proofs that materialist philosophers would use to prove Jupiter's irrationality, hence to refute his engagement in human affairs or even his very existence.

Lucretius, the most authoritative poetic voice of materialism in Rome, provides an important model. In order to prove that thunderbolts are purely natural phenomena, he argues that if they were hurled by wrathful Jupiter, the god would not strike his own and his fellow gods' temples and statues, as occasionally happens (*postremo cur sancta deum delubra suasque / discutit infesto praeclaras fulmine sedis / et bene facta deum frangit simulacra suisque / demit imaginibus violento vulnere honorem?*, *Lucr.* 6.417–620). Lucan exploits this idea when he compares Caesar to a lightning which rages *in sua templa*, “against its own sky” but also “against its own heaven” (*Lucan.* 1.155),<sup>10</sup> and is bound to strike down Pompey the oak, the tree sacred to Jupiter. Along the same lines, Statius' Capaneus urges Jupiter to light up his oak-torch with the fire of the thunderbolt (*in Thebas his iam decet ignibus uti, / hinc renovare faces lassamque accendere quercum*, *Theb.* 10.925–926) instead of destroying his (father-in-law's) city (*soceri turres excindere Cadmi*, 906; cf. *excindisne tuas Thebas?*, 7.155), thus tempting the god into the same materialistic self-refutation.<sup>11</sup> In Amphiaras' omen, if Alton's (perhaps unnecessary) conjecture of *solus* for *solis* is right, the Capaneus-eagle is also killed, while rising alone too lofty into the sky, precisely by a flash of lightning (*subita face solus inarsit*, 539), the quintessential form of *Iovis ira* (538), instead of a sudden sunstroke, as the manuscripts suggest (*subita face solis inarsit*).<sup>12</sup> In any case, the image of Jupiter raging, possibly even thundering, against his own birds perfectly matches that of Jupiter destroying his own temples, statues and trees.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See M. Leigh, “César coup de foudre: la signification d'un symbole chez Lucain”, in O. Devillers/S. Franchet d'Espèrey (eds.), *Lucain en débat. Rhétorique, poétique et histoire. Actes du colloque international, Institut Ausonius, Pessac, 12–14 juin 2008* (Bordeaux 2010) 162–163.

<sup>11</sup> See Pontiggia, *loc. cit.* (n. 5) 180–183. Capaneus' assault on Heaven can be regarded as a mythical projection of the *bellum Capitolinum* of 69 CE, a historical Gigantomachy (*bella Iovis*, 1.22) in which the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus was burnt down by the “Giant” Vitellius: see S. Rebeggiani, *The Fragility of Power: Statius, Domitian and the Politics of the Thebaid* (Oxford 2018) 253–261. Jupiter's thundering against Thebes thus evokes, if indirectly, the image of Jupiter storming his own Roman temple.

<sup>12</sup> See E. H. Alton, “Notes on the *Thebaid* of Statius”, *ClQu* 17 (1923) 175–186, followed by Hill. Shackleton Bailey's 2003 Loeb prints *solus* but translates *solis* (“one ... has all at once taken fire from the sun's torch”, p. 189). If, on the one hand, the suddenness of the fire (*subita face inarsit*) befits a death by lightning better than one by a sudden sunstroke, and the eagle's loneliness (*solus*) matches Capaneus' audacity in challenging Jupiter to single combat (cf. 10.902–903; 11.123–124), on the other, the idea of an “Icarian” death due to the sun's fire is not at all “absurd”, as Alton brands it, for a tale of *hybris* punished (*summisit animos*): see H. Snijder, *P. Papinius Statius, Thebaid. A Commentary on Book III* (Amsterdam 1968) 215–216 ad 539. I would be less sceptical about *solus* if it had been transmitted by the manuscripts.

<sup>13</sup> On the tradition and fortune of this topos see G. Colesanti, “Armida e l'ingiustizia degli dèi. Per l'esegesi e i modelli classici di *Gerusalemme Liberata* XVI 58, vv. 7–8”, *MD* 57 (2006) 137–181.

The entire auspicy is clearly framed as a Lucretian argument. Melampus opens his response with a question introduced by the typically Lucretian phrase *nonne vides?* (*nonne sub excelso spirantis limite caeli, / Amphiarae, vides ... ?*, 502–505).<sup>14</sup> Amphiarus, in turn, introduces the omen by calling for his addressee's attention (*huc adverte animum*, 524), another didactic move dear to Lucretius (*haec animum te advertere par est*, Lucr. 2.125).<sup>15</sup> Finally, as he starts to describe the eagles' demise, Amphiarus draws Melampus' attention through the verb *cernis?* (*Theb.* 3.536–537), which, in the specific form of a didactic rhetorical question, is not attested in Latin poetry before Lucretius (*non cernis?*, Lucr. 2.209; 5.306–310).<sup>16</sup>

Amphiarus finds himself entangled in the same theological paradox as his Lucanian models, the prophets Arruns and Nigidius Figulus.<sup>17</sup> Towards the end of *Pharsalia* 1, a series of portents reveals the active involvement of the gods in the upcoming war (*iamque irae patuere deum*, Lucan. 2.1). However, the irrationality of civil war keeps Nigidius from accepting the straightforward conclusion that Jupiter has devised such a crime. On the contrary, he in turn resorts to a Lucretian pattern of multiple explanations to express his puzzlement (Lucan. 1.642–645):

“aut hic errat” ait “nulla cum lege per aevum  
mundus et incerto discurrent sidera motu  
aut, si fata movent, urbi generique paratur  
humano matura lues.”

The world must be governed either by pure chance, which is the negation of Jupiter's providential authority, or by sadistic deities who are plotting Rome's ruin.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> On *nonne vides?* in Lucretius and in the Greek and Latin didactic tradition see A. Schiesaro, “Nonne vides in Lucrezio”, *MD* 13 (1984) 143–157; R. A. B. Mynors, *Virgil, Georgics. Edited with a Commentary* (Oxford 1990) 12–13 ad 1.56.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. also Lucr. 2.1023; 3.46, 181; 4.812. Amphiarus' imperatives *rere* and *concipe* (*Theb.* 3.528, 533) are also typical of didactic poetry and have relatives in Lucretius (e.g., *accipe, percipe*): see D. Marković, *The Rhetoric of Explanation in Lucretius' De rerum natura* (Leiden/Boston 2008) 72–73 with n. 103.

<sup>16</sup> A variation on *nonne vides?*: see Schiesaro, *loc. cit.* (n. 14) 144.

<sup>17</sup> On the three prophecies at the end of *Pharsalia* 1 as models for Amphiarus' prophecy see E. Fantham, “The Perils of Prophecy: Statius' Amphiarus and His Literary Antecedents”, in R. R. Nauta/H. van Dam/J. J. L. Smolenaars (eds.), *Flavian Poetry* (Leiden/Boston 2006) 149, 152–153, 156–157. I would add that Statius' conclusive invective against mantic arts, which already the scholium compared with Lucan's wish that humans be deprived of any such foreknowledge (*Theb.* 3.551–565 ~ Lucan. 2.14–15, with Lact. Plac. *ad Theb.* 3.551), refers quite explicitly to Lucan's triptych: Arruns (*hinc fibrae*, 557), Nigidius (*astrorumque vices*, 558) and Erictho (*Thessalicumque nefas*, 559, glossed by the scholiast as *artem magicam dicit, qua cadavera cogit futura praedicere*, Lact. Plac. *ad loc.*). On Melampus and Amphiarus' allegiance to Lucan's pessimism see T. Stover, “Apollonius, Valerius Flaccus, and Statius: Argonautic Elements in *Thebaid* 3.499–647”, *AJPh* 130 (2009) 445–453.

<sup>18</sup> See Feeney, *loc. cit.* (n. 1) 279–281; P. R. Hardie, “Lucretian Multiple Explanations and Their Reception in Latin Didactic and Epic”, in M. Beretta/F. Citti (eds.), *Lucrezio: la natura e la scienza* (Florence 2008) 85–86.

Arruns identifies these evil deities not with Jupiter, but with the infernal gods (*nec enim tibi, summe, litavi, / Iuppiter, hoc sacrum caesique in pectora tauri / inferni venere dei*, Lucan. 1.632–634).<sup>19</sup> At any rate, whether no providence or a cruel providence oversee the workings of civil war, Jupiter, traditionally the god of a rational and benevolent providence (*bonus ille deum genitor*, *Theb.* 3.556), is dismissed.<sup>20</sup>

Amphiaras' religion is tested on his first and last day of war. At the end of his aristeia, eventually abandoned by Apollo, the seer is swallowed by an abyss that opens up in the earth under his chariot (*Theb.* 7.794–823). This remarkable event is the realisation of what many humans, according to Lucretius, fear when faced with earthquakes (*timoris / ne pedibus raptim tellus subtracta feratur / in barathrum*, Lucr. 6.604–606). Unlike Lucretius, however, Statius is not fully convinced that this phenomenon has purely natural causes, as he gives as many as six alternative explanations to account for it, involving natural and supernatural agents alike, again through the Lucretian pattern *sive ... seu* (*Theb.* 7.809–816). Strikingly, however, none of these options envisages the possible intervention of Jupiter, whom part of the mythical tradition, with which Statius' Dis seems to be familiar, held responsible for Amphiaras' engulfment (Pind. *Nem.* 9.57–59; [Apollod.] *bibl.* 3.77; cf. *Theb.* 8.41–42).<sup>21</sup> So, the mere presence of scientific explanations, largely borrowed from Lucretius' section on earthquakes (*Theb.* 7.809–813 ~ Lucr. 6.535–607), is an innovation on the myth and functions to “bring the mythological event at least partly within the bounds of natural-philosophical didactic, the genre of the *De rerum natura*”.<sup>22</sup> Amphiaras' plunging into the abyss of Earth marks a further step away, literal and metaphorical, from Heaven and from the Jupiter he still believed in, and hymned, back in Book 3.

Amphiaras' catabasis crowns this disillusion. His descent to the Underworld through the void (*limite praceps / non licito per inane ruis*, *Theb.* 8.84–85) literalises, and mythologises, the audacious flight of Epicurus' mind to unlock the truths of nature,<sup>23</sup> and the business card he shows to Dis (*mihi qui quondam causas elementaque noram*, 92) makes him look like Virgil's model of didactic poetry (*felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas*, *georg.* 2.490). Now, Amphiaras' Lucre-

<sup>19</sup> In the same way, Melampus sees no eagles – hence no Jupiter – in the sky (*non fulminis ardens / vector adest*, *Theb.* 3.506–507), but only evil and nocturnal birds associated with the Underworld (*monstra volant: dirae stridunt in nube volucres / nocturnaeque gemunt striges et feralia bubo / damna canens*, 510–512).

<sup>20</sup> See E. Narducci, *Lucano: un'epica contro l'impero. Interpretazione della Pharsalia* (Rome/Bari 2002) 152–166.

<sup>21</sup> See J. J. L. Smolenaars, *Statius, Thebaid VII. A Commentary* (Leiden/New York/Cologne 1994) 390 ad 815 f. The absence of Jupiter is even more marked if one contrasts this section with the multiple explanations, both natural and supernatural, given by Amphiaras in the Hymn to Jupiter on the aetiology of ornithomancy (*Theb.* 3.482–488), where the first explanation ascribes it to Jupiter's agency (*superae seu conditor aulae / sic dedit*, 483–484): see Hardie, *loc. cit.* (n. 18) 92–94.

<sup>22</sup> P. R. Hardie, “Flavian Epic and the Sublime”, in Manuwald/Voigt, *loc. cit.* (n. 3) 130.

<sup>23</sup> See Hardie, *loc. cit.* (n. 22) 130.



tian catabasis is certainly not in keeping with the Epicurean firm conviction that Hell and afterlife are nothing but scary tales.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, on one crucial point Lucretius does offer something to Statius: Jupiter appears not to be involved in the plotting of civil war, just as he was not in the earthquake. For here in Hell, the priest witnesses Dis spur on Tisiphone to trigger the *nefas* of the remaining part of the conflict: Eteocles and Polynices' mutual fratricide, Tydeus' anthropophagy, Creon's edict, and Capaneus' gigantomachy (8.69–77). In this metapoetic "proem in the middle", Dis offers yet another preview of *Thebaid* 8–11 similar to the one that Amphiaraus offered in Book 3, when he tried to interpret Jupiter's will through the birds (*sit qui ... qui ... qui ... qui*, 8.71–77 ~ *sint hi ... hic ... hic ... hunc ... hic ... illum*, 3.533–547).<sup>25</sup> Amphiaraus reacts with a prayer to Dis in which he first addresses the king of Hell as the supreme creator of all things (*o cunctis finitor maxime rerum* / (*at mihi qui quondam causas elementaque noram*, / *et sator*, 8.91–93), bestowing on him the title he previously bestowed on Jupiter (*summe sator terraeque deumque*, 3.488). Then he acknowledges the subordination of fate to Dis' will (*Parcae tua iussa trahant*, 8.119), which Jupiter claimed for himself in Book 3 (*sic Fata mihi nigraeque Sororum / iuravere colus*, 3.241–242). Eventually, Amphiaraus verifies Arruns' inference: civil war cannot be the work of Jupiter, it must have been plotted by his evil infernal alias, Dis (*niger Iuppiter*, 2.49; *infernus Tonans*, 11.209).<sup>26</sup>

Amphiaraus, who had already taken off and thrown away his sacred vestments in Book 3 (*ergo manu vittas damnataque vertice sarta / deripit abiectaque inhonorus fronde sacerdos / invisio de monte redit*, 3.566–568), now forgets about Apollo altogether (*nec deprecor ... tripodum iam non meminisse meorum*, 8.116–117). The seer thus sanctions the crisis of traditional religion, and offers a metapoetic anticipation of what Statius is going to do in Book 11: get rid of Jupiter and his fellow Olympians.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> See L. Bennardo, "Dominique imitantia mores: Pluto's Unphilosophic Underworld in Statius *Thebaid* 8", *Phoenix* 72 (2018) 271–292, esp. 274–281.

<sup>25</sup> On the prologic function of Dis' speech see L. Bennardo, *Gli inferi e la prima notte di guerra. Saggio di commento a Stazio, Tebaide 8. 1–270* (Ph.D. diss., Scuola Normale Superiore of Pisa, 2010) xx; Bessone, *loc. cit.* (n. 3 [2011]) 99. The textual parallel with Book 3 is signalled by Walter, *loc. cit.* (n. 7) 356; A. Augoustakis, *Statius, Thebaid 8. Edited with an Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Oxford 2016) 95 ad 71–72.

<sup>26</sup> On Jupiter and Dis in the *Thebaid* see, e.g., Vessey, *loc. cit.* (n. 9) 263–264; Feeney, *loc. cit.* (n. 1) 350–353; Bennardo, *loc. cit.* (n. 25) xxvii–xxix.

<sup>27</sup> As Tuttle, *loc. cit.* (n. 8) 85 puts it, "the breakdown of the relationship evident in the augury also signifies a complete collapse of the divine machinery in the *Thebaid*".

## Thiodamas, Earth and Amphiaraus

An early response to this crisis is given by Thiodamas, Amphiaraus' successor and Melampus' son, in Book 8. Hardie and Rebeggiani have shown the exceptional role of this minor character as a positive exemplum of political (and poetic) succession, a very unique and isolated case in a civil war which is interspersed with repeated failures in the handing over of power – first from Oedipus to his sons, then from Eteocles to his brother, finally from the two brothers to their uncle Creon.<sup>28</sup> In this section, I argue that Thiodamas' election introduces a positive and alternative model not only for the politics and poetics of the *Thebaid*, but also for its theology, and that, although the gods are still going to play a very active part in the plot across Books 8–11, the new seer anticipates the anthropocentric religion that in Book 12 definitively replaces the theocentric one formerly embraced, and eventually disavowed, by Amphiaraus.

Upon being elected, Thiodamas officiates a ritual of expiation, a *placatio Telluris*, the goddess who swallowed up Amphiaraus. The ritual opens with a Hymn to Earth (*Theb.* 8.303–317):

“o hominum divumque aeterna creatrix,  
 quae fluvios silvasque animarum et semina mundo  
 305 cuncta Prometheasque manus Pyrrhaeaeque saxa  
 gignis, et in pastis quae prima alimenta dedisti  
 mutastique viris, quae pontum ambisque vehisque;  
 te penes et pecudum gens mitis et ira ferarum  
 et volucrum requies; firmum atque immobile mundi  
 310 robur in occidui, te velox machina caeli  
 aere pendentem vacuo, te currus uterque  
 circumit, o rerum media indivisaque magnis  
 fratribus! ergo simul tot gentibus alma, tot altis  
 urbibus ac populis, subterque ac desuper una  
 315 sufficis, astriferumque domos Atlanta supernas  
 ferre laborantem nullo vehis ipsa labore:  
 nos tantum portare negas? nos, diva, gravaris?”

Then Thiodamas prays Earth not to pre-empt anyone else's death, as she did with Amphiaraus (318–328).

<sup>28</sup> See P. R. Hardie, *The Epic Successors of Virgil. A Study in the Dynamics of a Tradition* (Cambridge 1993) 111–113; Rebeggiani, *loc. cit.* (n. 11) 112–116. The theme of political succession is introduced through the Persian prince simile (8.286–293): in addition to Rebeggiani, see A. S. Hollis, “Statius' Young Parthian King (*Thebaid* 8.286–93)”, *G&R* 41 (1994) 205–212. Walter, *loc. cit.* (n. 7) 181–190 expands on Hardie's interpretation of the episode as a case of (meta)poetic succession, though not with very solid arguments.

Despite the ritual context in which it is performed, and which any Epicurean would certainly abhor, this hymn is a rewriting of Lucretius' Hymn to Venus.<sup>29</sup> The choice of a terrestrial deity, such as this Lucretian goddess of Nature, instead of an Olympian one, sets Thiodamas' Hymn to Earth in sharp contrast with Amphiaraus' Hymn to Jupiter. The Lucretian intertext further highlights this contrast, since Lucretius' Hymn to Venus, according to Asmis' seminal interpretation, was conceived as a materialistic response to, and rewriting of, Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus*, whereby the Epicurean goddess "stands for pleasure and a world ordered by its own spontaneous impulses, as opposed to Stoic Zeus who stands for divine might and a world bound by an inexorable divine will".<sup>30</sup> Just as Lucretius regards Venus, not Cleanthes' Zeus, as the ultimate force of Nature (*rerum naturam sola gubernas*, Lucr. 1.21 ~ Ζεῦ, φύσεως ἀρχηγέ, νόμου μετὰ πάντα κυβερνῶν, SVF 1.537.2), thus Thiodamas places Earth above Amphiaraus' Jupiter (*hominum divumque aeterna creatrix*, *Theb.* 8.303 ~ *summe sator terraeque deumque*, 3.488):<sup>31</sup> perhaps not just an awkward inconsistency on Statius' part,<sup>32</sup> or a mere effusive flattery uttered with the specific purpose of propitiating an angry deity,<sup>33</sup> but rather a purposeful shift from Heaven to Earth.

The contrast stands out all the more if one considers that Amphiaraus' Hymn to Jupiter was placed shortly after a meeting between Venus and Mars, the only other scene of the *Thebaid* in which Statius overtly reworks the Lucretian proem (3.260–323). While Mars is rushing to Thebes, at Jupiter's behest, to trigger civil war, Venus crosses him on his way and begs him not to entangle their people in such a woeful crime. Mars replies by addressing his beloved with an abbreviated Hymn to Venus (*Theb.* 3.295–299):

"o mihi bellorum requies et sacra voluptas  
unaque pax animo; soli cui tanta potestas  
divorumque hominumque meis occurrere telis  
inpune et media quamvis in caede frementes  
hos adsistere equos, hunc ensem avellere dextrae."

<sup>29</sup> *Theb.* 8.303–317 ~ Lucr. 1.1–43: *hominum divumque aeterna creatrix* (303) ~ *Aeneadum genetrix, hominum divumque voluptas* (1); *quae ... quae ... quae* (304–307) ~ *quae ... quae* (3); *fluvios silvasque animarum* (304) ~ *fluvios ... frondiferasque domos avium* (17–18); *quae gignis* (304–306) ~ *genetrix* (1); *quae alimenta dedisti* (306) ~ *alma* (2); *te penes* (308) ~ *per te* (4); *pecudum gens mitis et ira ferarum* (308) ~ *ferae pecudes* (14); *volucrum* (309) ~ *volucres* (12); *rerum* (312) ~ *rerum naturam* (21); *alma ... subter* (313–314) ~ *alma ... subter* (2); *astriferumque domos* (315) ~ *frondiferasque domos* (18); *nos, diva* (317) ~ *te, diva* (12). Also *mundi / ... machina caeli* (309–310) ~ *machina mundi* (5.96). See Hardie, *loc. cit.* (n. 18) 95; Augoustakis, *loc. cit.* (n. 25) 190–192 *passim*.

<sup>30</sup> See E. Asmis, "Lucretius' Venus and Stoic Zeus", *Hermes* 110 (1982) 458–470, cit. 458.

<sup>31</sup> See T. Gesztelyi, "Placatio Telluris bei Statius (*Thebais* 8, 298–341)", *Acta Classica Universitatis Scientiarum Debreceniensis* 12 (1976) 54–55.

<sup>32</sup> See Legras, *loc. cit.* (n. 9) 165–168.

<sup>33</sup> See Vessey, *loc. cit.* (n. 9) 267.

The whole scene conjures up the proem of the *De rerum natura*: Venus begging Mars to spare their people (the Thebans) from civil war restages Venus' Lucretian plea to Mars that he would stop civil war among their people (the Romans, *Lucr.* 1.38–40), and Venus' power to disarm Mars recalls Lucretius' unarmed god lying naked in her lap (31–39). The god of warfare (*Bellipotens*, *Theb.* 3.292 ~ *armipotens*, *Lucr.* 1.33) even speaks Lucretian language.<sup>34</sup> However, the outcome of this intermezzo is very unLucretian: Venus comes off wounded from the embrace with Mars (*laedit in amplexu*, *Theb.* 3.294 ≠ *in gremium qui saepe tuum se / reicit aeterno devictus vulnere amoris*, *Lucr.* 1.33–34) and fails to persuade her lover, who in turn acknowledges the superiority of Jupiter's will over hers (*sed nunc factorum monitus mentemque supremi / iussus obire patris ...*, *Theb.* 3.304–310), in what Asmis would probably brand a regress to a Cleanthean perspective.<sup>35</sup> In Book 3 Amphiaraus subscribes to this Jovian view. In Book 8, by contrast, Thiodamas inverts the divine hierarchies once again and places the goddess of Nature, Venus-like Earth, back where she was in Lucretius' proem: above Jupiter.<sup>36</sup>

The reference to Prometheus' hands and Pyrrha's stones in Thiodamas' Hymn to Earth (*cuncta Prometheasque manus Pyrrhaeque saxa*, *Theb.* 8.305) refers, if more indirectly, to another intertext that questions the power of Heaven: the anthropogony of *Metamorphoses* 1. There, Ovid provides more than one explanation for the origin of mankind, including Prometheus' modelling of the first human being out of Earth's mud (*met.* 1.80–83) and the rise of humankind from the stones thrown by Deucalion and Pyrrha (313–415). However, in addition to these two mythologising accounts of our earthly origins, Ovid also envisages the alternative possibility that humans, fashioned by the demiurge, were born directly from Heaven (*met.* 1.78–83):

<sup>34</sup> *Theb.* 3.295–299 ~ *Lucr.* 1.1–43: *o mihi bellorum requies et sacra voluptas* (295) ~ *Aeneadam genetrix, hominum divumque voluptas* (1; cf. *Calliope, requies hominum divumque voluptas*, 6.94); *bellorum requies* (295) ~ *effice ut interea fera moenera militiae / ... sopita quiescant* (29–30); *pax* (296) ~ *pace* (31); *soli cui tanta potestas* (296) ~ *nam tu sola potes* (31); *divorumque hominumque* (297) ~ *hominum divumque* (1). See Snijder, *loc. cit.* (n. 12) 139–140. On the allegorical dimension of this scene, also a Lucretian legacy, see Feeney, *loc. cit.* (n. 1) 369–370; Criado, *loc. cit.* (n. 2) 53–54.

<sup>35</sup> On Statius' scene as a failed repetition of the colloquy between Jupiter and Venus in *Aeneid* 1 see D. Hershkowitz, "Parce Metu, Cytherea: 'Failed' Intertext Repetition in Statius' *Thebaid*, or, Don't Stop Me If You've Heard This One Before", *MD* 39 (1997) 44–48 (Lucretius' intertext is discussed at p. 47). On Statius' and Lucretius' Venus see also G. Rosati, "Il 'dolce delitto' di Lemno. Lucrezio e l'amore-guerra nell'Ipsipile di Stazio", in R. Raffaelli/R. M. Danese/M. R. Falivene/L. Lomiento (eds.), *Vicende di Ipsipile da Erodoto a Metastasio. Colloquio di Urbino, 5–6 maggio 2003* (Urbino 2005) 141–167.

<sup>36</sup> One could regard the two scenes in Books 3 and 8 as an instance of "memoria diffusa" of Lucretius' Hymn to Venus across the *Thebaid*. Other instances are illustrated in L. Micozzi, "Memoria diffusa di luoghi lucanei nella *Tebaide* di Stazio", in P. Esposito/E. M. Ariemma (eds.), *Lucano e la tradizione dell'epica latina. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi, Fisciano-Salerno, 19–20 ottobre 2001* (Naples 2004) 137–151.

*natus homo est, sive hunc divino semine fecit  
 ille opifex rerum, mundi melioris origo,  
 80 sive recens tellus seductaque nuper ab alto  
 aethere cognati retinebat semina caeli,  
 quam satus Iapeto mixtam pluvialibus undis  
 finxit in effigiem moderantum cuncta deorum.*

As scholars have observed, “la prima impressione è che il poeta voglia contrapporre, secondo i due filoni dominanti della riflessione classica, una spiegazione divina e una materialistica dell’origine della specie” and, regarding the relationship between the human and the divine, “it is left unclear whether the first humans were made by the creator-god, and hence had a share in his divine nature, or else were made from the earth’s new mud, and thereby they gained an element of the ethereal”.<sup>37</sup> In reviewing the Ovidian explanations (*natus homo est, sive ... sive*), Thiodamas goes beyond the benefit of doubt, rules out the divine option, and adopts only the materialistic one: humans arose from Earth, the *homini natale solum* (*Theb.* 8.320), and from her alone they derived their divinity.

Thiodamas’ geocentric cosmology, this time closer to Stoicism than to Epicureanism,<sup>38</sup> is in keeping with the anti-providentialism of the hymn. Earth, suspended in the void (*aere pendentem vacuo*, 311), does not depend, literally or metaphorically, on greater heavenly bodies. Her being completely self-sufficient above and beneath (*subter ac desuper una sufficis*, 314–315) and her not being surrounded or supported by the ocean as she is in the mythical tradition (*pontum ambisque vehisque*, 307) can be regarded as demythologising glosses on her not being part of Jupiter’s, Dis’ or Neptune’s kingdoms (*indivisa magnis fratribus*, 312–313). Finally, Earth is firmly nestled in the centre of the universe (*rerum media*), with Heaven, Sun and Moon orbiting around it (*te velox machina caeli, te currus uterque circumit*, 310–312), which reflects the “peripheral” and “ancillary” (etymologically, “moving around”) role that the gods play, if any, at the end of the poem – a *munus breve*, as Juno will define the Moon’s final task (12.299).

In Book 12, it is “sovereign Nature” (*princeps Natura*, 12.561), Thiodamas’ goddess (cf. *magna Natura*, 8.330), whom Evadne invokes while complaining about Jupiter’s disengagement and calling for Theseus’ help. It is again Nature who guides Theseus (*Naturam ducem*, 12.645) in the restoration of the *terrarum leges et mundi foedera* (642; cf. *foedera naturai*, *Lucr.* 1.586; 2.302; *foedere naturae*,

<sup>37</sup> A. Barchiesi, *Ovidio, Metamorfosi*, vol. I: *Libri I–II* (Milan 2005) 162 ad 1.76–79; Feeney, *loc. cit.* (n. 1) 194. Hardie, *loc. cit.* (n. 18) 83 frames Ovid’s use of multiple explanations in this passage (*sive ... sive*) within the Lucretian tradition in which this pattern was used to contrast materialistic and divine interpretations of the world.

<sup>38</sup> See Gesztelyi, *loc. cit.* (n. 31) 56. In fact, Lucretius criticises those like Thiodamas who hang Earth in the middle of the universe (*Lucr.* 2.602–603), arguing instead for a potentially endless plurality of worlds (1048–1089), and portrays Earth as an ephemeral and aging planet (1144–1174), very unlike Thiodamas’ *aeterna creatrix*.



5.924) violated by Jupiter and Dis (*pereant aedum discrimina rerum*, *Theb.* 8.37): “those same ‘terrestrial and universal laws’ ... that Thiodamas had hymned in vain” earlier on in Book 8.<sup>39</sup>

Finally, just as Lucretius’ Hymn to Venus is followed by the first eulogy of Epicurus (Lucr. 1.62–79), so Thiodamas’ Hymn to Earth is followed by a prayer to the shade of Amphiarus, now deified and worshipped as an oracular god (*Theb.* 8.329–338). Thiodamas poses as Amphiarus’ disciple (*quae populis proferre parabas / me doceas*, 334–335), just as Lucretius learned the secrets of Nature from Epicurus’ divulgation (*unde refert nobis ...*, Lucr. 1.75–77) – and in turn passed them down to Thiodamas, who sounds as though he were addressing both his teachers at once, Amphiarus and Lucretius, through a pun on the latter’s *cognomen* (*at tu, Care ...*, *Theb.* 8.329).

Most importantly, like Epicurus, who overpowers the Thunderer and crushes Religion underfoot, Amphiarus does not simply equal the gods, but he even outdoes and replaces them (*Theb.* 8.335–338):

“tibi sacra feram praesaga, tuique  
numinis interpres te Phoebos absente vocabo.  
ille mihi Delo Cirrhaque potentior omni,  
quo ruis, ille adytis melior locus.”

Amphiarus’ manteion is more truthful for Thiodamas than any oracle of Apollo, in quite the same way as Lucretius, in spreading Epicurus’ gospel, is capable of disclosing holier truths than the Pythia (*fundere fata / sanctius et multo certa ratione magis quam / Pythia, quae tripode a Phoebi lauroque profatur*, Lucr. 5.110–112; cf. 1.736–739).<sup>40</sup> In Book 3, Amphiarus praised Jupiter as superior to Apollo, the oracular god of Cirrha (*non Cirrha deum promiserit antro / certius*, *Theb.* 3.474–475); instead, Thiodamas places god-like Amphiarus above the god of Cirrha (*ille mihi Delo Cirrhaque potentior omni locus*).<sup>41</sup> Hierarchies have been reshaped, as now humans wield greater power than, and autonomy from, the gods. The ablative absolute *Phoebos absente*, “without Apollo”, is more than a mere historical allusion to the current decline of the traditional Greek oracles:<sup>42</sup> like Amphiarus’

<sup>39</sup> Hardie, *loc. cit.* (n. 28) 80 n. 47. On Lucretius’ *foedera naturae* see E. Asmis, “Lucretius’ New World Order: Making a Pact with Nature”, *ClQu* 58 (2008) 141–157, esp. 147 on the boundary between natural and divine worlds. The clausula *foedera mundi* is borrowed from Seneca (*Med.* 335, 605) and Lucan (1.80), where the breakdown of the Stoic cosmos is fittingly described in Lucretian language.

<sup>40</sup> See Hardie, *loc. cit.* (n. 18) 95–96. Cf. also Lucan’s Cato, who refuses to consult the oracle of Jupiter Hammon and speaks from the *adyta* of his heart (Lucan. 9.544–586), with Chaudhuri, *loc. cit.* (n. 5) 189–192.

<sup>41</sup> Here Thiodamas shows a closer affinity with Capaneus than with Amphiarus: the Giant similarly placed human virtue above the god of Cirrha worshipped by Amphiarus (*Theb.* 3.611–613).

<sup>42</sup> See J. M. Seo, *Exemplary Traits: Reading Characterization in Roman Poetry* (Oxford 2013) 182.

eventual disavowal of the tripods, Thiodamas' exclusion of Apollo ratifies the increasing reduction of the divine apparatus, at most, to a merely cosmetic presence.

It is tempting to go farther and investigate to what extent Thiodamas is merging into the prayer to his master material from panegyric, where the emperor can be celebrated as a better substitute for the gods (e.g., *silv.* 1.1.101–104). Such an enquiry could lead on to the question whether the diptych made of Hymn to Earth and *Laudes Amphiarai* could accordingly be interpreted as a way of interweaving the religious and the political discourse of the *Thebaid* by rooting imperial worship in the anthropocentric worldview with which Thiodamas replaces Amphiaraus' theocentric one.<sup>43</sup> But this is not the place to delve further into this aspect of Thiodamas' prayer. Like Amphiaraus, *presso ore*, I shall now fall silent.

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<sup>43</sup> On the continuity between the theology of the *Thebaid* and imperial worship see Bessone, *loc. cit.* (n. 3 [2011]) 45–53; ead., *loc. cit.* (n. 3 [2013a]) 156–161; Chaudhuri, *loc. cit.* (n. 5) 311–321. The Thiodamas episode, however, is not considered by either scholar.