

# The Medieval Tradition of Thebes

*History and Narrative in the OF  
Roman de Thèbes, Boccaccio,  
Chaucer, and Lydgate*

Dominique Battles

STUDIES IN  
MEDIEVAL HISTORY  
AND CULTURE

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OF THEBES

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Dominique Battles

Routledge  
New York & London

Published in 2004 by  
Routledge  
29 West 35th Street  
New York, NY 10001

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group.

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Battles, Dominique, 1964—

The medieval tradition of Thebes : history and narrative in the OF Roman de Thèbes, Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Lydgate / by Dominique Battles.

p. cm. — (Studies in medieval history and culture ; v. 26) Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-415-96993-X (alk. paper)

1. Literature, Medieval—History and criticism. 2. Seven against Thebes (Greek mythology) in literature. 3. Thebes (Greece)—In literature. I. Title. II. Series.

PN687 .S38B38 2004

809'.9332384—dc22

2003022423

*For Paul and Perry*



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# List of Credits

A portion of Chapter 1 originally appeared as “Trojan Elements in the OF *Roman de Thèbes*,” *Neophilologus* 85/2 (2001): 163-176, and is reprinted here with the kind permission of Kluwer Academic Publishers.

A version of Chapter 2 appeared in *Medievalia et Humanistica*, New Series, 28 (2001): 73-99, and is reprinted here with some modification with the kind permission of Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

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# Series Editor's Foreword

Far from providing just a musty whiff of yesteryear, research in Medieval Studies enters the new century as fresh and vigorous as never before. Scholars representing all disciplines and generations are consistently producing works of research of the highest caliber, utilizing new approaches and methodologies. Volumes in the Medieval History and Culture series will include studies on individual works and authors of Latin and vernacular literatures, historical personalities and events, theological and philosophical issues, and new critical approaches to medieval literature and culture.

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**Francis G. Gentry**



# Preface

This study surveys the various metamorphoses of the ancient legend of Thebes in the Middle Ages. For the western middle ages, the Theban tradition begins with Statius' *Thebaid* of 96 AD, the first Latin epic devoted to the history of Thebes, and the most substantial classical source of the legend for medieval readers.<sup>1</sup> In the mid-twelfth century, the first vernacular (and indeed the first medieval) version of the Theban legend appears in western France, the OF *Roman de Thèbes* (c. 1155-60), the work of an anonymous author associated with the Angevin court. Working within the broad outlines of the story of the Theban war found in Statius, the OF poet grafts material derived from contemporary chronicle accounts of the First Crusade as well as French heroic epic onto his classical source, thus lending the story of the Theban war the flavor of a crusade narrative. Roughly two hundred years later, Giovanni Boccaccio composed a fictional sequel to the story of the Theban war, the *Teseida* (1339-41), avowedly the first epic in the Italian language. Set in the period immediately following the Theban war and preceding the Trojan war, Boccaccio designs the *Teseida* as what I will refer to as a "transitional epic," a work that creates a chronological and typological link between the Theban and Trojan wars. While Boccaccio was familiar with the OF *Thèbes*, he relies most heavily upon Statius for his Theban material and on a variety of classical and medieval sources for the Trojan matter. Some forty years later, the English poet Geoffrey Chaucer, having returned from a business trip in Italy with a copy of Boccaccio's *Teseida*, made two poetic ventures into Theban history, the *Anelida and Arcite* and the *Knights Tale* (both of the 1380s), both of which draw to varying degrees upon the *Teseida*. Staying within the post-Theban war timeframe that Boccaccio had opened up, Chaucer nevertheless draws upon and responds to the entire body of Theban narratives from Statius on. He then explores the very practice of transmitting history in his *Troilus and Criseyde*, where he presents the major (and some minor) characters as consumers, interpreters, and ultimately writers of Theban history. Not long after that, another English poet, John Lydgate, composes the last medieval adaptation of the Theban legend, the *Siege of Thebes* (1420-22), in which he revisits the events of the Theban war itself in order to take issue with the most fundamental assumptions governing all of the previous medieval treatments of Theban history.

As a chapter in ancient history, the story of Thebes contains few bright spots, and its grimness permeates each adaptation of the legend. It is, therefore, tempting to try to identify a single unifying principle, a Theban “lesson,” governing all of the texts around which to organize a thesis. However, deeper investigation into these medieval Theban narratives only frustrates any expectation of a recurring Theban exemplar. While in his *Siege of Thebes*, for example, Lydgate moralizes the story of Thebes in a way that seem to promote pacifism, the opposite concept, militancy, provides the underlying theme in the OF *Roman de Thèbes*. Nor do these texts prioritize political concerns in equal measure. While the OF poet aligns his literary goals with those of Angevin policy with respect to its Norman past, Boccaccio does not uphold any specific political program in the *Teseida*, and while Boccaccio uses the value system associated with romance to transform Theban history by transforming his Theban protagonists, Chaucer expressly denies his two Thebans any such experience. My own investigation has led me to conclude, therefore, that medieval authors readapted, reimagined, and appropriated the Theban legend in different ways and to different ends.

If, however, there is one constant in all the medieval adaptations of the Theban legend, it is that they approach Thebes primarily within the context of historical paradigms. Interestingly, the paradigms, too, differ from one narrative to the next. As I will show more fully in Chapter 1, in the case of the OF *Roman de Thèbes*, the political and strategic oppositions characteristic of the military chronicles of the First Crusade provide the historical paradigm, and the poet reconfigures the Theban war, structurally and morally, as a crusade. For Boccaccio’s *Teseida*, the Augustinian notion of secular history which unfolds in cycles — each of which resembles one another — provides the historical paradigm for this premier Italian epic. Alone of all the medieval Theban narratives, Chaucer’s *Knighr’s Tale* brings a historicist perspective to this episode in classical history and approaches the ancient past on its own terms, imagining the Theban mindset from within, so to speak. Finally, John Lydgate’s dominant concern in the *Siege of Thebes* is to appropriate the Theban legend for moral-didactic ends, in which the value of history lies primarily in its exemplary function; for this reason, Lydgate adopts the “mirror of princes” genre.

As the preceding discussion indicates, I have been eclectic in my choice of theoretical approaches to these texts. It may strike readers as odd, for example, to see a New Historicist reading of the *Roman de Thèbes* followed by a “Neo-Augustinian” reading of the *Teseida*. However, such an eclectic use of interpretive models actually best captures the eclectic nature of the narratives in question. I have consciously tried to avoid imposing too narrow a focus on my investigations which would result in a homogeneous reading of these diverse poems, a common pitfall in such broad surveys. In all cases, I have tried to allow the concerns of the works themselves to dictate my critical approach.

At the same time, this project has been shaped, inescapably, by two underlying scholarly assumptions, and I should like to address these briefly. I proceed with the conviction that epic concerns in each of these works have been sidelined by previous critics in the face of greater scholarly enthusiasm for their romance content, and by “epic” I mean qualities of both content and form. With respect to content, epic concerns itself chiefly with matters of history and ancestry, with the “baggage” of the past, and while medieval romance often takes history into account (and, indeed, romance heroes like Gawain may have historical origins), it remains chiefly concerned with the inner life of individuals rather than with the collective life of armies or races of people; history does not occupy center stage in romance as it does in epic. Medieval readers understood that Statius composed the *Thebaid*, the main source for the entire medieval Theban tradition, “*Thebanam describere historiam*,” as a medieval *accessus* on the *Thebaid* indicates.<sup>2</sup> Although the medieval adaptors of the Theban legend certainly employed elements of medieval romance in their vernacular reworkings of the story, I argue that history continues to shape the story of Thebes in each successive version. I work on the assumption that, in fact, each of the medieval adaptations of the Theban legend constitutes some attempt to understand the ancient Thebans as a cursed race, as a people with a hereditary propensity for violent and distorted relationships. For each of these poets, the destructive pattern of Theban history becomes a problem to be either exploited or overcome.

Much of the historical aspect of these works has been overlooked, given the scholarly dominance of romance readings of each of these texts (with the exception, perhaps, of Lydgate’s *Siege*). For example, the OF *Roman de Thèbes* is invariably categorized with the other *romans antiques*, which “opened Romance literature to the subject of femininity,” and indeed the *Roman de Thèbes* offers the earliest example of this.<sup>3</sup> In the other *romans antiques*, female characters do, in fact, completely reorient classical history: for example, Aeneas’ historical project of conquering the region that will later become Rome becomes transformed into a love-quest for Lavinia in the OF *Roman d’Eneas*. However, the same cannot be said for the love interests of the *Roman de Thèbes* which, while constituting a new addition to the story of Thebes, nevertheless drop out of the narrative almost as quickly as they appear without leaving any crucial impact on the narrative as a whole. Therefore, the necessary classification of the *Thèbes* with the other *romans antiques* leads readers, I feel, to overestimate the importance of the love affairs in the *Thèbes* at the expense of the historical-epic features in the narrative. My own study of the poem focuses, instead, on the remarkable conflation of ancient history (the Theban war) with contemporary, twelfth-century history (the First Crusade), which thereby creates a fictional contest between the achievements of the ancients and those of the moderns.

Romance readings have similarly obscured the epic context of Boccaccio’s *Teseida*, and they do this largely by privileging “the story” of the poem in the foreground of the

narrative: the love triangle of Palamone, Arcita and Emilia. Meanwhile, the epic context of the *Teseida*, namely the copious legendary historical material that fills the glosses of the poem, becomes relegated to “background” warranting only brief summary. Thus, the epic origins of Palamone and Arcita as the descendants of the royal house of Thebes become overshadowed by their roles as romance heroes in pursuit of Emilia.<sup>4</sup> While Boccaccio does, indeed, employ the ethical system of chivalric romance to transform his Theban heroes, romance readings tend to ignore how the transformation of this single generation of Thebans, in fact, transforms Theban history as a whole. Consequently, the “meaning” of the story is located within the narrow confines of the love triangle with little attention to the implications that these developments might hold for the larger picture of Theban history. David Anderson’s pioneering work on the *Teseida* has helped to correct this scholarly imbalance by examining the poem within the context of Statius’ Theban epic. My own research supplements Anderson’s by uncovering the equally important Trojan context of the *Teseida*, and Chapter 2 explores the way Boccaccio blends Theban and Trojan history in his own epic project.

The disproportionate attention paid to the love triangle in the *Teseida* also dominates the scholarship on Chaucer’s Theban poems, notably the *Knights Tale*, which is understandable since Chaucer borrows the central plot device from Boccaccio and drops much of the historical content of the *Teseida*. I argue, however, that Chaucer attempts to recuperate Theban history in both his Theban works not on the level of historical event, necessarily, but rather on the level of a historical mind-set; his Theban works constitute an attempt to enter imaginatively into a distant past. Chaucer, thus, retains Boccaccio’s “romance” plot, but he restores their epic identity to the two Theban heroes, Palaemon and Arcite; I argue that the weight of this past identity, and specifically the heroes’ awareness of that identity, renders them impervious to the influences of romance which they confront. While Chaucer’s historicism in the *Knights Tale*, in particular, his desire to understand and portray antiquity on its own terms, has long been acknowledged by scholars, the degree to which this constitutes a reaction to his medieval predecessors in the Theban tradition has been understated, and Chapter 3 re-examines Chaucer’s relationship with the rest of the medieval Theban tradition.

With respect to form, I examine each poet’s use of the schemes and tropes characteristic of historical epic, both classical and medieval. In the cases of the *Roman de Thèbes* and the *Teseida*, this emphasis on epic form has proved extremely revealing. I demonstrate, for example, that the OF poet shapes his account of the Theban war according to the historical-literary tradition of the First Crusade that still flourished at the time. He imports certain scenes found in the numerous chronicle accounts of the First Crusade in order to make his version of the Theban war read more like a crusade narrative. Epic form also helps to reveal the complicated structure of Boccaccio’s *Teseida*, whose meandering second half has contributed to the poem’s reputation as a “failed epic.” While David Anderson has demonstrated Boccaccio’s open imitation of

the narrative structure of the *Thebaid* in the first half of the poem, my own research uncovers how Boccaccio similarly shapes the second half of the *Teseida* by manipulating a series of epic type scenes common to late Roman epic. Consequently, I argue that the second half of the poem is very carefully structured and that Boccaccio maintained his epic design for the work from beginning to end. Hence, one of the chief contributions of this study has to do with restoring the balance in the critical debates on these texts by reopening discussion of their epic form and content.

Of course, when discussing questions of genre with respect to medieval narrative, one always treads slippery ground since neither medieval authors or audiences had systematic definitions of narrative genre, and for every rule there are countless exceptions. Romance, in particular, is a notoriously multifarious genre that defies easy classification. Nevertheless, the general distinctions between narrative types do obtain, and throughout this study I work with the very broadest distinction between epic and romance: epic deals with matters of war and history while romance deals with matters of love. Nor do I insist that the presence of epic material means the absence of romance content. When I argue, for example, that Boccaccio employs epic type-scenes in his *Teseida*, I do not deny the importance of the romance conventions that he employs. I simply wish to reposition the camera onto a different corner of the narrative terrain, and with respect to epic content that means refocusing on armies, armor, warriors, battle, and the stakes of history.

Another important scholarly assumption that has guided my research, and one that, I feel, must underlie all sweeping surveys of a literary tradition, is my emphasis upon the importance of source studies. While the interpretive systems and schools that I employ vary from chapter to chapter, all of my conclusions depend upon a close study of the materials available to each poet and the particular uses he makes of them. Thus, my discussion on the OF *Thèbes* develops, for the first time, the poet's extensive use of the chronicle accounts of the First Crusade, many of which were still being written and revised at the time. Such chronicles constituted the "bestsellers" of the day and help to account for many of the poem's structural as well as ideological principles. Similarly, my discussion of Lydgate's *Siege* begins with a review of his sources for Theban genealogy. My investigations reveal, again for the first time, that Lydgate deliberately departs from his source material, namely the ancient and medieval accounts of the origins of the Theban people, and tampers with Theban genealogy in an attempt to shift our most basic understanding of Theban history. My review of the sources for these works, particularly in the case of Lydgate, has helped to modify some long-standing prejudices about both these works and their authors.

In this same spirit, I begin the survey of the medieval Theban tradition with an overview, by no means comprehensive, of the body of commentary material that accompanied medieval school texts of the *Thebaid*, the material that told medieval students and poets who Statius was and why he was important.



# Acknowledgments

This book is the result of thought, training, and countless conversations that go back to my undergraduate days. I would like to thank Eugene Green, whose introductory course I took on a whim, which opened up to me the world of medieval literature, a world which I have never left since. I have to thank Robert Levine, who taught the second semester of that same introductory course on medieval literature, for fostering my interest in source studies and intertextuality, and for introducing me to the crusade chronicle tradition, without which I never would have been able to write Chapter 1 of this book. For their copious criticisms, suggestions, and counsel throughout the project, I owe deep gratitude to Robert Kellogg, C. David Benson, Clare Kinney, Gregory Hays, and Paul Battles.

For supporting my research efforts in the final stages of this project, I thank the Faculty Development Committee of Hanover College for a research grant, as well as the staff at Duggan Library for processing countless interlibrary loan requests and hunting down obscure references.

For guiding me through the process of preparing a book manuscript, I thank Paul Johnson of Routledge, who promptly and patiently addressed all my questions and concerns.

Finally, I must thank those people who have made this project happen by their valuable support, direct and indirect, most notably Jerry Woodall, Camay Woodall, Mary Patterson, Nancy Clendenon, Billy and Rosemarie Battles, Renate Kerschbaumer, Becky Brown, Rebecca Lartigue, the staff of the Cinema Café, Steve and Terry Jobe, David Banta, Ann Kirkland, David Cassell, Pat Schuring, Melissa May, Perry Battles (a dragon fighter), and especially Paul Battles, my dearest companion and colleague.



## Introduction

# Statius in the Middle Ages

Although Statius' *Thebaid* won instant recognition upon its publication in 96 A.D., it achieved its greatest popularity during the Middle Ages.<sup>1</sup> In the medieval schoolroom, Statius ranked among Vergil, Ovid, Horace and Juvenal as a canonical author, and the *Thebaid* survives in over one hundred and sixty manuscripts, mostly dating to the twelfth century, when the rise of the cathedral schools and the revival of ancient learning generated new demand for classical texts.<sup>2</sup> Most importantly, however, for the scope of the current study, Statius' *Thebaid* is the only other Roman epic, apart from Vergil's *Aeneid*, to engender its own literary tradition in the Middle Ages. The corpus of Thebes rivaled that of Troy from the twelfth century onwards, resulting in a series of paired vernacular narratives of Thebes and Troy: the OF *Roman de Thèbes* appears within ten years of the OF *Roman de Troie* in the mid-twelfth century, and the literary careers of Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Lydgate all include narrative poems of both Thebes and Troy. Moreover, unlike the medieval tradition of Troy, which derives from a variety of texts including Vergil's *Aeneid*, the accounts of Dares and Dictys, and the works of Ovid, among others, the medieval tradition of Thebes emanates ultimately from the *Thebaid* alone, giving Statius that much more centrality to the Theban legend in the Middle Ages.

Medieval poets encountered Statius' *Thebaid* amidst a rich commentary tradition including annotated school texts, the literary preface (or *accessus*), *florilegia* (anthologies containing excerpts of the poem), and commentaries. It would, I think, be pointless to argue that the Latinate tradition of the *Thebaid* constitutes the most determining influence on the vernacular adaptations discussed in subsequent chapters, given the wide variety of source material, vernacular and Latinate, upon which these poets drew, and I distinguish between the methods of the commentators and those of the vernacular poets. Nevertheless, the questions and concerns that the commentators bring to Statius' Latin epic as a vision of the ancient past anticipate those of the medieval adaptors in significant ways. Therefore, no discussion of the medieval vernacular tradition of Thebes would be complete without some exploration into the

Latinate tradition of Thebes in the Middle Ages, the body of pedagogical material that students and their instructors consulted in their study of the *Thebaid*.

## STATIUS AS ANCIENT AUTHORITY

By far the dominant image that Statius projected for medieval audiences was that of revered authority on the Latin language. Most people would have encountered Statius primarily in the classroom where texts of the *Thebaid* were used for instruction in Latin grammar and syntax. The *Thebaid* was approached as a repository for correct verbal expression. Several kinds of pedagogical tools arose around the *Thebaid* (and other ancient texts) to guide students' learning, including line-by-line commentaries that clarified meanings of difficult words or passages, *florilegia*, or anthologies of readings from various ancient *auctores* (Statius among them), and the *accessus*, or literary preface which suggested how students should read and why. All of these texts project a sense of the ancient text as a revered model for Latin usage, as something to be preserved, not changed.<sup>3</sup> By extension, they maintain the historicity of the ancient text as an artifact from the past, a past that differed from the present in many fundamental ways, including religion, custom, belief and geography. Quite unlike the medieval romance adaptations of ancient legends, which merge the past and present by, for instance, assigning a medieval social hierarchy to ancient characters, these interpretive *apparati* used in the classroom preserve the alterity of the ancient past, and provide a wonderful example of historicism in the Middle Ages long before its full flowering in the Renaissance.

For texts of the *Thebaid*, the most widely circulating and influential commentary was that of Lactantius Placidus, whose commentary appears to date to the fifth century.<sup>4</sup> In addition to the commentary on Statius, Placidus has been credited with a commentary on Ovid, and it is clear that Placidus was familiar with Lucan, Horace, Juvenal, Terence, Lucretius, Sallust, and Cicero as well, for he cites them throughout the commentary.<sup>5</sup> The Placidus commentary survives in at least forty-two manuscripts (partial and complete), and originally, the *scholia* of Placidus occupied the margins of the *Thebaid* manuscripts. Later, they were copied separately from the poem, forming an independent commentary, both formats of which survive in manuscript witnesses.<sup>6</sup> Placidus' treatise is a line-by-line commentary divided into twelve books corresponding to the twelve books of the *Thebaid*. Books 2-12 are prefaced by *argumenta*, or tables of contents for each individual book, though the *argumentum* for book 1, along with any original *accessus ad auctorem* accompanying the commentary, has been lost.

Looking at the various aspects of the Placidus commentary, we get a sense for what medieval students were taught to value in the *Thebaid*, what Statius' *auctoritas* rested upon. For example, the *argumenta* (or tables of contents) prefacing the

individual books of the commentary highlight not only plot elements (as a modern table of contents would do), but also exemplary rhetorical occasions such as descriptions of things (“*descriptio orientis diet*” (II); “*descriptio nuptialis... ascensio puellarum in Mineruae templum*” (II); “*descriptio monilis Harmoniae*” (II); “*Iunonis ad Lunam allocutio...*” (XII); “*catalogus exercitus Thesei*” (XII); and “*descriptio solis occidentis et orientis noctis*” (III)) — including gods, landscapes, times of day, states of being, jewelry, weddings and armies — as well as speeches (“*Polynicis de regno desiderium*” (II); “*allocutio Capanei iniuriosa contra Amphiarauum et religionem*” (III); and “*allocutiones Argiae et Antigones et iunctus labor ad sepeliendum Polynicis cadauer*” (XII)). While the *argumenta* do not provide much guideline for interpreting the scenes listed, the textual details they highlight clearly suggest the *Thebaid* as a linguistic and literary model.

The Placidus commentary also approaches the *Thebaid* as a resource for information about ancient custom and belief. Throughout the commentary, he provides factual background to various Roman and Egyptian gods including the rites surrounding them. For instance, in explaining Amphiaraus’ preference for vultures in augury, Placidus writes, “*id est uultur, qui solet bona omnia augurantibus facere*” (III, 508) [“the vulture is a bird of good omen”], reporting on pagan rite as a quaint foreign custom.<sup>7</sup> Placidus describes ancient Athenian custom in similar historical (even nostalgic) terms: “*primi enim Athenienses inter reliqua bona legum tabulas inuenerunt*” (XII.501) [“Among the good things that they left behind, the Athenians were the first to invent tables of law.”] Placidus seems to look upon the customs of antiquity, and upon the *Thebaid* as a witness of antiquity, with the confident detachment of an historian making information more accessible.

The single-word glosses also indicate an effort to disambiguate the meaning of the text without changing its meaning in any way. For example, in the line “*virides gravis unguula campos/mutat*” (XII.657) [“The heavy hoof changes the aspect of the verdant plain”], Placidus glosses *mutat* [“change”] with *atterit* [“rub away”], which is precisely how hooves change a field. Similarly, for the line “*et tibi nimbosum languet iubar*” (XII.305) [“Your light, too, is faint and clouded now”], Placidus glosses *nimbosum* [“stormy”] with *nebulosum* [“foggy, cloudy”], rendering more exact the experience of Argia searching for her husband’s body in the darkness. In a final example, for the line “*sub casside ducens*” (XII.713) [“breathing beneath his helmet”], Placidus glosses *ducens* [“leading, breathing in”] as *odorans* [“sniffing, scenting”], thus clarifying the action of breathing while avoiding the far more common meaning of *ducens* as “leading.” In general, Placidus provides interpretive glosses that limit the meanings of words by removing alternate (figurative or rarified) meanings. By minimizing obscurity, Placidus makes the *Thebaid* more comprehensible while respecting its alterity.

In addition to the textbook commentary, *florilegia*, or anthologies, also present Statius as a technical authority on Latin grammar and versification.<sup>8</sup> Excerpts of the *Thebaid* frequently occur in *florilegia* of classical authors. One good example is the

*Florilegium Prosodiacum Florentino-Erlangense*, which survives in three manuscripts (two from the thirteenth century and one dating to the fifteenth century) and contains excerpts or full texts of grammatical treatises by Bede, Aimericus, Servius and Priscian.<sup>9</sup> The *florilegium prosodiacum* lists examples of single-line excerpts from classical authors, arranged alphabetically according to the word exemplified, in order to illustrate the principles of Latin usage set forth in these other grammatical treatises. This particular *florilegium* includes thirty-nine verses from Statius (thirty-three derived from the *Thebaid* and six from the *Achilleid*).<sup>10</sup> In addition to Statius, the *florilegium* features verses from Vergil (85 verses), Horace (163 verses), Ovid (16 verses), and Lucan (93 verses), among other classical authors. Statius was also excerpted for other *florilegia*, and different kinds of *florilegia*, which showcased the finest examples of Latin usage.<sup>11</sup>

## STATIUS AND MEDIEVAL VERNACULAR POETICS

Medieval textbooks of the *Thebaid* also afford a glimpse into the emerging literary tastes that came to dominate the vernacular tradition of the twelfth century and beyond. In a small, but representative, sampling of texts in which certain passages are highlighted for special consideration, we see how the *Thebaid* inspired and served the growing popularity of lyric poetry, particularly the *plaint*. Birger Munk Olsen's *L'Études des auteurs classiques latins aux XIe et XIIe siècles* (which also includes listings for many tenth-, thirteenth-, and fourteenth-century manuscripts) provides an excellent cross-section of *Thebaid* manuscripts. Olsen lists over one hundred manuscripts of the *Thebaid*, mostly dating to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, eleven of which indicate marked passages in the margins.<sup>12</sup> Of the eleven manuscripts, seven note Hypsipyle's lament over Archemorus (*Thebaid* 5.608ff.). Eight of the manuscripts note Argia's lament over the dead Polynices (12.321ff.). Three note Polynices' lament over his dead companion, Oenicles (9.49ff.), and three note the scene where the wounded Tydeus speaks before eating the head of Melanippus (8.726ff.). Two of the manuscripts note all four passages and four note only Argia's lament (one of these being a fragment containing only a portion of book twelve). A clear pattern emerges from these marked passages: first, all of the marked passages are laments, three of them over a corpse (although lyric passages are, perhaps, simply easier to excerpt). Second, the most popular passages are the laments of Hypsipyle and Argia, two female victims of the conflict.<sup>13</sup> Finally, all four passages expose the irrecoverable costs of war rather than its valor; they speak to the transience of worldly victories.

A similar pattern emerges from the passages typically excerpted from the *Thebaid* into *florilegia*. Munk Olsen lists twelve manuscripts containing selections of the *Thebaid*, varying in length from a single line to several hundred lines.<sup>14</sup> Some of these extracts appear in grammatical *florilegia* where narrative context matters little if at all,

but several anthologies contain substantial *Thebaid* extracts. One such manuscript is Cambridge, Peterhouse Library, 229-II, a twelfth-century manuscript in three hands. It contains the works of Horace and two substantial extracts of the *Thebaid*.<sup>15</sup> The first *Thebaid* extract runs 461 lines (8.615-9.310) and consists of Oedipus's daughter Ismene's lament to her sister over her husband. It runs through the scene where Tydeus is wounded and devours the head of Melanippus and into the ensuing battle of book nine. Again, we have a female lament, and Tydeus' wounding and subsequent speech. The second extract runs for 821 lines (9.618-10.532) and consists of Atalanta's prayer at Diana's shrine on behalf of her son Parthenopeus (one of the seven against Thebes). It runs through the battle in which Parthenopeus dies and into book ten where his two companions die. The extract amounts to a portrait of Parthenopeus as one of the seven commanders, his rise and fall, including, among other things, a lament by his mother.

Another *florilegium*, Cambridge University Library, Gg.5.35-II, dating to the eleventh century, contains extracts of the *Thebaid* as part of the *Cambridge Songs* (*Carmina Cantabrigiensia*).<sup>16</sup> This famous manuscript represents the most substantial and varied corpus of Latin lyrics between the Carolingian *corpora* of the ninth century and the *Carmina Burana* of the thirteenth.<sup>17</sup> The manuscript brings together verses from Christian poets of Germany, France and Italy as well as excerpts from classical Latin poetry of the Golden and Silver ages.<sup>18</sup> Excerpts from the *Thebaid* are as follows: CC 29 (12.325-48) (Argia's lament), CC 31 (5.608-16) (Hypsipyle's lament), and CC 32 (12.325-35) (Argia's lament). Presumably, Argia's lament appears twice since it was set to different melodies. Hypsipyle's lament (CC 31) appears neumed (set to music) in this manuscript as well as in seven other manuscripts, indicating that her lament was popular song material.<sup>19</sup> Argia's lament, too, was frequently set to music.<sup>20</sup> Karl Breul, the early (1915) editor of the *Cambridge Songs* notes that the passages extracted from Statius, Vergil, and Horace are "invariably pathetic addresses, outpourings of sorrow and of passionate tenderness."<sup>21</sup>

Yet another *florilegium*, Edinburgh, National Library, Adv.18.5.12-I, dating to the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, includes an extract of 92 lines of the *Thebaid* (12.256-348)(Argia's lament) on the last folio of the poem.<sup>22</sup> This manuscript presents an especially interesting case since it already includes a full text of the *Thebaid* (fols. 1-99) (along with a full text of the *Aeneid* (fols. 100-210)). Yet Argia's lament was copied out separately at the end of the *Thebaid* segment.

Though relatively small in number, this cross-section of marked passages in medieval manuscript witnesses of the *Thebaid* and in medieval *florilegia* speaks to the emerging Ovidian poetics of the twelfth century. Statius, we can assume, knew Ovid's *Heroides*, a collection of laments by the women spurned by various ancient heroes, many of them (though not all) heroes of the Trojan War. In his *Thebaid*, Statius produces for the Theban legend a similar collection of female laments. In fact, he expands on Ovid's achievement by covering a wider spectrum of experience: there is a mother's

lament for her son (Atalanta), a woman's lament for a dead infant, though not her own (Hipsypyle), a woman's lament over a dead husband (Argia), as well as laments by men over lost comrades.

The fact that such instances of pathos were highlighted in medieval codices of the *Thebaid* indicates their appeal to the growing interest during this period in the *plaint d'amor*.<sup>23</sup> At least one medieval poet added to the collection by composing the *Planctus Oedipus*, a rhyming poem in twenty-one stanzas dating to the twelfth century in which Oedipus recounts his own cursed history in the form of a lament.<sup>24</sup> In it, Oedipus narrates the events that led up to the Theban war, events to which Statius only alludes. So too, Chaucer's first handling of Theban material also comes in the form of a lament: *The Compleynt of feire Anelida and fals Arcite*, in which Queen Anelida laments her betrayal by her Theban lover, Arcite, in wartime Thebes. While there are many parallels between Anelida and Ovid's Trojan heroines, especially Dido, medieval readers found as many anguished heroines in the story of Thebes as in the story of Troy, as this sampling of marked passages suggests.<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, however, all of the medieval adaptations of the Theban legend reduce, rather than amplify, the number and extent of the female laments in the *Thebaid*.

## STATIUS AS MORAL AUTHORITY

Another aspect of Statius' importance to the medieval audience involves his status, along with Vergil and Ovid, as a pagan authority on morality and ethics. In the medieval *accessus* tradition, the source of so many author portraits for the Middle Ages, Statius emerges as a virtuous, upstanding figure who composed his *Thebaid* in order to instruct rulers on good governance. By way of unfolding the medieval *persona* of Statius, I will focus first on a representative thirteenth-century *accessus*, "*In principio unuscuiusque actoris*," which I will refer to from here on as "*In principio*."<sup>26</sup> "*In principio*" survives in four manuscripts, three dating to the thirteenth century and one dating to the early fifteenth.<sup>27</sup> All three thirteenth-century copies appear in anthologies of other commentaries on Latin poetry, two of which contain the commentary on the *Aeneid* ascribed to Anselm of Laon.<sup>28</sup> Two of the early manuscripts also contain the metrical *Planctus Oedipus*, which was often included in manuscripts containing Theban material. In all four manuscripts, "*In principio*" is followed by a line-by-line commentary, based on that of Lactantius Placidus, as a continuous commentary without an accompanying text of the *Thebaid*. "*In principio*" covers the conventional "topics" of academic prologues: *vita poetae*, *titulus operis*, *qualitas carminis*, *intentio scribentis*, *modus tractandi*, *materia*, *finalis causa*, *quo genere stili utatur* (or *utilitas*), *quem auctorem imitetur* and the *pars philosophie*.<sup>29</sup> Such terms for interpretation originated from the scriptural commentary tradition, and the fact that we find them applied to classical texts speaks to the enhanced prestige of classical authors during the twelfth and thirteenth

centuries whose works, no matter how salacious (as in the case of Ovid) were marshaled in the service of “ethics” within the context of Christian moral education.

The portrait of Stattus as a moral authority emerges on several levels in “*In principio*.” First, there is the author’s name. In the brief *vita* at the beginning of the *accessus*, the commentator etymologizes Stattus’ name, Sursulus Papinius Stattus for inherent virtue. He interprets “Sursulus” to mean “*quasi sursum canens*” (“as if singing from on high”).<sup>30</sup> The commentator then traces the name “Stattus” to “*statu vite sue sic dictus est. Erat enim firmus contra vicia...*” (“from the upstanding life that he was said to have followed. For he was steadfast against vice...”).<sup>31</sup> Such etymologies of names acquired fundamental importance for the medieval commentators, and Vergil’s name underwent similar scrutiny.<sup>32</sup> In the medieval *accessus*, the practice is motivated by the late medieval concern for the integrity of the individual *auctor* as a reliable authority on the wisdom they imparted, and this same concern comes into play in “*In principio*.”<sup>33</sup>

The second place in “*In principio*” where Stattus emerges as a moral authority is in the portrait of the author, in which the commentator calls attention to two character traits: talent and integrity:

*Fuit igitur morum honestate preeditus, acris intelligencie, tenacis memorie, clarus ingenio, doctus eloquio, liberalium artium, sciencie feliciter eruditus.*<sup>34</sup>

[He was endowed with an honest character, sharp intellect, tenacious memory, was notable for his ability, learned in eloquence, and abundantly accomplished in the knowledge of the liberal arts.]

Such praise of the classical author’s skill is hardly unusual in the medieval *accessus*. Ovid is praised for his innovation in letter composition, and Vergil is praised widely and profusely for his boundless knowledge and incomparable style.<sup>35</sup>

However, the portrait of Stattus that surfaces in the *accessus* differs from that of, say, Ovid or Vergil in one important way. Both Ovid and Vergil, perhaps the most favored poets of the Middle Ages, bore ambiguous reputations: Ovid’s disgrace supposedly after the publication of the *Ars Amatoria* was acknowledged in the medieval *accessus*.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, a tradition developed along popular lines whereby Vergil becomes a sorcerer magician, thus casting awe and suspicion on his powers of intellect and poetic skill.<sup>37</sup> The portrait of Stattus in “*In principio*,” however, presents Stattus as far less suspect than Ovid or Vergil (though also, perhaps, less exciting).

Stattus’ alleged moral commitment to his patron and public emerges in the *intentio scribentis* (or “intention”) segment of “*In principio*.” I say “alleged” because Stattus himself claims no such purpose in the *Thebaid*. According to the commentator, Stattus composed the *Thebaid*, a story of brotherly conflict from the distant past, in

order to avert fraternal conflict within the family of his patron, namely between Domitian and Titus:

*Intencio Stacii in hoc opere Thebanam describere historiam, cuius intencionis diverse a diversis cause assignantur. Quidam enim dicunt quod mortuo Vespasiano filii eius Titus et Domicianus in tantam regni cupiditatem exarserunt quod fraternale odium incurrerunt. Ad quorum debortacionem auctor iste Thebanam proposuit describere historiam, et secundum hanc causam talis erit huius intencionis utilitas, ut viso quid contigerit illis duobus pessimis fratribus scilicet Ethiocli et Polinici, qui tanta regni cupiditate exarserunt quod se mutuis vulneribus interfecerunt, et isti a consimili scelere desistant.*<sup>38</sup>

[The intention of Statius in this work is to recount the Theban story. Different reasons for this intention are mentioned by different people. Certain people say that, with Vespasian dead, his sons, Titus and Domitian, erupted into such great desire for the realm that they came to the point of fraternal hatred. In order to dissuade them, the author set himself to recount the Theban tale, reasoning that the effect of this intention would be such that, when they saw what happened to those two worst of brothers, that is, Etiocles and Polynices, who burned with such great desire for rule that they killed one another by mutual wounds, they (Titus and Domitian) would desist from a similar crime.]

According to this, the *Thebaid* served the very timely ethical purpose of heading off a specific political conflict in its own day.

From this specific act of historical contextualization, the commentator of “*In principio*” proceeds to universalize the poem’s interests by extending the historical intentions to the art of governing in general. In the *fnis* (or “goal”) he offers this explanation:

*Finis ad quem tendit, ut visis utriusque partis incommotis, ne tale aggrediamur officium, per quod simile incurramus periculum.*<sup>39</sup>

[“The end to which the work strives is that once we have seen the misfortunes of either side, we should not strive for such a high position through which we could incur danger.”]

In other words, do not be too ambitious. The belief that Statius employed the lessons of the past in order to avert present ills seems to have been widespread. The idea surfaces again in another *accessus* entitled “*Scriptum super Statio Thebaydos*,” which survives in a manuscript that once belonged to Pietro da Montagnana, though it dates to before 1420:<sup>40</sup>

*Est autem autoris intentio in hoc opere Thebanam hystoriam, fratrumque discidium Polinici et Etheoelis ad memoriam revocare, et propter hanc util-*

*itatem ut visis incommoditatibus fraterni discidii lectoribus fraternalem discordiam summo diligentique studio dissuadeat.*<sup>41</sup>

[The intent of the author in this work is to recall to memory Theban history, and the fraternal discord of Etiocles and Polynices, and to this end, that when the disadvantages of fraternal discord had been shown, he might through great and diligent effort dissuade his readers from such fraternal strife.]

Here, however, the commentator avoids all mention of the specific political agenda mentioned in “*In principio*”; while he mentions Domitian as the patron of Staius, he does not mention any potential civil war between Domitian and Titus. Instead, he focuses on the poem’s universal application. Thus commentators used such reasoning to position the *Thebaid* within the political branch of ethics, as in “*In principio*”:

*Politica est scientia que ad regnum civitatum est necessaria.*<sup>42</sup>

[The political part (to which this belongs) is the knowledge necessary for the governing of cities and states.]

The work, then, serves a two-fold ethical purpose, one historical and one universal. On the historical level, it addresses the specific political circumstances of Domitian’s Rome. On the universal level, the work offers an *exemplum*, or rather a negative *exemplum*, of sound political policy for all time.

From another standpoint, the historical level pertains primarily to the poet, i.e., Staius, while the universal level pertains primarily to the poem. At the historical level, we see Staius the upstanding Roman citizen doing good for his state, and the work becomes a testament to his moral integrity; it becomes a moral response to a specific political dilemma. Such a portrait renders Staius a worthy *auctor* (author) of a valuable poem and a reliable *auctoritas* (authority) for subsequent ages. The universal level, on the other hand, speaks to the worth of the poem itself. It demonstrates the work’s ethical applicability quite apart from its author. The poem has a life beyond ancient Rome, and has much to teach us about good governance. Thus, on both levels, the *accessus* supplies an ethical justification for the poem, which the poem itself neither claims nor begs.<sup>43</sup> Consequently, medieval readers received a warrant for reading, enjoying and learning from a poem of incomparable violence and cruelty.

Staius’ position as a moral authority for medieval readers also takes the form of *sententiae* (“sentences”), or lines of worldly wisdom excerpted from various secular and sacred texts. The Scholastics of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries compiled and arranged them for quick reference, though the practice of collecting *sententiae* dates to antiquity.<sup>44</sup> One twelfth-century *florilegium* (Paris, Bib. Nat. lat. 13582-V) contains two such *sententiae* noted in the margin as “*Proverbia Statii Thebaidos*”:

*Pugna est de paupere regno...* (1.151)  
 [A starveling realm was their cause of battle...] <sup>45</sup>  
*<nequit> secernere mixtos equa sitis.* (4.810-11)  
 [universal thirst made no distinction]

Another *florilegium* of proverbs entitled “*Incipit proverbia ex diversorum auctorum libris in unum collecta moribus instruendis viciisque destruendis proferenda*,” includes two excerpts from the *Thebaid*: <sup>46</sup>

*Protinus attoniti fratrum sub pectore motus...* (1.125)  
 [At once wild passions stirred the brothers’ hearts.]

“...*tuas inritat callidus iras.*” (11.716)  
 [“In his cunning, he enrages you.”]

Matthew of Vendôme provides several examples of proverbial statements which he recommends for opening a work, one of which derives from the *Thebaid*:

*Pessimus in dubiis augur timor undique versat.* (3.6) <sup>47</sup>  
 [Fear is the worst guide, for in consternation it turns here and there.] <sup>48</sup>

Not surprisingly, most of the above excerpts from the *Thebaid* pertain to the disorienting effects of anger and fear, the very soul of the poem. They warn readers of what *not* to do. As to the value of *sententiae* drawn from pagan authors for Christian students, Conrad of Hirsau instructs his own that “it is... for Christian writers who... inserted many of [pagan authors’] ideas (*sententiae*) in writings which are in conformity with Christian teachings, to judge how much profit is to be gained by students from [pagan authors’] words or weighty sayings (*sententiae*).” <sup>49</sup> The *sententiae*, as does the *accessus*, gives the ancient poem timeless and universal moral relevance, a trend that also emerges in the allegorical tradition of the poem.

In the textual tradition of Statius’ *Thebaid*, allegoresis arrived late on the scene, and, judging from the wider medieval vernacular tradition of Thebes in the Middle Ages, seems to have had little impact. Nevertheless, it represents an important aspect of the moral application of the poem for medieval readers. The chief representative of the allegorical vision of the *Thebaid* is the *Super Thebaiden*, a brief commentary falsely credited for a long time to the sixth-century Fulgentius. (It was included, for instance, in the most recent translation of the works of Fulgentius, though the editor attributes it to a “second Fulgentius.”) <sup>50</sup> The commentary survives in two manuscripts, and

Brian Stock has argued, persuasively, for a composition date of 1120-80, based on terminology it shares with many *accessus ad auctores* of the twelfth century, long after the Placidus commentary had become ensconced in medieval schoolrooms.<sup>51</sup> The *Super Thebaiden* seems to have enjoyed rather limited circulation and influence.<sup>52</sup>

What *Super Thebaiden* lacks in length and influence, it makes up for in ingenuity. It transforms the *Thebaid* into a *psychomachia*, each character representing a different spiritual state or concept.<sup>53</sup> The struggle at Thebes becomes spiritual warfare. Rita Copeland has noted that the medieval allegorizing commentary operates by inserting itself “as the originary point of the text,” by supplying “an anterior structure of reference” to the text.<sup>54</sup> It overrides the poem’s authority by defining the source of that authority, and the Pseudo-Fulgentius commentary operates precisely in such a way. Its allegoresis hinges on a series of etymologies, often clumsy, of proper names and place names. So, for instance, “‘*Thebae*’ <Grece> *dicuntur quasi ‘theosbe’ id est ‘dei bonum.’*” *Haec est humana anima, quam diuina benignitas creauit ad imaginem et similitudinem suam...*” (ll. 52-54) [“‘*Thebe*’ is pronounced in Greek like *theosbe*, that is, the goodness of God. This is the soul of man, which divine goodness created in his own image and likeness”].<sup>55</sup> Laius represents “*lux sancta*” (l.60) [“Holy Light”] (from “*lux ayos*”). Jocasta, his wife, represents “*iocunditatem castam*” (l.65) [“pure joy”], “*mens enim humana ex santa luce quam habuit iocundatur*” (l. 65-66) [“For the mind of man is made joyful by the holy light”]. Oedipus, her ill-fated son, is a “*animal valde lasciuum*” (l. 72-3) [“a truly lascivious beast”]. Ethiocles (*sic*) derives from “*ethos*” (habit, morals) and “*ocleos*” (destruction), making him the “*morum interitus*” (l. 87) [“destruction of morals”], or “*auaritia*” [“greed”]. Polynices is “*luxuria*” (l. 92) [“licentiousness”] and so on. The seven against Thebes become the seven liberal arts divorced from faith under the command of Philosophy (King Adrastus). They set out for Thebes and grow thirsty: “*quid mirum si sitiunt qui fonte fidei carent*” (l. 128-9) [“What wonder that those who lack the wellspring of faith are thirsty”]. An especially far-fetched etymology concerns Archemorus, the baby in Hipsipyle’s care, who is killed by the serpent: “*quilibet alumpnus idolatri-ae> ‘Archemorus’ postest uocari, id est ‘principaliter <mortuus>’*” (l.136-7) [“Archemorus can be called the foster child of idolatry, that is, essentially dead”]. (Placidus makes no such mention of Archemorus, nor do the *accessus* on the *Thebaid*.) Hipsipyle herself is “*idolatria*” (l.133) [“idolatry”], a label that departs from the more usual sympathetic reading of her. These search-and-replace etymologies create an entirely new text that effectively becomes the source for the poem rather than a commentary on it. The main thrust of the moral message of Pseudo Fulgentius’ comes in two forms: first, a happy ending when Creon (“*superbia*” (l.171) [“pride”]) is overcome, and second, an undisputed hero, Theseus, who represents “*humilitas*” (l.171-4) [“humility”] conquering Creon:

*Tanto autem uitiorum conflictu Thebe id est humana anima  
 quasata est quidem, sed diuinae benignitas clementia  
 subueniente liberatur.* (l.174-7)

[By such a contest with vice, Thebes, that is the soul of man,  
 was left shattered; but it is freed when the grace of divine  
 goodness comes to its assistance.]

These two features, a hero and a happy ending are decidedly lacking in Statius' poem, and they transform the story from one of utter defeat and loss to one of gain, of sorts. This happy ending, in particular, whereby conflict and suffering result in salvation for the soul, reflects a distinctly medieval Christian vantage on the *Thebaid* in celebrating the benefits of misfortune.<sup>56</sup>

Yet, the *Super Thebaiden* seems not to have directed the course of the medieval Theban tradition to any great extent. On the whole, the vernacular adaptations of the *Thebaid* avoid any programmatic Christian allegoresis of the Theban legend. The OF *Roman de Thèbes*, as we shall see, borrows heavily from the crusade chronicle tradition of the twelfth century, but it tends to draw upon predominantly secular aspects of those works. While Boccaccio's *Teseida* introduces the transformative power of the vision of love offered by medieval romance into the Theban scene after the war, nevertheless it attempts no such allegoresis of the Theban war in the glossarial commentary. Chaucer avoids such Christian allegory still further by trying to recapture a distinctly pagan setting for his *Knight's Tale*. Even John Lydgate, the Benedictine monk, avoids extended Christian allegoresis in his *Siege of Thebes*, dwelling instead on the workings of secular history. On a more specific level, the Pseudo-Fulgentius' etymologies fail to reflect how medieval readers directed their sympathies in the *Thebaid*. Hypsipyle, for instance, remains a sympathetic figure throughout all vernacular Theban narratives, as do Archemorus and, especially, King Adrastus. Thus the vernacular Theban tradition, along with the manuscript evidence, suggests only a modest impact of the *Super Thebaiden* on the medieval understanding of the Theban legend. Despite its limited impact, however, the *Super Thebaiden* speaks to the tendency of medieval commentators to give moral value to even the most hopeless of stories.

## STATIUS AS LITERARY ROLE MODEL

The Latinate tradition of Statius in the Middle Ages, that is the body of pedagogical material which students consulted in their reading of the *Thebaid*, contains the seeds for a literary development that influenced the vernacular tradition far more than allegoresis of the poem. That literary development had less to do with the poem itself than with the poet, Statius, for the portrait of Statius the public poet fighting an uphill battle very much influenced medieval vernacular poets forming their own public

*personae*. In their efforts to establish for themselves a reputation for learning and, therefore, authority, vernacular poets often looked to ancient poetic authorities for role models. Statius provided an especially good one in that, as noted above, his own reputation was not colored in any way by personal scandal (as in the case of Ovid) or by perceived malice as concocted by medieval commentators (as in the case of Vergil). The blandness of his life and personality as understood by medieval readers seemed to afford safer raw material around which to model one's own poetic identity.

Additionally, as is typical of epic poets of the Flavian Period, Statius (like Lucan) gives himself as the author more presence in his work than, say, Vergil, whose work dominates the Augustan Age.<sup>57</sup> The authorial voice constantly intrudes upon the narrative, dictating the reader's emotional response to the work by expressing its own response to the material. Statius portrays himself as the reluctant, pained poet forced by his audience to tell a story of misery beyond words. Hence he opens the *Thebaid* with the question "*gentisne canam primordia dirae...?*" (I.4) ["Shall I relate/The origins of that disastrous race...?"], as if he would much rather not have to, and claims "*plorandaque bella protervii/Arcados atque alio Capaneus horrore canendus*" (I.44-5) ["I must mourn/The battles of the wild Arcadian,/And shudder as I sing of Capaneus"]. Statius' poem, therefore, offered medieval writers quite a vivid portrait of poet taking on a task he would rather not do for the sake of his audience, a portrait that in many ways complemented the already favorable portrait we find in the *accessus*. Although the use of Statius as literary role model became almost a commonplace among a series of vernacular poets, one of the earliest instances of it occurs not in a vernacular work but in the Latin treatise of Matthew of Vendôme, the *Ars versificatoria*, the earliest manual of poetics of the Middle Ages with the exception of Bede's *De Schematibus et Tropis*.<sup>58</sup>

Matthew's *Ars versificatoria*, which survives in five manuscripts, belongs to a group of texts known collectively as the *artes poeticae* ("arts of poetry"), which strongly emphasize premeditation in poetic composition; the poet functions like a craftsman and language serves as his building materials. Matthew wrote the *Ars* for his students, and in it, he, like many medieval instructors, uses Statius as a technical authority on Latin usage (although the emphasis falls on poetic schemes and tropes rather than on grammar). Matthew organizes his treatise under the headings of "description," "elegance of words," "eloquence of expression," and "execution of material," and he illustrates each point with countless examples drawn from classical authors including Vergil, Statius, Lucan, and Ovid. Thus, he uses classical texts (the *Thebaid* among them) in much the same way as the grammatical *florilegia*, as a repository of examples. However, Matthew employs another, highly effective, strategy for getting his points across to his students.

The *Ars versificatoria* uses "personality" as a pedagogical tool, and some of this personality derives specifically from Statius' *Thebaid* and the medieval portrait of Statius we find in the *accessus*. Employing Horace's precept that all good poetry pleases

and instructs, Matthew instills humor throughout. He achieves this by framing the various “lessons” of the *Ars* within a mini-drama of professional rivalry between himself and a certain Rufinus, the butt of many of his jokes. The device works. The student making his way through this potentially stodgy tract finds himself periodically jolted awake by examples involving Rufinus, such as this one where Matthew illustrates a verb “cut short”: “*Rufinum coitus meretricis inebriat, immo/Lumina lippa lupae turpis inescat amor*” [“Making love to a prostitute intoxicates him;/Indeed, the charms of a common whore enchant his bleary eyes”].<sup>59</sup> Matthew’s authorial *persona* manifests itself throughout the *Ars*, especially at the beginning and the end, and at both points, Matthew invokes Statius to defend himself against would-be detractors. For example, in the Prologue, Matthew introduces his nemesis, Rufinus:

*Igitur, quia diuturnitas silentii nutrimentum est verbi  
et male cuncta ministrat impetus, Rufinus collateralis  
adversarius, obprobrium hominum et abjectio plebis, ponat  
custodiam ori suo et ostium circumstantiae labiis suis ...*

[Therefore, since a period of silence is food for sensible speech and “rashness serves all things ill,” let my acknowledged enemy Rufinus, a reproach to men and rejected of the people, place a guard at his mouth and a door all around his lips ...]<sup>60</sup>

The phrase “*male cuncta ministrat impetus*” comes from the *Thebaid* (10.704), where Creon tries to dissuade his son Menoeceus from killing himself. The context is a father’s love for his son, but Matthew uses the phrase proverbially, quite apart from context, as a slice of general wisdom. This accounts, perhaps, for why Matthew does not attribute the phrase to Statius here, whereas elsewhere in the *Ars* he nearly always makes the appropriate attribution.

Matthew marshals Statius to his defense again in the closing lines of the *Ars* where he releases his book to readers at large:

*Instruit ad versus pueros haec summula, nomen  
Ex re sortitur: summa docere potest.  
Vive, precor, nec formida livoris hiatum,  
Summula, per menses emodulata duos. (ll. 29-32)*

[This little book instructs boys about verses; it takes Its name from that fact; it can teach the major ideas. O live, I pray, and fear not the stings of envy, Little book written during the course of two months.]<sup>61</sup>

These closing lines participate in the convention of “go little book” as popularized by Ovid.<sup>62</sup> The “go little book” convention involves two gestures: 1) the author addresses his work as “*liber*” (“book”), “*liber parva*,” or in this case “*summula*” (“little book”), and 2) the author bids his work to “*vade*” (go). Horace uses this at the end of his first book of *Epistles*, Ovid takes up the same sentiment in the opening of his *Tristia*, and Statius ends his *Thebaid* with a similar, though not identical, gesture. In all cases, the author anticipates criticism of his work and worries over its fate in the hands of the public. Matthew borrows from all three models. Like Horace, he indicates that his work will instruct schoolboys (although Horace’s prediction for his book was ironic, whereas Matthew’s appears sincere).<sup>63</sup> Like Ovid, he calls his work “little book” (*summula*). But unlike Horace and Ovid, he does not bid his work to “go.” Instead, he quotes Statius’ *Thebaid* (12.816) with “Vive, precor” [“O live, I pray”]. Also, like Statius, he indicates how long it took him to compose the *Ars*: in his case, two months, in Statius’ twelve years. Additionally, like Statius (and Horace), he ends his work with this gesture.

Matthew invokes Statius’ *Thebaid* at the beginning and end of his *Ars* at the points where he makes his poetic *persona* most manifest. In both places, he assumes a defensive posture, anticipating criticism from his detractors. The ending of the *Thebaid*, with its mixture of hope and apprehension, was much imitated in the Middle Ages. Boccaccio imitates it at the end of his *Teseida* (XII, 84-85) and Chaucer, following Boccaccio, imitates it at the end of his *Troilus* (V, 1786-92), where he tells his book to kiss the footsteps of Statius, among other classical poets. In the case of the *Ars*, one could argue that we need not take Matthews’s fears for the fate of his work, expressed at the end, too seriously. After all, Matthew writes these lines simply to illustrate a formula for an effective conclusion, and his cavalier tone throughout the rest of the *Ars* denies any such fear.

On the other hand, the ending of the *Ars* shares with the endings of the *Teseida* and the *Troilus* a certain authorial self-consciousness. In Statius, Matthews finds a model ending that foregrounds the author rather than the hero or the work itself. Matthew, like Statius, calls attention to the tribulations that go into the making of his work, and he suggests a certain authorial vulnerability at the hands of the public. For Matthew, as for later vernacular writers, Statius’ personal presence in his poem formed a precedent for authorial intrusion as a poetic technique. Chaucer too, for example, gives the narrator for the *Troilus* the same emotional involvement (and anguish) with the material that typifies the narrator of the *Thebaid*.<sup>64</sup> Similarly, Joseph of Exeter, in his account of the Trojan War, the *Iliad of Dares Phrygius* (1180’s), not only models his Latin on that of the Flavian poets, but also adopts a beleaguered authorial voice very much like that of the *Thebaid*.<sup>65</sup> Of course, in all of these instances, it could be said that the projection of authorial vulnerability constitutes nothing more than a humility *topos*, but the *topos* provides an opportunity for authorial self-fashioning,

Statius employs it to position himself within Vergil's radius, and medieval poets looked to Statius in shaping their own poetic identities.

In the chapters that follow, I examine the vernacular revisions of Statius' story of Thebes. Unlike the Latinate tradition of Thebes in the Middle Ages, the body of pedagogical material discussed above, which continue to rely on the classical text as "original," the vernacular adaptations of Statius' *Thebaid* depart from the Latinate tradition on several levels: they relate the story of Thebes in the native tongue of their audiences; they re-cast the imagined world of the ancient past into the medieval present to a large extent, and they introduce new characters and scenes into the ancient story. However, many of the concerns and questions that the medieval commentators brought to the classical text also surface in the vernacular adaptations of that text despite their departures from it.

For example, the emphasis on history that we find in the medieval *accessus* on the *Thebaid* also governs the first vernacular adaptation of the Theban legend, the OF *Roman de Thèbes*, which conflates the historical achievements of the ancients and the contemporary historical triumphs of the Normans. Boccaccio, in turn, designs his *Teseida* as an ancient text in its own right when he includes his own glossarial apparatus in his adaptation of the Theban legend into Italian. In so doing, he effectively replicates the very form in which classical texts were transmitted in medieval manuscripts: text surrounded by gloss.<sup>66</sup> Chaucer then assumes in the *Knighi's Tale* the same historicist vision of the ancient past that typifies the pedagogical approach of the *Thebaid* represented by the commentary of Lactantius Placidus. Of course, I do not argue that Chaucer imitates Placidus specifically in this regard, but his evocation of an ancient past as separate from the medieval present is, in many respects, a far more academic approach to antiquity than that of the OF poet or of Boccaccio. Furthermore, in designing his *Anelida and Arcite* as a complaint in the female voice, Chaucer recalls the popularity of the female laments in the *Thebaid*, if we consider how they were highlighted, excerpted and set to music. Finally, the *intentio scribentis* indicated by the medieval *accessus* on the *Thebaid*, namely the belief that Statius, the loyal civil servant, wrote his epic poem about internecine warfare in the past in order to avert civil war in the present, resurfaces in Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes*, where the poet re-packages the Theban legend in the form of a mirror for princes for moral didactic aims. Lydgate himself becomes the loyal civil servant writing about unwise political policy in the past in order to inform the policies of the present. Again, it would be difficult to argue that Lydgate drew motivation for doing this directly from the literary *accessus* on the *Thebaid*, especially since he worked not so much from *Thebaid* as from a prose translation of the OF *Roman de Thèbes*. Nevertheless, he uses the story of Etiocles and Polynices to affect the political climate of his own day in much the same way that medieval commentators claim that Statius used the story. In each of these instances, I argue not for direct source influence but for a more generalized similarity of interpretive

strategy. Thus we find in the Latin tradition of the *Thebaid* in the Middle Ages the same interpretive paradigms, *in nuce*, that shape the vernacular re-workings of the Theban legend in the Middle Ages. I turn now to the very first of these re-workings: the OF *Roman de Thèbes*.



## Chapter One

# The OF *Roman de Thèbes*: The Ancients vs. the Moderns

As the first vernacular adaptation of Statius' story of the war between the sons of Oedipus, the OF *Roman de Thèbes* has attracted scholarly attention for what it has to say about the effects of civil war. Looking to the twelfth-century Norman political scene from which the poem emerged, scholars have related the events of the poem to corresponding instances (or potential instances) of civil war in Anglo-Norman society.<sup>1</sup> The net result of these investigations is a pacifist reading of the poem which depicts the author as the voice of reconciliation amidst impending civil strife, either between Henry II Plantagenet and King Louis VII of France, or among Henry's five sons. The poem becomes a warning against the dangers of civil war and a monument to the body of ancient art and learning threatened as a result. But in their preoccupation with civil war, these studies have overlooked an equally important model of warfare in the contemporary Norman political scene: the crusades, particularly the First Crusade, which represents not civil war, but rather the conquest of one foreign power by another.<sup>2</sup> Not only was crusading a defining element in Norman political ascendancy, but the First Crusade, especially, formed the subject of the most prolific explosion of historical writing in the medieval West, a phenomenon centered in Henry II's domain.<sup>3</sup> Emerging from this same center of activity, the OF *Roman de Thèbes* incorporates the crusading ethos into its retelling of the Theban war. The OF poet transforms Statius' ancient story of civil war into a medieval crusade, and draws upon contemporary chronicle accounts of the First Crusade to structure and develop the poem as a platform for war, not peace. In the process, Thebes becomes an eastern city besieged by an army of crusaders, while the army besieging Thebes includes veteran crusaders. But there is another contest of power at stake in the *Thèbes*, for the eastern city of Thebes also includes among its allies members of the ancient house of Troy, while its attackers include recruits from the ancient Greek army besieging Troy, a campaign which, chronologically, has not yet occurred. By overlaying the narratives of the First

Crusade and the Trojan War, the *Thèbes* creates a strange contest whereby medieval crusaders besiege the ancient Trojans, a contest between the cultural and political giants of antiquity and their medieval heirs.

The OF *Roman de Thèbes* is the earliest of a small group of texts in Old French known collectively as the *romans antiques*.<sup>4</sup> These poems, which include the *Roman d'Enéas* and the *Roman de Troie* of Benoît de Saint-Mauré, were all composed within a period of twenty years (1150-65 or 1170), and all three originate in the domain of western France under the rule of Henry II Plantagenet. (Benoît dedicates the *Roman de Troie* to Henry's queen, Eleanor of Aquitaine.)<sup>5</sup> These texts participate in a growing and lively interest in historiography in general during this period.<sup>6</sup> The *romans antiques* adapt from Latin into *romanz* classical historical material, namely the siege of Thebes, the siege of Troy and the story of Aeneas. Each of these texts derives from a specific Latin source: the *Thebaid* of Statius, the accounts of the Trojan War by Dares Phrygius and Dictys Cretensis, and the *Aeneid* of Vergil. In adapting these narratives of ancient history into the vernacular, the poets draw upon the tradition of French heroic epic while introducing features from the emerging *fin amore* tradition. Neither *historia* nor *roman* nor *chanson de geste*, the *roman antique* constitutes a unique and highly experimental literary form that nevertheless draws upon, and influences, all of these other contemporary genres.

Despite the uniqueness of the *roman antique* as a literary form, comparatively little has been written about these texts. This is especially true of the *Roman de Thèbes*. Following the 1890 edition of the *Thèbes* by Léopold Constans, and his earlier study of the poem, *La Légende d'Oedipe* of 1881, the *Thèbes* has formed the subject of only a handful of articles or chapters in books and a few doctoral dissertations.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, scholarship on the *Thèbes* has tended to fragment the poem, isolating particular features of the work that invite comparison with other contemporary genres such as the *roman* (e.g. the role of women in the poem) or the *chanson de geste* (e.g. the prevalence of conciliar debate), or scholars focus on one particular episode (e.g., the *Daire le Roux* episode, one of most significant additions made to the Latin source) while avoiding that episode's larger implications for the work.

Part of the problem has to do with the poem's complicated manuscript history: the poem survives in five manuscripts (deriving from two ancestors), each of which differs from one another, sometimes quite substantially.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, we speak tentatively at best of *the* text of the *Roman de Thèbes* or *the* *Thèbes* poet,<sup>9</sup> given the variation between each manuscript witness. Hence, scholarship on the poem has generally avoided global readings, adhering instead to discussions of familiar particulars. As a result, there is as yet no satisfactory discussion of what the *Roman de Thèbes* is finally about.

Much of this scholarly impasse has resulted from a restrictive consideration of the poem's sources. Source studies on the *Thèbes* tend to focus either on Statius' *Thebaid* as the chief source of the Theban legend, or on the Ovidian influence in the poem

which accounts for the added love interests, or on the contemporary vernacular tradition of the *chanson de geste*.<sup>10</sup> While all of these source traditions undoubtedly inform our understanding of the *Roman de Thèbes*, they by no means account for the entire textual tradition reflected in the poem. In this chapter, I explore two other important literary contexts of the OF *Thèbes*: the chronicle tradition of the First Crusade which still flourished when the *Thèbes* appeared in the mid-twelfth century, and the medieval legend of Troy. Moreover, I explore how these two traditions, one pertaining to recent history and the other to ancient history, merge and compete in the poem, for their point of contact in the *Thèbes* reveals much about the relationship twelfth-century poets and audiences had with their classical past. This relationship is best characterized by a concept familiar to scholars as *translatio imperii*.

### MEDIEVAL PRESENT AND CLASSICAL PAST

*Translatio imperii* means, literally, “transference of Empire,” and it concerns the political and intellectual legacy of ancient Rome in the medieval West. It became coordinated with the notion of *translatio studii*, or “transference of learning,” which grounded medieval learning in the classical Latin tradition.<sup>11</sup> The concept of a “transference” of authority from the classical past to the medieval present first gains significance in the ninth century under Charlemagne, whose coronation in 800 as Holy “Roman Emperor” secured ancient imperial legitimacy for the Germanic peoples. Under his dominion, Charlemagne revived ancient learning through a rigorous program of copying classical Latin texts. From Charlemagne on, medieval monarchies looked to Rome for political legitimacy, coining genealogies that proved their Roman pedigree. Hence the second flowering of *translatio imperii* occurs in the twelfth century with newly emerging monarchies. Geoffrey of Monmouth, writing under the new Norman rulership of England, begins his *History of the Kings of Britain* (1136) with the founding of Britain by Brutus, great-grandson of Aeneas, and Rigord, in his *Gesta Philippi Augusti* (1196) traces the kings of France back to a certain Marcomirus, a direct descendant of King Priam of Troy.<sup>12</sup> These nascent centers of power gained legitimacy through their affiliation with Rome, the ancient imperial power founded by Trojan refugees.

*Translatio imperii* governs the advent of vernacular literature. While the revival of classical learning under Charlemagne had simply continued the Latinate tradition (learned poetry and historiography from his reign remained in Latin, and Charlemagne embraced Latin as the medium of educational policy), twelfth-century poets achieved a break with the Latinate tradition. In writing for a court setting, they retold the stories of the classical past in the vernacular. For their patrons, the geographic transference of power from Rome to France involved a corresponding linguistic transference of authority from Latin to *romanz*, but this literal “translation” was not

without tension. As Lee Patterson has remarked, vernacular poets engage in a system of both “emulation and exorcism” with regard to their Latin sources, looking to ancient Latin sources for authority while attempting to usurp that authority for their own creations.<sup>13</sup> The *locus classicus* for this manifestation of *translatio imperii* in French literature is the opening of Chretien de Troyes’ *Cliges*:

*Ce nos ont nostre livre apris,  
Que Grece ot de chevalerie  
Le premier los et de clergie.  
Puis vint chevalerie a Rome  
Et de la clergie la some,  
Qui or est en France venue.*

[Our books have taught us that Greece had the first fame of chivalry and learning. Then came chivalry to Rome, and the sum of learning, which now is come to France.]<sup>14</sup>

This same claim to authority appears in the Prologue to the *Roman de Thèbes*, a vernacular retelling of the ancient legend of Thebes.

The concept of *translatio imperii* for the *Thèbes* has been discussed by Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, who reveals a certain rivalry between the vernacular poet and his ancient forebears. Focusing on the Prologue, she examines how the anonymous poet establishes his credibility as a mediator between the ancient Latin source and his French-speaking audience.<sup>15</sup> His qualifications hinge on his learnedness. Thus he says:

*Qui sages est nel doit celer,  
ainz doit por ce son senz moutrer  
que quant il ert du siecle alez  
touz jor en soit mes ramenbrez. (1-4)*<sup>16</sup>

[He who is wise should not hide it.  
Rather, for this he should show his wisdom,  
Because when he is gone from the world  
He may be remembered for it always.] (Coley 1-4)<sup>17</sup>

He speaks of himself, of course: *he* is “*sage*” and shares his wisdom out of a sense of duty.<sup>18</sup> He then places himself among the ranks of other *auctores* of antiquity: Homer, Plato, Vergil, and Cicero (5-6), and his choice of figures tracks the transference of learning from ancient Greece (Homer and Plato) to Rome (Vergil, Cicero) to France (himself). “*Leur sapience*” (7) [“their wisdom”] becomes “*ma sapience*” (10) [“my wisdom”].<sup>19</sup> Thus the *Thèbes* poet establishes himself as a man of wisdom, learned in the classical authors, who has appointed himself as the intermediary between his classical

sources and his contemporary audience.<sup>20</sup> In a nutshell, *translatio imperii* bespeaks a desire to share in the authority of the ancients while replacing them.

Statius is conspicuously absent among the *auctores* mentioned by the poet. This is all the more curious because, unlike the Trojan legend, which came to medieval readers through a number of sources, the legend of Thebes derived from Statius alone. Blumenfeld-Kosinski accounts for this omission as the poet's desire to assert his poetic independence from his classical source; he is "under no compulsion to walk directly in Statius' footsteps," and may claim his own poetic authority.<sup>21</sup> While I agree with Kosinski that the poet struggles with his own authorial legitimacy with respect to his predecessors, I would suggest that the poet's contention lies not with Statius, or Thebes for that matter, but with Troy. Indeed, the ancient poets he does mention in the Prologue (Homer and Vergil) established the legend of Troy as the myth of origin for the West. I suggest that the poet conceives of his narrative not as a Theban narrative exclusively, but also as a Trojan narrative, and that the "translation" he stages is from one Trojan *auctor* to another. This accords with the quantity of material relating to Trojan history in the poem and with the fact that the poem was so often anthologized with other narratives of Troy. In fact, in many ways, the *Thèbes* pre-stages the siege of Troy precisely as a means of achieving the transference of empire from Rome to France, and again, the transference does not come without conflict.

The conflict in the *Roman de Thèbes* is multivalent, involving no fewer than three sets of armies: the armies of Thebes and Argos who contested the throne of Thebes; the armies of the crusaders and the Infidels who contested the territories of the Near East during the First Crusade; and the armies of the Trojans and the Greeks who contested possession of Helen of Troy. Of course, the immediate plot of the poem concerns the conflict between the armies of Thebes and Argos, but the poet introduces into this conflict individuals and scenes derived from the other two conflicts. Thus the *Thèbes* poet forms the opposing armies of Ethïoclés and Pollinicés out of combatants from both the ancient Trojan conflict and the recent history of the Crusades. The "Greeks" fighting for Pollinicés include Greeks from the Trojan War (e.g., Antenor, Nestor), while Theban ranks include Trojan names (e.g., Hector, Calcas). Simultaneously, the Greek and Theban sides take on the aspect of Crusader vs. Infidel. This double subtext of Troy and the Crusades in the story of Thebes results in a conflict between Argive-Greek-Crusaders versus Theban-Trojan-Infidels, creating a scenario where the Trojans, the ancestral stock of the medieval west, become allied with Infidels. Conversely, the Greeks, the legendary destroyers of Trojan civilization, become allied with the crusaders. I argue that the *Thèbes* poet combines Trojan and Crusade history in order to stage a conflict between the ancient Trojans and the medieval crusaders, between the victors (through Aeneas) of antiquity and the new victors of the medieval crusades. Ancient supremacy is literally challenged by a new, medieval, order of supremacy. Thus the full transfer of power from

antiquity to the present involves the medieval heirs of the Trojan legacy wresting power from their ancient ancestors on the battlefield.

### THE *THÈBES* AND THE CRUSADES

The *Thèbes* appears roughly fifty years after the fall of Jerusalem in June 1099 and in the midst of preparations for the Second Crusade. By the time the *Thèbes* poet began writing, already several well-known chronicle accounts of the First Crusade were circulating, most of them written by Frenchmen. Well before the romances of Marie de France and Chrétien de Troyes, these crusade narratives were the literary rage of the early twelfth century.<sup>22</sup> The Crusades had launched a burst of literary activity, beginning with the anonymous *Gesta Francorum* of 1099 (allegedly by an eyewitness) and the account of Raymond of Aguilers. Additional versions followed, including those by Albert of Aix (1119), Fulchre of Chartres (1127), and William of Tyre (completed 1180).<sup>23</sup> The story of the First Crusade proved especially popular in France where, in 1107 alone, three different French monks (Robert the Monk, Guibert of Nogent and Baldric of Bourgueil) revised the *Gesta Francorum*, ostensibly to render the Crusade more theologically acceptable.<sup>24</sup>

By the time the *Roman de Thèbes* appeared c.1150, crusading had taken on an increasingly international character, spread throughout several theaters. After the fall of Jerusalem in 1099, the eastern theater remained a military concern for the West as the newly established Latin territories of Edessa, Antioch, and Jerusalem faced repeated threats by both the Muslims and the Greeks. These new kingdoms could not sustain themselves without regular aid from the West. Thus, as Jonathan Riley-Smith points out, a pattern of crisis in the East, embassy to the West and papal intervention was repeated again and again throughout the twelfth century.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, Spain had emerged as an important theater of crusading. Following the successes of the First Crusade, international attention focused on challenging the Muslim strongholds throughout the southern half of the Iberian Peninsula. This new offensive resulted in a series of successful campaigns (1110, 1114, 1116, 1118, 1125-6), some of which involved veterans of the First Crusade and men from as far away as Norway.<sup>26</sup> Another important theater of crusading was North Africa, the seat of Muslim power that extended into Spain, Sicily, and parts of southern Italy. Germany, too, became another front of crusading during the 1140s: German crusaders, mostly Saxons, began petitioning for papal approval for a campaign against the pagan Wends east of the Elbe.<sup>27</sup>

In April 1147, Pope Eugenius II (1145-53) issued an encyclical which laid out a strategy for crusading that consolidated all of these theaters. Five armies converged on the East including those of Louis of France, Conrad of Germany, Amadeus of Savoy, Alfonso Jordain of Toulouse, and an Anglo-Flemish force.<sup>28</sup> Their goal was to recapture Edessa, which had fallen to Zengi on Christmas Eve 1144 in what was now the

second crusade to the East. Four campaigns emerged in Spain which included forces from Spain, the Low Countries, the Rhineland, northern France, Britain, and Italy.<sup>29</sup> In North Africa, a Sicilian-Norman fleet extended Roger of Sicily's rule along the coast from Tripoli to Tunis. The Germans, too, received permission to launch a crusade against the Wends. Though this crusading activity took place in geographically disparate areas, Jonathan Riley-Smith argues that "contemporaries saw all these expeditions as parts of a single enterprise."<sup>30</sup>

Given the ubiquity of crusading in the social and political life of the mid-twelfth-century, it comes as no surprise that the *Roman de Thèbes* reflects multiple phases of crusading throughout the East and the West. We find clear instances of borrowing, both of characters and scenes, from chronicle accounts of the First Crusade. The poem also contains numerous cross-references to the *Chanson de Roland* of the early twelfth century, which concerns a failed campaign of the eighth century against the Spanish Muslims. The *Thèbes* presents an international cast from Spain, Italy, France, England, and Germany, as well as numerous territories in the Eastern Empire. So comprehensive is the theme of crusading in the *Thèbes*, that a later interpolator of the poem added to the army ofAdrastus the figure of Boniface of Montferrat, a leading figure in the Fourth Crusade which ended in 1204, over fifty years after the poem was originally composed.<sup>31</sup>

In a 1910 article, J. J. Salverda de Grave identified the chronicle accounts of the First Crusade as perhaps the most significant source material for the *Roman de Thèbes*, but while scholars have respectfully acknowledged his findings, none have pursued or developed them.<sup>32</sup> For the most part, scholars have dismissed these references as mere anachronism. Guy Raynaud de Lage insists that the poet introduces crusade material for nothing more than "*une expérience directe de la guerre et de ses divers aspects...*"<sup>33</sup> He insists that there is no Holy War between Christians and Infidels in the *Thèbes*, that the purpose of the work was simply to adapt an ancient story to the tastes of a twelfth-century audience.<sup>34</sup>

Yet the presence of the Crusades in the *Thèbes* is neither arbitrary nor inconsequential. In fact, the story of the First Crusade helps to account for the most sweeping alterations that the *Thèbes* poet brings to Statius' *Thebaid*, including modifications to major characters and additional scenes, and provides a structuring device for the poem, stylistically and ideologically. First, we find numerous references to contemporary peoples and places connected with crusade politics. Second, the OF poet locates the city of Thebes in an eastern landscape; Thebes has numerous and dubious connections with the East, and a large contingent of those defending Ethïoclès are pagan mercenaries who formed the target of the historical campaigns to the East. Third, Pollicicés' army includes veteran crusaders from Spanish, African, and Eastern fronts. Finally, the poem's most substantial additional scenes derive from the chronicle

accounts of the First Crusade, so that events of the poem imitate those of the campaign to Jerusalem in 1096-9.

### THEBAN INFIDELS AND GREEK CRUSADERS

A survey of the ranks of the Theban forces defending Ethïoclés reveals a clear eastern connection. Enlistments include Anirthas (5539), a Duke of Persia, Dÿogenes (6291), Duke of Tyre, Eblon (4695), Duke of Persia, Floriant (4721), count of Turin, who arrives with seven thousand knights from "the Orient," Dapneus of Sadoche (Constans, 5346), Thenelaux of Sidon (4569) (one of of the towns *en route* to Jerusalem), Polydamas of Thessaly (6311), Ates (Constans 3497), son of the king of the Orient, Hermagoras of Salemine (6299), Sylaciel (6285), a Jew, Chanelaux of Phrygia (1655), Godeschax (1660), a Theban knight (in William of Tyre's chronicle of the crusades, this name belongs to a member of a small group of Assassins considering conversion to Christianity),<sup>35</sup> Polydorus of Caesarea (Constans, 6627), and Huitasse (4725), count of Turin.<sup>36</sup>

Several of the names appearing in the ranks of Thebes reflect the equally prominent threat that the Greek kingdom of Byzantium posed to western interests in the East. At least two men in Ethïoclés' army come from Byzantine-controlled territories: Caeroz of Corinth (6323) and Polydamas of Thessaly (6311). Interestingly, many of the names of the Theban recruits combine Greek first names and Muslim controlled place-names: Diogenes of Tyre, Dapneus of Sadoche, Thenelaux of Sidon, and Polydorus of Caesarea. Tyre and Sidon, for instance, were Muslim cities allied with Egypt located in the territory controlled by Muslim potentates which posed an immediate threat to the newly conquered Kingdom of Jerusalem.<sup>37</sup> Such pairing of Greek names and Muslim place-names reflects the persistent Greek threat throughout this period to the Latin territories in the East. When Bohemund, prince of the newly established Principality of Antioch, set out for France in 1106 in order to garner support to defend his territory, he faced Byzantine invasions in Cilicia and Syria, and throughout his tour, he justified an attack on the Greeks as vengeance for their ill-treatment of the crusaders during the First Crusade.<sup>38</sup> By 1146-7, a few years before the *Thebes* was written, the Byzantine Emperor, Manuel I Comnenus, had accepted a peace-settlement with the Sultan (due to Norman attacks on Greek territories) and came to be regarded as a traitor to Christendom.<sup>39</sup> William of Tyre characterizes the Greeks as "extremely effeminate and completely given over to the lustful sins of the flesh," giving us an idea of how Western Christians viewed their Eastern "allies."<sup>40</sup> Thus, the Greeks, while Christian, raised almost as much suspicion in the western imagination as the Muslims. It is not surprising, then, that we find this Muslim-Greek axis reflected in the names of many of the defenders of Ethïoclés in the *Thebes*.

Also defending the city of Thebes are groups of eastern mercenaries. In addition to the seven thousand knights from “the Orient” under the command of Floriant, Ethïoclés’ army includes groups of Achopars (3730) (pagan mercenaries),<sup>41</sup> Escalvons (5438) (Slavs from Dalmatian Croatia), Moors (5438, 8416), Petchenegs (7501, 7505, 7543, 7528) (nomadic Turks), Bulgarians (6960ff.), Syrians (3118), and Turks (3730).<sup>42</sup> The Moors and the Turks were, of course, Muslim, and though there were Christian Syrians, the *Thèbes* poet does not specify the faith of the Syrians defending Thebes. The Bulgarians occupied a liminal position in the First Crusade, often fighting for the Christian side and then for the Muslim side. In any case, Ethïoclés depends for support largely upon peoples held under suspicion by the Latin crusaders.

Ethïoclés’ army also includes men from politically unstable regions in the West, most notably southern Europe. For example, we find among Theban ranks the following names: Antenor of Sardinia (Constans 6035), Galeran of Sipont (1721) (located in Norman Apulia), an anonymous count of Venice (3318, 3505), Agrippa of Sicily (6303), and Petreus of Marseille (Constans 6615). Southern Italy in particular was a patchwork of Byzantine, Muslim, and Latin territories and semi-independent cities. While its ties with the more advanced civilization of Islam fueled a thriving economy throughout this region, the competing cultures of the region made for political unrest.<sup>43</sup> Sipont, where Galeran comes from, was located in Apulia, an area under Byzantine rule for most of this period.<sup>44</sup> Cities such as Venice, while part of the Latin Kingdom, formed hubs of trade with the East. Marseille rivaled Venice as a coastal port city heavily dependent on trade with Islam.<sup>45</sup> Such cities competed with one another in the Latin Kingdoms of the East, and were just as willing to side with the Muslims in the interest of trade as to defend one another out of a shared faith. The island of Sicily, where a certain “Agrippa” comes from, had been under Muslim control until the Norman conquest between 1060 and 1090. Even after Sicily came under Christian rule, communities of Muslims continued to live on the island for over two hundred years, and Sicily remained an intersection of trade between the Muslim Kingdom, the Greek East and the Latin West. Sardinia, where “Antenor” comes from, occupied a similarly ambiguous position in western geography as a Mediterranean center of trade serving Latin, Muslim and Greek interests. Corinth, where “Caeröz” comes from, lay within the Byzantine empire. In 1147, just a few years before the *Thèbes* was composed, Roger II of Sicily invaded the Greek peninsula and robbed Corinth, the region’s chief fortress, of its treasures. This attack drove the Emperor, Manuel I, to forge an alliance with the Turks. The fact that Ethïoclés relies for support on men from these politically and theologically mixed regions only compounds the suspicion surrounding Theban allegiance.

Early on in the poem, the *Thèbes* poet associates the city of Thebes with the East. As a Boeotian city, Thebes lies, geographically, in the West, and Statius depicts the Theban affair as a conflict between one Greek city and another. However, when the

*Thèbes* was composed, the historic city of Thebes lay within the eastern empire of Byzantium. Politically, then, it *was* an eastern city. Reflecting the twelfth-century political landscape, the *Thèbes* locates the legendary Thebes in an eastern landscape controlled by Greek and Arab influence (something Statius never does).

For example, as Pollinicés retreats into exile from Thebes, he chooses a destination among several eastern courts:

*tandis esgart environ soi  
ou il aille servir un roi;  
aille servir cest premier an  
au roi de Gresce ou au Persan,  
ou s'em past outre en Cassidoine,  
ou a ses parens en Sydoine. (589-94)*

[Meanwhile the younger (brother) looked around him—  
Where he might go to serve a king.  
He might go to serve, that first year,  
The king of Greece or of Persia;  
Or he might go beyond into Babylon,  
Or to his relatives in Sidon.] (Coley 555-60)

Pollinicés' choice constitutes an important alteration to the Latin source. Statius poses no such choice to Polynices; the exiled brother wanders through a mythic landscape, which catalogs the divine forces controlling human affairs, and arrives exhausted and delirious in Argos "*ignotaeque adclinis postibus aulae*" (I.388) ["leaning on the unknown palace doors" (Melville I.390)] (*Thebaid*, I.312-90).<sup>46</sup> The medieval poet, however, has Pollinicés choose between, on one hand, several Muslim centers of power (Persia, Babylon, Sidon, all localities that do not appear in Statius) and, on the other, the (Christian) court of the Greek king. In the terrain of the crusades, Pollinicés must choose among enemies: Muslims or Eastern Christians, both of whom posed a threat to the interests of western Christendom. He chooses the lesser enemy, the Greek king, and from this point on, the opposition between Argos and Thebes becomes one of Christian versus Infidel.

The Greek side of the conflict in the *Roman de Thèbes*, on the other hand, bears strong resemblance to a western crusading army. Surveying the Greek ranks in the *Thèbes*, we find that many of them hold credentials in crusading from both the eastern and Spanish theaters. In the cause of liberating Thebes, these men "*tuit se livrent a martire*" (9848) ["gave themselves as martyrs" (Coley, 9716)]. Thideüs, for example, the true hero of the *Thèbes*, rivals Roland in fighting capability:

... de prouesse sembla Roullant. (772)  
[in prowess he was like Roland] (Coley 748)

*Coux donne merveillex et granz,  
onc nel donna meillor Rollans* (1711-12)  
[He gives blows marvelous and powerful —  
Never did Roland give better] (Coley 1677-8)

Like Roland, his sword hilt contains holy relics (“*car reliques mout fors y a*” (1680)). His horse comes from Castille (5789), and the poet describes him as a messenger of God (“*A deu comande sa moillier*” (Constans, 1222)). On his embassy to Ethioclés, the poet exclaims “*Or li aïst Diex et ses droit,/ses vasselages et sa foiz*” (1249-50) [“Now might God help him and his cause,/His courage and his faith” (Coley, 1231-2)]. Thideüs’ likeness to a crusader (namely Roland), and the poet’s sympathy with him, comes in sharp contrast to his role in the *Thebaid*, where he distinguishes himself by the grotesque act of chewing on the severed head of Melanippus (perhaps the most memorable scene of the *Thebaid*). His remarkable transformation from cannibal into crusader points to the OF poet’s systematic revision of the Theban conflict in accordance with the moral standards suggested by the chronicle accounts of the crusades.

Similarly, Amphiaraus, the “archbishop” (*arcevesque*) of the Greek side, is likened first to Godfrey de Bouillon (5025) (one of the commanders of the First Crusade) fighting the Turks, and then to the Archbishop Turpin (5027) of the *Chanson de Roland* fighting the Saracens in Spain. About another Greek, Garsi of Marre,<sup>47</sup> the poet tells us “*N’ot tel el regne al rei Anfous*” (Constans, 4440) [“There is not such a one in the kingdom of Alfonso” (Coley, 4440)].<sup>48</sup> Adrastus, too, has crusader connections: he is the nephew of Flori, who took the city of Tarse “*quant il ocist le roi de Persse*” (4296) [“when he killed the king of Persia” (trans. mine)].<sup>49</sup> One of Adrastus’ striking feats in the *Thèbes* involves leading a contingent of “*antif et gros*” (4825) [“old and fat”] knights from ancient families against the Thebans who distinguish themselves on the battlefield by displaying their white beards to the enemy (4862ff.). In the *Roland*, the Saracens remark at the white beards of the Franks spread over their hauberks (*Roland* 3087), and Charlemagne is prominent for his large, white beard (3654). Another Greek soldier, Alexander of Moncensis (4812), is identified as the son of Boniface from Lombardy, based on Boniface of Montferrat, a prominent figure in the Fourth Crusade. Parthenopeus, one of the seven commanders, rides a horse from Spain (4125) and dresses “*en guise de François*” (4124) [“in the manner of a Frenchman”], as does Meleazar of Margerye (8302). On the whole, the Greek host in the *Thèbes*, particularly its high command, bear the features, credentials, and equipment of crusaders. The *Thèbes* poet clearly had crusade narratives in mind when he adapted the story of Thebes to twelfth-century tastes.

## CLOSING RANKS AT MONTFLOR

Perhaps the most convincing evidence of the influence of the accounts of the First Crusade on the OF *Thèbes* concerns the additional episodes the poet brings to the Latin source: the siege of Montflor, the famine and expedition for provisions, and the episode of *Daire le Roux*. While these three episodes, particularly the *Daire le Roux* episode, have attracted scholarly attention individually, no recent study of the *Thèbes* has explored how these episodes work together in the narrative and how they help to structure the poem. This lacuna in the criticism stems from the widespread oversight of the importance of the literature of the First Crusade for the *Roman de Thèbes*, an importance that J. J. Salverda de Grave identified around the turn of the century but which scholars have subsequently ignored.<sup>50</sup> In fact, all three of these additional episodes derive from similar episodes in the chronicle accounts of the First Crusade and have the overall effect of making the story of the Theban war resemble the expedition to Jerusalem of 1095-9. I will discuss these episodes one at a time. I should say here that no single crusade chronicle I discuss has been positively identified as the source for the *Thèbes*. However, these accounts share many of the same episodes since they borrow heavily from one another. While I may use a single example by way of comparison, the episodes I discuss can be found in a number of parallel accounts. Above all, these chronicles were enormously popular during this period and circulated widely, and there is every reason to believe that the *Thèbes* poet had access to more than one version of them.

I begin with the episode of Montflor. After departing from Argos, and before reaching Thebes, Adrastus' army comes to a fortified city called Montflor. Ethïoclés controls the city, and a figure called Meleager governs it (2943ff.).<sup>51</sup> Soon after the Greek army encamps around the city, Pollinicés strikes up an exchange with Meleager through a window in one of the towers. Meleager, he finds out, is first cousin to Ethïoclés (and, therefore, to Pollinicés himself). Pollinicés discloses his identity and then promises to reward Meleager handsomely if he yields the city to him. If he refuses, Pollinicés says, "*ja n'i avra garde parage/ne amitié ne cousinage/que ne vous pende toz as portes/as laz coranz et as roortes*" (3019-22) ["Not at all will kinship prevent me,/Or friendship or cousinship,/From hanging you all at the gates/With running knot cords and with nooses"] (Coley 2753-6). Meleager goes to his barons and tries to convince them of Pollinicés' legal right to the city, given that Ethïoclés' one-year term has expired. A debate ensues and the barons refuse to betray Ethïoclés, but Meleager remains sympathetic to Pollinicés and informs him of his failed negotiations. Achillor, a baron in the tower, shouts challenges to the Greeks. Meanwhile, under the expert council of three Venetian counts, who command a handsome fee, Adrastus' army captures the city by staging a false retreat. The Greeks take the citizens captive, except Meleager "*pour ce qu'il le souffri a rendre*" (3689) ["Because he had offered to surrender himself"] (Coley 3443)]. None of this material appears in the *Thebaid*.

In a number of important ways, the siege of Montflor in the *Thèbes* evokes the chronicle accounts of the First Crusade. Within the overall narrative, it occurs between the assembling of forces at Argos and the final siege of Thebes. In the *Thebaid*, the army of Adrastus goes directly to Thebes with no intervening campaigns, but the *Thèbes* inserts a lesser campaign that has little to do with Thebes itself. In this respect, it resembles many of the lesser sieges of the cities *en route* to Antioch and Jerusalem in 1097-9. Once beyond Constantinople, the crusading armies overtook a series of fortified cities including Nicea, Tarse, Marash, Mamistra, Edessa, Seruj, and Artah before reaching Antioch. Between the sieges of Antioch and Jerusalem, the crusaders besieged more fortified cities including Albara, Maara, Arka and Antardos. Although the sieges of Antioch and Jerusalem receive most coverage in the accounts, chroniclers nevertheless related these lesser sieges as well, the accounts of which sound very much alike. This repetition in the chronicles serves, among other things, to convey the full extent of enemy territory. Similarly, in the *Thèbes*, Montflor extends Ethïoclés' domain; he controls an entire region, not just a single city. By prefacing the siege of Thebes with the preliminary siege of Montflor, the *Thèbes* imitates the narrative terrain of the crusade chronicle.

Furthermore, the poet describes the tactics of siege warfare in the same detail that we find in the chronicles. For example, Thideüs summons engineers to build siege engines (3270-80). He specifies that they should drag timber from the woods and make two stone-throwing catapults "*fors et gitanz et bien manieres*" (3272) ["strong and very light and which threw well" (Coley 3020)]. The poet describes them smashing sections of the wall and breaking pillars (3279-80). Adrastus' army also uses Greek fire (*grejois feu*, 3161, 3289) against Montflor, a weapon developed in the seventh century and a mainstay in medieval siege warfare.<sup>52</sup> Finally, the Venetian counts as military advisers in this episode speaks to the important Venetian presence in the early years of the Crusade.<sup>53</sup>

Another similarity between the siege of Montflor and the numerous sieges of the crusade accounts involves conciliar debate. Such councils occur frequently throughout the *Thèbes*, comprising a significant addition to the Latin source.<sup>54</sup> In most cases, as at Montflor, they concern military strategy, and Montflor, especially, evokes the circumstances of crusade warfare. Once the inhabitants of Montflor refuse to surrender outright, the Greek forces convene a council to devise a strategy. Despite his initial bravado, Pollinicés argues for withdrawal:

*'Seigneur, fet il, veez quel tor!  
Ne crient assaut de nul seingnor....  
Lessons Monflor, alons avant!  
Au vif deable le conmant!'* (3131-2, 3139-40)

['Lords,' said he, 'see what a tower!  
 It does not fear the attack of any lord...  
 Let us leave Montflor, let us go forward!  
 I commend it to the living devils.'] (Coley 2873-4, 2883-4)

Thideüs calls Pollinicés a “coward” (*coart*), “blockhead” (*bricon*) and “idler” (*musart*) (3143-4), and he insists that unless they take Montflor, “*Mar conquerron no l'autre terrelou nos trouveron l'autre guerre*” (3151-2) [“We shall scarcely overcome the rest of the land, where we will find fierce war” (Coley 2895-6)]. Adrastus sides with Thideüs, in no small measure because of the “*tant gentilz houme d'autre terre/qui erent venuz pour conquerré*” (3643-4) [“many a nobleman of another land/Who have come to make conquests” (Coley 3397-8)], precisely the situation of the crusades. Such councils also occur frequently throughout the chronicle accounts of the First Crusade since divisiveness arose repeatedly among leaders of the crusade (though some chroniclers like Robert the Monk deemphasize contention in order to present a more unified Christian front). In this respect, the council of the Greek commanders in the *Thebes* participates in a well-established chronicle tradition of conciliar debate.

The Montflor episode not only resembles a siege episode from the crusade chronicles, but it also serves the same function within the larger narrative of the *Thebes* as the lesser sieges do in the chronicles. The episode of Montflor, above all, consolidates the aim and will of the Greek forces collectively before they ever reach Thebes. It sets up a situation that demands coordinated effort among the Greeks and showcases the ability of the various commanders to work together, both on the battlefield and in the council chamber. In forming this *communitas* among the Greeks, the episode subsumes the personal quarrel of Pollinicés with his brother to the collective agenda of the Greeks against the forces of Ethiolclés. Montflor transforms the familial conflict between the brothers into a collective conflict between the Greeks and the Thebans (who control more than just Thebes). Therefore, the conflict is no longer a civil war. Moreover, the scene builds suspense within the narrative as Montflor becomes a rehearsal for Thebes, just as the lesser campaigns in the chronicles anticipate the magnificence of the sieges of Antioch and Jerusalem. While a few critics have discussed the Montflor episode for its richness in detail of twelfth-century siege warfare, none have examined how this episode contributes to the larger narrative of the *Thebes*, a contribution that, I argue, only becomes apparent within the context of the chronicle tradition of the First Crusade.

## FAMINE AND FORAGING AS A CRUSADE THEME

Working in chronological order, we turn now to the second additional episode in the *Thebes*: the famine within the Greek camp outside of Thebes and the expedition into Russia for provisions. Immediately following the death of Thideüs, the Greek forces face starvation:

*Grant est la gent, gaste est la terre;  
loing leur estoit vitaille a querre:  
de trois granz jornees sanz faille  
ne pueent il trouver vitaille.  
Destroite est mout la gent menue,  
destroit sunt cil de grant tenue,  
car ne pueent praer ne prendre,  
et pou treuvent vitaille a vendre. (6949-56)*

[The army was huge, the land was laid waste,  
It was necessary for them to seek far for provisions:  
On three long day's journeys, without exception,  
They could not find food.  
The lesser people were considerably worried,  
And those with great holdings were worried,  
Because they could not ask for or take,  
And they found little food for sale.] (Coley 7293-7300)

Concerned about declining morale, Hippomedon (one of the seven commanders) proposes a foraging expedition. First, he consults with several Bulgarians, who tell him of “*unne terre planteive*” (6974) [“a plentiful land”] near Russia where “*des vingnes sont granz li clos;/tel sont li vergier que nos tuit/i pourrions vivre de fruit*” (6982-4) [“the vineyards are large;/Such are the orchards that all of us/Could live on the fruit there” (Coley 7326-7)], and they report extensive herds of pigs and cattle. However, they go on, there is only one way into the region, and they will have to fight their way in (6990). They journey into Russia where they encounter an ambush party led by a certain Faramond, count of Valfecond, who has been conspiring with Ethüoclés. The Greeks outwit the ambush party and return to the camp laden with provisions.

Famine posed a continual threat to the crusading armies in the Holy Land, and, consequently, forms a recurring theme in the chronicles of the First Crusade.<sup>55</sup> One particularly well-known instance of famine in the chronicles occurs during the siege of Antioch, an episode which shares many features with the episode in the *Thèbes*.<sup>56</sup> When the siege was in its third month, provisions in the army encamped around Antioch ran dangerously low. Although the surrounding area had had abundant food-stuffs, the Frankish army faced exorbitantly inflated prices for basic provisions. In response, Bohemund organized a foraging expedition into enemy lands and encountered an ambush party of Turks on the return journey. However, they defeated the Turks, returning to the camp laden with supplies.

In addition to the obvious parallel of famine/foraging in the two scenes, a number of details in the *Thèbes* link the famine episode specifically with the crusades. One such detail concerns the difficulty of purchasing food in the surrounding area. The

*Thèbes* indicates that by the time Hippomedon returns to the camp with supplies, flour had become so scarce that “*le pain vendoit on a or fin/le cartier un marabotin*” (7263-4) [“People sold bread for fine gold,/The fourth of a gold coin” (Coley 7615-6)]. A *marabotin* is, specifically, an Arab gold coin struck by the Almoravids of North Africa.<sup>57</sup> By including it here, the poet evokes the commercial map of the crusades where crusaders purchased supplies, often at inflated prices, with foreign currency. Another detail concerns the Bulgarian guides. J. J. Salverda de Grave notes that the historians of the crusades speak often of the fertility of Bulgaria. In the *Gesta Francorum*, this same Bohemund and his men “*applicuerunt Bulgariae partibus; ubi invenerunt nimiam abundantiam frumenti et vini et alimentorum corporis*” [“reached western Macedonia, where they found plenty of corn and wine and other things to eat”].<sup>58</sup> Bulgaria’s reputation for plenty helps to explain the appearance of Bulgarian guides in the *Thèbes*, especially as they disappear from the narrative after the expedition. Finally, in the ambush scene, the main combat tactic used by the enemy side corresponds to what chroniclers of the First Crusade report about Turkish battle tactic, namely circling the enemy army on horseback while firing arrows.<sup>59</sup>

Such famine episodes belong specifically to the chronicle tradition; we do not find them in either the *chanson de geste* or in the romance tradition. In the chronicles, these famine episodes serve the narrative by depicting hardship in the crusading ranks, highlighting the sacrifices made in the name of holy war. There are any number of ways that the *Thèbes* poet might have depicted hardship in the Greek camp, ways that derive from the *chanson de geste*, for instance. By showing hardship specifically in the form of famine, and by borrowing from the well-known famine episode at Antioch, the poet lends to the narrative the flavor of a crusade chronicle.

### DAIRE LE ROUX AND THE PIOUS TRAITOR

The third, and longest, substantial addition that the *Thèbes* poet brings to the *Thebaid* is the episode of *Daire le Roux*. The episode follows immediately on the foraging expedition, and opens (7291ff.) as a young Theban is captured by the Greeks. Pollinics knows him well from earlier days and seeks to rekindle their friendship. He allows him to stay in his tent, to take meals with him and to move about the camp freely. Pollinics does this “*car bien en cuide son preu fere*” (7302) [“For he firmly expected to gain his advantage by this” (Coley 7656)] and he offers the young man a bargain: in exchange for surrendering his family tower in Thebes, Pollinics will give him twice as much land as his ancestors held (7325-7). The poet stresses the intimacy of the whole exchange: Pollinics speaks to the young man “*soi seul*” (7304) [“by himself alone”], he calls him “*Amis*” (7305) [“friend”], he tells the youth of how he has arranged for his utmost comfort in the camp, and swears that if he agrees to his offer, “*nostre amor ert entiere et voire*” (7318) [“our love will be sure and true” (Coley

7672)]. When the young man agrees to cooperate, Pollinicés laughs and “*son braz li a a son col mis*” (7324) [“put his arms around the other’s neck” (Coley 7678)].

The young man vows to negotiate with his father, Daire, a powerful noble of Thebes, and then to return to the Greek camp as a prisoner. Predictably, his return to Thebes sparks a conflict of loyalty: the young man does anything, including lying to his father, to secure the tower for the Greeks, but his father, though wanting desperately to free his son, refuses to commit treason by releasing the tower. Hence, Daire negotiates with Ethïoclés, urging him to honor his original pact with Pollinicés of alternate rule. He makes an eloquent plea for peace, noting the losses to Ethïoclés’ territory and the loss to all Theban families of their young men. When Ethïoclés strikes Daire in anger, Daire betrays Thebes by allowing Greek knights to scale the tower with ladders. Battle ensues, Ethïoclés takes the Greek intruders prisoner, and Daire goes on trial. Ethïoclés spares Daire’s life only after Jocaste arranges for Ethïoclés to marry Daire’s daughter, Salamander. Pollinicés, in turn, frees Daire’s son. Despite Pollinicés’ failed attempt to invade the city in the end, nevertheless, this scene marks the beginning of the end of Ethïoclés’ control over Thebes.

The *Daire le Roux* episode has come under critical attention primarily for its legal aspects. Its subtle debate over the terms of treason and punishment reveal much about the twelfth-century feudal judiciary system, and critics have compared this episode with similar trials in the *chanson de geste*. In line with feudal concerns, one study explores the episode for how it manifests anxieties over patrilineal loyalty.<sup>60</sup> The episode has also come under investigation within the context of academic modes of ethical argumentation.<sup>61</sup> Such critical discussions, while valuable for our understanding of twelfth-century modes of disputation and legal procedure, do little to explain why the poet would have added this trial to the story of Thebes, or what this episode does for the narrative as a whole. An equally vital context for the *Daire le Roux* episode, and one which reflects its full significance for the *Thèbes*, is the chronicle tradition of the First Crusade.

One of the most celebrated episodes in the chronicle accounts of the siege of Antioch concerns Pirus, the Pious Traitor.<sup>62</sup> It survives in both Latin and Arabic sources, including the histories of Robert the Monk, Fulchre of Chartres, Guibert of Nogent, Albert of Aix, the *Chanson d’Antioch*, and William of Tyre, to name a few, and an analogous account appears in the Spanish *Gran Conquista*.<sup>63</sup> Though the details of the event vary somewhat from one account to the other, the basic story concerns the surrender of Antioch to the Franks in June 1099 with the help of someone inside the city. His identity varies in the accounts: he is a Turk, a Greek, or an Armenian, and in at least one account, he is a member of a distinguished family of Antioch.<sup>64</sup> At some point during the siege of Antioch, Pirus develops a friendship with Bohemund, one of the leaders of the First Crusade. (Both Robert the Monk and William of Tyre characterize the friendship as secret and intimate, and the former has Bohemund quietly

convert Pirus to Christianity.) Pirus keeps Bohemund informed on the progress of the siege from within the city and devises a plan to surrender three of the towers in his control to the Franks. Meanwhile, Pirus sends his son into the crusader camp as a pledge of faith, and in some versions his son acts as an intermediary between Pirus and the Christian army.<sup>65</sup> By some accounts, Pirus is discovered and brought before the lord of Antioch and his barons on suspicion of treason.<sup>66</sup> After he manages to provide adequate proof of his innocence, Pirus proceeds to admit the crusaders into the city by lowering a rope through an opening in the ramparts.<sup>67</sup> The crusaders scale the wall and open the city gates to the Christian forces.

The structural similarities between the Pious Traitor episode in the crusade accounts and the *Daire le Roux* episode in the *Thèbes* are manifold: both Daire and Pirus are members of distinguished families within the city under siege;<sup>68</sup> both belong or have access to the lord's inner circle; both have sons who act as intermediaries with the enemy camp; both men experience a crisis of loyalty (Daire more so than Pirus); both men are arrested on suspicion of treason (Pirus' arrest appears in some, though not all, accounts) but manage to escape punishment, and both men betray their cities by lowering a rope/ladder for the enemy army. Furthermore, both episodes stress the secret, intimate nature of the friendship, although in the *Thèbes* Pollinicés forms a friendship with the son (the intermediary) rather than with his father (the traitor). Above all, the Daire episode serves the same function in the *Thèbes* as the Pious Traitor episode serves in the chronicle accounts: it exposes internal weakness within a city governed by an autocrat with eastern connections, it marks the beginning of the end for the security of the city, and it justifies the invasion of the city by reflecting favorably on the invading army.

It is tempting to attribute these three episodes (Montflor, the famine and *Daire le Roux*) to anachronism, or chronological incongruities, so typical of medieval adaptations of ancient narrative.<sup>69</sup> All of the *romans antiques*, while set in antiquity, present essentially medieval characters, wearing medieval dress, engaged in medieval modes of conduct. Ancient themes take on contemporary form and Christian significance. Hence, the combatants at Thebes assume medieval rank (i.e. "duke," "count" and "knight"), and Parthenopeus courts Antigone according to the customs of *fine amor*. The usual pattern involves grafting familiar aspects of the material and social world of the present onto the past in order to render the past more accessible to the contemporary audience.

To be sure, the *Thèbes* poet does "update" the ancient story of Thebes with medieval costume and custom. However, the episodes of Montflor, the famine and *Daire le Roux* involve more than mere window-dressing. The poet does not simply medievalize scenes from his Latin source; he adds entirely new episodes, none of which have anything to do with Theban history. He pulls all three episodes from the chronicle accounts of the First Crusade, adding some material from more recent crusading

events. Moreover, all three episodes serve the aims of the larger narrative quite specifically: Montflor redefines the conflict from an individual one to a collective one (comparable to the crusading enterprise). It defines the moral terrain of the conflict by figuring the Theban side in eastern terms and the Greek side in crusader terms, and, consequently, establishes credibility and sympathy for the Greeks and their cause well before they reach Thebes. The famine episode shows the Greeks suffering for a greater cause while exposing the treachery of the supporters of Ethïoclés, who fight in the style of Turks, and like Montflor, the famine episode solidifies reader sympathies. Similarly, the *Daire le Roux* episode constitutes more than a rhetorical interlude in the *Thèbes*. It uncovers internal weakness in Ethïoclés' high command, exposes Ethïoclés himself as a tyrant who violates the most fundamental rules of feudal conduct, and therefore justifies a Greek invasion (just as the Pious Traitor episode justifies the Frankish invasion of Antioch). Furthermore, all three episodes in the *Thèbes* fall in the same chronological order as their corresponding episodes in the chronicle accounts. (An exception might be made for the Montflor episode since there are many such episodes of lesser sieges in the chronicles which occur before and after the sieges of Antioch and Jerusalem). Thus, far from simply "updating" the story of Thebes with contemporary scenery and costume, the *Thèbes* poet deliberately lends the story of Thebes some aspects of the structure and ethos of a crusade narrative.

## THE GODS AND FALSE BELIEF

The context of the crusades also helps us to make sense of the surprise appearance of the gods late in the *Roman de Thèbes*. Their appearance has perplexed students of the *Thèbes* for its singularity, since this is the only time in the poem when the gods appear and, moreover, they only appear in two of the manuscript witnesses of the *Thèbes* (mss. B and C; other manuscripts contain some of the elements in abbreviated form). On the whole, the *Thèbes* suppresses the divine machinery that so dominates the Latin source and, therefore, the belated appearance of the gods in the poem has become one of the most contested issues among scholars of the *Thèbes*.

Scholars have proposed several theories to explain the divine Council in the *Thèbes*. Both editors of the *Thèbes* suggest that the scene is a later interpolation of material from the *Thebaid*, not part of the original text.<sup>70</sup> In this light, P. B. Grout suggests that the scene may be a poetic gesture of fidelity to the Latin source.<sup>71</sup> However, Grout's theory seems implausible given the total exclusion of the pagan gods from the poem up to this point. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski claims that the poet deliberately marshals the pagan gods in the *Thèbes* as a metaphor for "the moral usefulness of ancient learning." She interprets the gods favorably as agents in the poet's self-appointed task as "preserver and perpetuator of an ancient tale in the service of a moral lesson."<sup>72</sup> But if the gods serve a worthy cause, why does the poet exclude them up to this point?

Jean Charles Payen examines this scene in light of the East-West dichotomy in the poem, and (allowing for exceptions) concludes that since, in general, the poet more readily accuses the Thebans of idolatry than the Greeks, the poet includes the gods in order to give his audience the flavor of pagan religion.<sup>73</sup> Like Grout, then, Payen suggests that the gods are largely inessential to the poem's overall message.

Much of the confusion arises from a tendency among critics to rigidly categorize the theology of the *Thèbes* as that of the ancients, and to view the characters of the poem as undifferentiated ancient pagans. To be sure, P. B. Grout notes correctly that the central characters "are clearly not meant to be seen as Christians."<sup>74</sup> As figures from the ancient past, they are *not* Christian. However, the OF poet has rendered some of these ancients (namely the Thebans and their allies) more pagan than others by imposing the theological distinctions of crusade literature onto the ancient legend of the Theban war. Thus in the divine Council episode, the poet conflates the ancient pagan pantheon with the religion of medieval Infidels so that the Thebans and their gods have more in common with medieval Muslim culture than with ancient pagan culture.<sup>75</sup> The rarity of this divine appearance in the *Thèbes* may be attributed to the fact that the *Thèbes* poet generally selects the secular elements of crusade narratives (tactics, famine, councils) over the sacred. Nevertheless, it is difficult to separate the historical and theological aims of the crusade histories, and in this divine appearance in the *Thèbes*, we see that theological dimension at work.

The OF poet triggers the appearance of the gods late in the poem with Capaneüs' enraged speech on the walls of the temple within Thebes, a scene derived from one of the most memorable scenes of the *Thebaid* in which Capaneus, the archetypal blasphemer, insults the gods and provokes Jupiter to combat (*Thebaid*, X.896-906). Jupiter, observing from above, strikes Capaneus dead with a thunderbolt. This is not the first time Capaneus insults the gods, for earlier he derides the prophecy of Amphiaraus and Melampus as futile attempts to penetrate "*inani... polo*" (III.657-8) ["heaven's void"], dismissing the "*dementia Phoebi*" (III.667) ["Apollo's fear-filled lunacies"] and insisting that "*primus in orbe deos fecit timor!*" (III.661) ["It's fear that first/Created gods"]. Throughout the *Thebaid*, Capaneus remains belligerent and impetuous, and Jupiter's thunderbolt arrives in Book X not a moment too soon.

All of the manuscript witnesses of the *Thèbes* preserve this scene. However, two of them contain an expanded version of Capaneüs' speech, expanded not only upon the other OF versions, but also upon the *Thebaid* itself. The speech that runs for thirteen lines in the Latin source (X.873-7 and 899-906) runs for sixty-four lines in the *Thèbes* (9312-9376).<sup>76</sup> Clearly, the poet aspires to more than simple fidelity to his Latin source and views the scene as an added opportunity to further expound upon the moral and theological contest he has conceived thus far in the poem. This would explain the important changes he makes to the parallel scene in the *Thebaid*.

First of all, the poet changes the entire orientation of the speech so that Capaneüs addresses a different audience in the French poem than in the Latin source. In Statius, Capaneus provokes the gods themselves (“*nunc age, nunc totis in me conitere flammis, Iuppiter!*” (X.904) [“Come, Jupiter, with all your fiery flames”]); in the *Thèbes*, however, he challenges the people who *believe* in those gods rather than the gods themselves:

*‘Gent plus d’autre maleüree  
 Qui tante paine as enduree:  
 Bien vous ai la touz enserrez:…  
 N’i vaudra rien deu[s] ne deese,  
 Lire sautier ne chanter messe;  
 N’i vaudra rien veu ne promesse  
 Que clers en face ne clergesse.  
 Ou sont ore tuit vostre dé?’* (Constans, appendix II, 9317-19 and 9329-37)

[‘People more wretched than any other  
 who have endured such suffering,  
 well I have captured you all:…  
 Gods or goddesses will be useless,  
 reading the psalms and singing mass will be useless;  
 the vow or promise that clerics or nuns make  
 will be worth nothing.  
 Where are your gods now?’] (trans. mine)

He chastises the Thebans for false belief and tells them that their gods have abandoned them. Claiming that their gods are no more than deified humans, he threatens to expose them as imposters: he promises that he will bring Jupiter down from heaven “*Que vous tuit le pourrez veoir*” (Constans, appendix II, 9372) [“So that you can see all”] and he swears to make the other gods live “*com autre gent*” (9374) [“As other men”] (no longer as gods).<sup>77</sup> It comes as no surprise, then, that Capaneüs opens this tirade with “*Monjoie!*,” the famous crusader cry used throughout the *Chanson de Roland*.

Second, Capaneüs refers to “*tuit li dieu de ceste vile*” (Constans, appendix II, 9347) [“all the gods of this city”] as if to distinguish the religion of Thebes from his own religion.<sup>78</sup> And he greatly expands the roster of pagan figures he condemns from his Latin source, including deities (Juno, Mars, Venus, Bacchus), lesser deities (Leucathoe, Agave, Palemon, and Semele), and seers (Calcas, Tiresias, and his daughter Manto). He attacks pagan religion on more levels than does the Latin source, from its gods down to its followers.

Third, in addition to reorienting the message of Capaneüs' speech, the *Thèbes* poet redeems the messenger. Whereas the Capaneus of the *Thebaid* embodies angry irreverence, the Capaneüs of the *Thèbes* is the model vassal. Like Thideüs, he makes the transition into Old French as a reformed man, and consistently assumes proper rank, obeying Adrastus faithfully. Even his earlier resistance to the prophecy of Amphiarus translates into sound advice to Adrastus to avoid distractions: "*Chevauche toi, ne croi en sort*" (2097) ["Ride to battle, do not believe in sorcery"]. Though he speaks "*comme hom iriez*" (2082) ["like an angry man"], he reminds Adrastus of his duty to the army. In the face of superstition, Capaneüs becomes the voice of reason. Hence the shock when he "*perdre la teste*" (9245) ["loses his head"] on the walls of Thebes and shouts in a "*voiz horrible et fière*" (9315) ["horrible and proud voice"]. Of course, this violation of character would support the source-fidelity theory, as Capaneüs seems to revert back to his role in the Latin source. But if this passage is an ancient artificial limb in the *Thèbes*, then why would the poet expand Capaneüs' speech and alter it in the ways we have seen? Why would the poet make Capaneüs sympathetic up until this point? How does this scene serve the poem's larger narrative aims?

The possibility proposed by Blumenfeld-Kosinski takes Capaneüs in the *Thèbes* as a "wrecker of civilization." She reads the scene as a "moral lesson" of "what happens to a society when one of the leaders defies not only the gods but also the achievements of art and poetry."<sup>79</sup> She locates that art and poetry specifically in the temple that Capaneüs smashes, which she takes to represent the "learned tradition and its expression through writing."<sup>80</sup> However, the Capaneüs of the *Thèbes* is far more tame than his ancient counterpart; his wrecking activity confines itself to this one scene. Up until this final battle scene, the poet has secured Capaneüs' credibility as a commander, disposing us favorably to what he has to say. Moreover, the gods he "defies" are pagan gods placed within the larger network of pagan subordinates. The artwork he smashes is pagan artwork — a pagan temple with a mural of Cadmus' founding of Thebes and frontal mosaics of pagan deities.<sup>81</sup> The "civilization" that Capaneüs attacks, then, is pagan, not Christian, a distinction that a twelfth-century audience would hardly miss.

I suggest that the *Thèbes* poet found in Capaneüs a very convenient voice for discrediting pagan belief. The occasion comes to him ready-made from the *Thebaid*, and he simply expands it by adding more supporting material to the argument, building up the speaker's credibility beforehand and broadening the audience of the message to include both gods and believers. Moreover, he directs the attack to the citizens of a city which is largely defended by pagan mercenaries and whose leader resembles an eastern despot. To be sure, Capaneus in the *Thebaid* is a blasphemer, but he curses precisely the peoples and beliefs that so preoccupied the crusaders. The OF poet appropriates the irreverent voice of Capaneüs from the Latin source and makes it serve his larger purpose of condemning the Thebans as the enemies of Western Christendom using

the moral categories characteristic of crusade histories. Thus, far from being an attacker of civilization, Capaneüs, in this scene in the *Thèbes*, becomes a defender of the Faith. It is for this reason, in all likelihood, that the OF poet alters the conditions of Capaneüs' death: whereas in the *Thebaid*, Capaneus dies by the divine hand of Jupiter who sends down a lightening bolt (10.927-30), in the *Thèbes*, he dies by human (and enemy) hands of a head wound inflicted by a rock thrown by an anonymous Theban (Constans, 10,094-5), thus transforming him into a martyr of sorts.

Just as the *Thèbes* poet condemns the Theban citizens as worshippers of false gods, he condemns the gods of Thebes themselves as little more than deified Infidels. The gods meet in council, deliberating on how to respond to Capaneüs' insult. As with Capaneüs' speech, the poet expands the scene to include more divinities who give longer speeches. In fact, the poet seems to make a composite of several earlier divine council scenes in the *Thebaid*, notably the first one in Book I and that of Book VII.<sup>82</sup> More importantly, however, the OF poet significantly modifies the picture of the gods in his Latin source. The first step in my inquiry into the council of the gods in the *Thèbes* begins, therefore, with Statius.

Statius' handling of divine machinery constitutes perhaps his most original contribution to the ancient epic tradition. Typically in ancient epic, a Council of the gods occurs early in the narrative and foreshadows the events to come based upon the alliances struck by the gods (as, for example, in the *Aeneid* I, 304-410). The Council is the usual place where the poet sets out a political or moral vision. For the reader it establishes the "big picture," a perspective not shared by the characters in the narrative. Such a set-up achieves two broad effects. One is to flatter the reader with the wisdom of foreknowledge, with a sense of looking down on the narrative from a superior vantage point. The other is to strike a sense of inevitability into the narrative since the events to come have been prescribed by the gods. In the *Thebaid*, the first council reveals that Jove will punish the city of Thebes by pitting brother against brother. However, while Statius writes within the tradition of Vergilian epic, he brings to the *Thebaid* a model of divine-human relations that seems not simply un-Vergilian but, at times, un-pagan. Nowhere is this more clear than in his handling of the figure of Jove (Jupiter) as he presides over a council of the gods.

Unlike the gods in Homer and Vergil, who seem to operate out of purely subjective motives, and who quickly fall to bickering among themselves, Statius' Jove strikes a regal, sober impression:

*Mediis sese arduus infert  
ipse deis, placido quatiens tamen omnia vultu,  
stellantique locat solio; nec protinus ausi  
caelicolae, veniam donec pater ipse sedendi  
tranquilla iubet esse manu.* (*Thebaid*, 1.201-6)

[Then Jove  
 Moved proudly through their ranks, his countenance  
 Serene (though all things shook) and took his seat  
 Upon the starry throne. Nor did they dare,  
 The Heavenly gods, to sit till his calm hand  
 Bade leave be given.]

Stattius tells us that “*mixta convexa deorum/maiestate tremunt*” (1.208-9) [“The firmament of heaven/Shimmered in majesty”]. Jove speaks with “*sanctis... verbis*” (1.213) [“holy words”], and Stattius calls him the “*pater omnipotens*” (1.248) [“Almighty father”]. Furthermore, Stattius portrays Jove as merciful as well as stern (“*nam cui tanta quies inarum aut sanguinis usus parcior humani?*” (VII.199-200) [“Whose wrath abates as soon as mine?”]), and as a god who dispenses justice reluctantly, not wrathfully (“*Ast ego non proprio diros impendo dolori Oedipodionidas*” (VII.215-16) [“But not to my own indignation do I sacrifice the tragic progeny of Oedipus”]). C. S. Lewis has noted that, in his majesty and solemnity, Stattius’ Jove comes closer to a monotheistic Creator than the Jupiter of the *Iliad* or the *Aeneid*.<sup>83</sup> Payen suggests that Stattius’ unusual portrait of Jove shows the influence of the God of the Pythagorians and the Stoics. In any event, Stattius contrasts Jove’s majesty with the cowering bitterness of the other gods. He further differentiates Jove’s brand of divinity from that of the other gods in a later council scene when he says that the others were so fearful of Jove, that “*mortalia credes pectora*” (3.253-4) [“One would believe their hearts were human”] rather than divine.

Jove’s weary majesty surfaces again in the *Thebaid* as he looks down on Capaneus perched atop the walls of Thebes. Through the tumult, the “*pater aequus*” (X.885) [“impartial father”] is aware that he alone restrains it (*seque obstare videt*, X.886). A throng of gods gathers around him, angry and frightened; they grow pale (X.920), doubting the thunderbolt’s power (*dubio pro fulmine*, X.920) while Bacchus implores him to use it. Weighing the matter, Jove raises his “weary” (*lassamque*, X.926) torch and strikes down Capaneus. Again, he punishes humanity reluctantly. Thus, whereas the gods in Homer and Vergil often act like children, leaving the humans to withstand their onslaught like adults, Jove in the *Thebaid* appears as the weary adult teaching a familiar lesson to infantile humans. He seems, in short, less of a pagan god and more like the Christian God.

The Council of the gods in the *Roman de Thèbes* reverses many of the changes that Stattius brought to the pagan gods of antiquity by, in effect, re-paganizing them. First of all, the poet removes Jupiter from his position of supremacy. *All* of the gods assemble in anger and confusion as Jupiter listens to their complaints. Their various speeches give them as much, if not more, narrative presence than Jupiter, and Jupiter possesses none of the majesty of Stattius’ Jove. (In fact, Capaneüs strikes more fear in

the gods than does Jupiter.) Jove makes no pretense of impartiality and hastily acts on “*vengeance*,” a term repeated throughout this scene (9580, 9584, 9588 and 9597). Thus while Statius’ Jupiter may, as C.S. Lewis suggests, prefigure the Christian God (which may have prompted Dante to grant Statius Christian status), the medieval French poet actually strips Jupiter of the detail that would qualify Jupiter as a proto-Christian figure.

Second, the poet rehumanizes the gods. The gods speak to one another as family members, revealing human intimacies that we do not find in Statius. Juno, for instance, recalls her sexual escapades with Jupiter (Constans, appendix II, 9483-6) while Bacchus recalls his infancy in Jupiter’s care (9517-20). They ply Jupiter with these details, vying for influence over his decisions, and their speeches uphold no political or moral agenda. Instead, they expose the gods’ personal vulnerabilities and selfish motives. In short, they are more like the gods of pre-Statian epic.

More revealing still, the pagan gods in the *Thèbes* share qualities with certain enemy chieftains in the crusade narratives. For instance, Jupiter and Ethïoclés consult their respective councils in a similar fashion:

*‘Seignors,’ fet il, ‘que m’en loez  
De l’outrage que vous oez?  
En quel manière et en quel guise  
Loez qu’en soit vengeance prise?’* (Jupiter 9585-88)  
[‘Lords,’ said he, ‘how do you advise me  
about the outrage which you see here?  
In what manner and in what guise  
do you advise that vengeance be taken?’]

*‘Seignor, fet il, dites me droit  
de cest mien traïtor revoit,  
savoir quel justice en feré...  
A vous le veull fere jugier,  
en quel guise m’en doi vengier.’* (Ethïoclés 7801-5)  
[‘Lords,’ said he, ‘give me your judgment on it,  
About this proved traitor (Daire) of mine,  
So I may know what punishment I shall give...  
I want to have it decided by you  
In what way I ought to avenge myself in this.’] (Coley 8205-10)

Jupiter’s words echo Ethïoclés’ own words to his council in the *Daire le Roux* episode. And his words echo an even earlier council scene where Ethïoclés poses the exact same question to his council in similar terms (cf. 7517). In the *Thebaid*, Jove asks for no advice from the other gods, and simply waits for the right moment to strike Capaneüs

down. Of course, such parallels between divine and mortal council scenes occur throughout classical epic, but in this instance the OF poet does *not* imitate his Latin source in his treatment of Jupiter.

Bacchus, too, takes on an eastern aspect. Departing, again, from the Latin source, the *Thèbes* shifts Bacchus' gaze from Capaneüs to the Greek army at large. He questions their motives:

*'Or sont issu Griex de lor terre  
pour Thebes avoir et conquerre:  
viles et bors et chastiex ardent,  
de nul mal faire ne se tardent;  
prannent les proies a delivre,  
pour eus soustenir et por vivre;  
riens ne lor puet avoir duree,  
ne mes qu'a genz desmesuree;  
tout le païs metent a honte  
si ne sevent pas de quel conte  
se pour ce non que par outrage  
veulent avoir nostre heritage,  
et pour essaucier lor linage,  
pour ce qu'il sont de grant parage,  
cuident le siècle asaboïr.  
Ja Diex ne leur en doint joïr!'* (9533-9548)

[‘Now the Greeks have issued from their land  
to have and to conquer Thebes:  
They burned towns and cities and castles,  
they do not hesitate to do any evil;  
they look greedy  
to sustain themselves in order to live;  
they permit nothing to last  
anymore than any excessive people will;  
They outrage the entire country  
and yet they do not know why except out of sheer excessiveness  
and to exhalt their lineage;  
Because they are of high birth,  
they want to have our heritage.  
They think they will astound the world:  
may God never give them the satisfaction of it!'] (trans. mine)

Bacchus outlines here perhaps the most common criticism of the crusades: western greed. In their desire for the riches of the East, the crusaders concocted a theological justification for invading eastern territories. Robert the Monk's account of the First

Crusade contains several veiled critiques of the material motives of the crusades, a distinctive feature of the *Historia*. For example, one defeated emir, Clement, voices precisely this accusation:

*'Gloriam nostrae felicitatis viderunt, divitias nostras concupierunt, concupiscentiam secum in terram suam detulerunt, et istis nuntiaverunt. Nunc igitur isti sitiunt aurum argentumque nostrum, et ob hoc tam crudeliter effundunt sanguinem nostrum.'*<sup>84</sup>

[‘They saw the glory of our happiness, desired our wealth, carried the desire with them to their own land and proclaimed it. Now, therefore, they thirst for our gold and silver, and because of this so cruelly spill our blood.’] (trans. mine)

By placing a similar complaint in the mouth of Bacchus, the *Thèbes* poet ascribes to him the vantage point of the eastern peoples scrutinizing the western invaders. It also allies Bacchus decidedly with Theban (eastern) interests in opposition to “Greek” interests.

The *Thèbes* poet achieves three broad things in adapting the pagan gods of the *Thebaid* for a twelfth-century audience. First, he strips the gods of their power. They appear late in the narrative in circumstances that have been shaped without them (their input is limited to this one scene), and Jupiter, especially, loses all of the presence he has in the ancient source. Second, he anthropomorphizes the gods far more than does Statius. We see their weaknesses, their familial tensions, their power struggles. Third, he aligns the gods with the East and with the eastern-seeming city of Thebes. In short, the *Thèbes* re-paganizes the pagan gods of the *Thebaid* and places them behind enemy lines in the crusading landscape of the *Thèbes*.<sup>85</sup>

To summarize briefly, the *Thèbes* poet polarizes the armies of Polliniccés and Ethioclés into sides resembling crusaders and Infidels. He populates the Theban army with combatants from the Near East, southern Italy, North Africa, and Muslim Spain. In turn, he reinforces the Greek army of Adrastus, especially its high command, with experienced crusaders of western European origin. The poet uses the genre of the crusade chronicle to structure the narrative (at least in part), giving the siege of Thebes the flavor of a crusade, thus conflating ancient and contemporary history. Finally, he exploits the Council of the Gods episode from his Latin source to launch an attack on pagan religion as well as to sharpen the distinction between the crusader-Greeks and the Infidel-Thebans.

## THEBES AND TROY

Complicating the dual identities of the respective sides of the conflict in the *Thèbes* is still another, third, identity, this one derived from a later chapter in ancient history, the Trojan War, which, by medieval estimates, took place roughly one generation after the Theban conflict. Into the army of Infidel-Thebans, for example, the poet intro-

duces Trojan names, while Greek names from the Trojan conflict appear among the Greek recruits fighting under king Adrastus. Of course this creates some chronological disunity, since many of the Trojan and Greek figures who appear at Thebes would not have been alive yet, or would have been too young to participate in the war. Nevertheless, the poet supplements the ranks of the Thebans and the Greeks at Thebes with recruits from the Trojan and Greek armies at Troy. In other ways, as well, the poet redesigns the Theban conflict to resemble that of Troy: he alters the landscape of Thebes so that it resembles that of Troy, and he modifies the outcome of one of the final battles at Thebes to make it imitate the final Greek victory at Troy. Such resemblances between the Theban and Trojan conflicts in the *Thèbes* reflect a larger desire among twelfth-century poets and readers to forge causal links between the two ancient conflicts, and we see these links in the manuscript evidence.

More often than not, the *Roman de Thèbes* appears together in the same manuscripts with Trojan material and, as manuscript evidence shows, twelfth-century readers and writers sought to consolidate the histories of Thebes and Troy. The *Roman de Thèbes* survives in five manuscripts and two fragments. All five manuscripts containing full versions of the poem also contain Trojan material in French, including the OF *Roman de Troie* of Benoît de Saint Mauré and the OF *Roman de Enéas*, though both do not always appear in the same codices. This consolidation of the histories of Thebes and Troy constitutes one of the important developments of the Theban legend in the middle ages. While Statius' *Thebaid* rarely appears with Trojan material in medieval codices, vernacular versions of Thebes and Troy were very frequently consolidated into one continuous narrative of ancient history.<sup>86</sup>

Ms. A (Bibl. Nat. Fs.fr.375), an enormous volume dating to 1288, contains a number of romances and devotional tracts including the *Roman de Troie* and the *Prophecies of Cassandra* as well as an Alexander romance.<sup>87</sup> The *Thèbes* and the *Troie* appear consecutively and form the second part of the manuscript. Both the *Thèbes* and the *Troie* are the work of one scribe, Jehan Madot, who identifies himself at the beginning of the *Thèbes* and again at the end of the *Troie*.

Ms. B (Bibl. Nat. Fs. fr. 60), dating to the end of the fourteenth century, contains all three *romans antiques* in sequential order: *Thèbes*, *Troie*, and *Enéas*. Ms. C (Bibl. Nat. Fs.fr., 784), a small volume dating to the middle of the thirteenth century, contains both the *Roman de Thèbes* and the *Roman d'Enéas*. Ms. S (Brit. Mus., Add. 34114 (ex-Spalding)), dating to the end of the fourteenth century, contains, in addition to the *Thèbes*, the *Roman d'Enéas* along with a poem on the First Crusade, *Le siege d'Antioche avesque le conquest de Jerusalem e Godefred de Boilion*, known to modern editors as the *Chanson d'Antioch*.<sup>88</sup> Of English origin, Ms. S is the work of a scribe who appears to have worked for the bishop of Norwich during the years 1370-1406.<sup>89</sup> Ms. P (Genève, Bibl. Bodmer 18 (ex-Phillipps 8384)), dating to the end of the thirteenth century, contains both the *Roman de Troie* as well as the *Roman de Thèbes*, each copied by a different hand.<sup>90</sup>

This move to link the histories of Thebes and Troy appears, as well, in the *incipits* and *explicit*s of the manuscript witnesses of the *Roman de Thèbes*. Ms. B connects all three poems as a continuous sequence in the *incipit* to the *Thèbes*:

*Ci commence li roumans de Thèbes, qui fu racine de Troie la grant, ou il a ml't de merveilles diverses. Item toute l'istoire de Troie la grant, comment elle fu .ij. fois destruite par les Grijois et la cause pour quoi ce fu, et les mortalitez qui y furent. Item toute l'histoire de Eneas et d'Ancisès, qui s'enfuirent après la destruction de Troie, et comment leurs oirs p(l)ueplèrent les regions de decain, et les granz merveilles qui d'eux issirent.*<sup>91</sup>

[Here begins the Romance of Thebes, which was the root of great Troy, where there were many, diverse marvels. Item: the complete history of great Troy, how it was twice destroyed by the Greeks and the cause for which that was done, and the deaths that occurred there. Item: all the history of Aeneas and Anchises, who fled after the destruction of Troy, and how their descendants disseminated into the lands of this side of the sea, and the great marvels which emanated from them.]

The phrase “Thebes, which is the root (*racine*) of Troy” is especially important since it incorporates Thebes into the history of Troy. The Theban conflict in some way caused the Trojan War. The *explicit* to the *Roman de Thèbes* in this ms. also joins the histories of Thebes, Troy, and Aeneas: “*Ci fenist le ronmans de Thebes. Et après vient le ronmans de Troie la grant. Et après Troie vient le ronmans de Eneas*”<sup>92</sup> [“Here ends the romance of Thebes. And afterwards comes the romance of great Troy. And after Troy comes the romance of Aeneas”]. The scribe states and restates the connections between these three poems, which comprise the entire content of the manuscript.

In Ms. A, the scribe, Jehan Madot, announces the *Thèbes* and the *Troie* as a pair in the *incipit* to the second part of the ms.: “*Les guerres de Troie et Thèbes, de Jehans Mados, neveu d'Adam li boeuf d'Arras, MCCLXXX, a la chandeleur*” [The wars of Troy and Thebes, of Jehans Mados, nephew of Adam li Boeuf of Arras, 1280, at Candlemas].<sup>93</sup> The *Roman de Troie* then concludes on fol. 119v with the *explicit* “*Ci faut de Troies et de Thebes li quarte, et puis li sieges d'Ataines*” [Here ends the portion of Troy and of Thebes, and following is the siege of Athens], thus linking the *Troie* with the *Thèbes* before it and with the classicizing romance that follows.<sup>94</sup>

Further evidence for how the stories of Thebes and Troy began to cross-pollinate in the process of translation into the vernacular appears in Ms. P, dating to the end of the thirteenth century, which contains both the *Roman de Thèbes* and Benoît's *Roman de Troie*. This version of the poem includes closing lines not found in the other manuscript witnesses of the poem. The lines not only link the two conflicts of Thebes and Troy, but also make the Theban war resemble the Trojan War:

*L'estore avommes chi fnee  
Si comme Thèbes fu gaste;  
Très cel tans fu si escillie  
C'ainc puis ne fu reherbergie.*

*Éle fu mout d'antiquité  
Et si ot mout nobilité.  
Outre Gresse est, joste le mer:  
La le poet on encor trove[r]  
Car èle fu mout noble cose,  
De grans muriaus fu bien enclose,  
E fu bien ains. XX. ans assise*

*Que Troie fust arse ne prise;  
N'encor n'estoit Rome li grans,  
Ne ne fu puis en mout grans tans.  
Ichi faut de Thèbes l'estore:  
Bien ait ki le mist en memore*

*Explicit li romans de Thebes.*<sup>95</sup>

Here we have finished the history  
Of how Thebes was laid to waste;  
Very long ago it was scaled  
So that afterwards it could not be  
rehabited.

It was of great antiquity  
And also had great nobility.  
It is beyond Greece, beside the sea:  
There the poet still sings of it  
Since it was a very noble thing;  
It was well enclosed by great walls  
And was besieged for fully twenty  
years

Until Troy was taken and burned;  
Great Rome did not exist yet,  
Nor would it for a long time.  
Here ends the history of Thebes:  
May good come to him who sets it  
in memory.

*Explicit li romans de Thebes.* (trans.  
mine)<sup>96</sup>

These lines encapsulate several important developments in the Theban legend as it circulated during the middle ages. The history of Thebes becomes, like the story of Troy, the story of a destroyed city. For Statius, the tragedy of Theban history always lay in “*fraternas acies*” (“brotherly strife”), as the opening words of the *Thebaid* announce. The physical city forms only the backdrop for the struggle between Eteocles and Polynices. But in the closing lines of Ms. P of the *Thèbes*, the brothers are not mentioned at all. Instead, the poet stresses the harm done to the city, which has been “devastated” (*gasté*), “scaled” (*escilié*), made “no longer inhabitable” (*ne fu reherbergié*), “closed off” (*bien enclose*) and “besieged” (*assise*) for twenty years, after which Troy, too, was captured and burned. The siege of Thebes becomes a rehearsal for the siege of Troy as the siege of one leads into the other. Thebes is also, like Troy, a coastal city (*joste le mer*), which it is certainly not in Statius. The likeness grows even more vivid with the comparison between Thebes and Rome, since Troy too was so often compared to Rome.<sup>97</sup> Such evidence suggests that medieval readers understood the events at Thebes in terms of their relevance for the later events at Troy. The siege of Thebes prefigures the siege of Troy, and Troy repeats the disasters at Thebes. In fact, not only do Thebes and Troy merge in OF manuscripts, but the story of Thebes comes to resemble that of Troy in the OF *Roman de Thèbes*.

## THE “GREEKS” VS. THE THEBANS

One important way that the OF poet modifies the Theban war to resemble that of Troy involves transforming the nature of the conflict from a civil war to a war between two foreign powers. Thus, the opposing sides assume collective, cultural identities rather than familial identities, as in the *Thebaid*. In the closing lines of Ms. P, the poet distinguishes Thebes from the rest of Greece (*Outre Gresse est, joste le mer*), even though Thebes was historically a Greek city. What in Statius remains a conflict between Eteocles and Polynices, becomes a conflict between “*li Grieu*” and “*cil de Thebes*,” the “Greeks” and the “Thebans,” even though the Thebans are, of course, Greek. In Statius, Polynices goes into exile and arrives at the city of Argos. There he meets Tydeus and the two are welcomed by Adrastus, king of Argos. Various commanders join forces on behalf of Polynices, and they set off to Thebes. While they share the common objective of regaining Thebes for Polynices, the army never assumes a collective identity separate from Polynices himself. (The same holds true for the forces of Eteocles.) Statius never refers to the side of Polynices as “Greeks”; if anything, he refers to them as the “Argives,” since they set off from Argos under the command of its king. The *Thebaid* relates a civil war rooted in family conflict, a story of “*Fraternas acies alternaque regna*” (I.1) [“The strife of brothers and alternate reigns”]. In the *Roman de Thèbes*, what begins as a familial conflict quickly takes on the aspect of a conflict of opposing collective identities. Throughout the poem, the poet identifies the side of Polliniccés as “*li Grieu*,” “*lost de Greiex*,” “*Li Griex*,” or “*Grejois*,” (“the Greeks”) and king Adrastus as “*roi de Grice*” (“king of Greece”).<sup>98</sup>

In fact, the OF poet deliberately diminishes Polliniccés’ presence and importance in the narrative. Polliniccés typically recedes into the background in most matters of diplomacy and never figures prominently in the numerous council scenes in the poem. Instead, the poet routinely locates authority in king Adrastus and valorizes Thideüs as a loyal and decisive retainer. By excluding Polliniccés from most of the decision-making in the poem, and by allowing Thideüs to outshine him in all respects, the poet severs the narrative from Polliniccés himself. The conflict becomes a collective “Greek” enterprise, headed by Adrastus, in which Polliniccés happens to participate.

This dichotomy of Greeks versus Thebans anticipates the later conflict between the Greeks and the Trojans. The Trojan War involved, of course, two foreign political powers, the Trojans and the Greeks, and thus was in no sense a civil war. The Theban conflict, on the other hand, was unquestionably a civil war. Medieval commentaries on the *Thebaid* acknowledge this, designating the opposing sides along familial lines. One such commentary known as “*In principio uniuscuiusque auctoris*,” which survives in four manuscripts (one from the late twelfth century, two from the thirteenth century and one from the fifteenth century) states that “*Intencio auctoris est Ethioclis et Poliniccis bellum describere et utriusque partis fautores*” [“The author’s intention is to

describe the war between Eteocles and Polynices and the supporters of either side”].<sup>99</sup> A second commentary on the *Thebaid* known as “*Scriptum super Statio Thebaydos*,” dating prior to 1420, states similarly, “*Est autem autoris intentio in hoc opere Thebanam hystoriam, fraternumque discidium Polinicus et Etheoclis ad memoriam revocare*” [“The author’s intention in this work is to recall to memory Theban history, and the discord of Eteocles and Polynices”], and he does so, according to the commentator, by way of dissuading readers from such conflict.<sup>100</sup> Thus we have good evidence that medieval readers of Statius’ *Thebaid* continued to see the conflict as a civil war. For this reason, the revisions of the *Thèbes* poet become all the more remarkable, for he transforms the Theban conflict so that it becomes no longer a civil war but a war between two foreign powers. He severs the Thebans from their native Greece and depicts them, geographically and politically, in relation to Greece, as a kingdom similar to that of Troy, a coastal city besieged by foreigners.

Looking through the ranks of the Theban and Greek armies, we find more Trojan influence on the story of Thebes. The OF poet expands the ranks of both sides with names derived from the siege of Troy. Among Theban forces, we find a knight named Anthenor (Antenor) (6035) (who here engages Thideüs in combat, but at Troy he is Priam’s traitorous counselor). There is also a knight named Hector (6315) (who, having been disenfranchised by Adrastus, fights for Thebes). This same Hector has given “*quarante eschieles*” (6325) [“forty small bells”] to another Theban, Caeroz of Corinth (6323). There is also a Calcas (Calchas) (9343) (here he is among the Theban figures threatened with deposition by Capaneüs, but at Troy he is the famous Trojan seer who defects to the Greek side). We also have a certain Alixandre (Alexander) (8609 ff.), a Theban knight and member of Ethïoclés’ inner circle. Alexander is another name for Paris, and the name used most often to refer to Paris in the accounts of Dares and Dictys. Theban forces also include a Polidorus (Polydorus) (Constans, 6627) (the name of Priam’s youngest son), and Polydamas (Polydamus) (6311) (who goes into the field with Hector at Troy).<sup>101</sup> None of these names appear in Statius’ *Thebaid*.

On the Greek side in the *Roman de Thèbes*, we find Laertés de Lacedemoine (Lacedaemon) (8327) (Laertes being the name of Odysseus’ father and Lacedaemon another name for Sparta, home of Menelaus). There also appears a Nestor (9709) (here an Argive “count,” but at Troy the famous, aged general and advisor for the Greeks). There is also a Pirrus (Pyrrhus) (Constans, 8769) (here a count palatine, but at Troy he is known as Neoptolemus, the son of Achilles). The OF poet also mentions Diomedes (6890), the son of Thideüs and future combatant of Aeneas at Troy, but this name, unlike the others, does appear in the *Thebaid*. Some exceptions do exist to these new enlistments. For example, there is a second Anthenor who fights behind Greek lines (8335). On the other hand, according to Dares and Dictys, Antenor plotted within Troy to admit the Greeks into the city. Following the Greek invasion, he banished Aeneas from Troy. The fact that there are two Antenors in the *Thèbes*, one

on the Theban side and one on the Greek side, may well reflect Antenor's reputation in the middle ages as a double agent.

None of the figures listed above appear in Statius' *Thebaid* (with the exception of Diomedes), certainly not as members of either the Theban or Argive hosts. The OF poet introduces them to the story of Thebes. More importantly, the poet transposes these names from the Trojan conflict to the Theban conflict systematically, not randomly: Trojan names appear among Theban ranks and Greek names from the Trojan War appear among Greek ranks at Thebes. Of course, chronologically, the calculations for this situation do not make sense; if Hector fights here at Thebes, he cannot be a relatively young man at Troy. Nor is it likely that Achilles' son, Neoptolemus, could fight here at Thebes alongside Laertes, Achilles' father. After all, there is a difference of about a generation between the sieges of Thebes and Troy. In all likelihood, the poet did not think of these figures as literally the same men who will appear later at Troy, but rather the poet seems to introduce these names from the Trojan conflict by way of evoking the later, more far-reaching conflict, in terms of its importance to the medieval West. He creates resemblances between the Theban and Trojan conflict that do not appear in the ancient sources for these stories. Thus the antagonism between the Greeks and the Trojans that surfaces later finds its beginning, its "racine," here at Thebes.

### THE TROJAN LANDSCAPE OF THE *THÈBES*

The perceived Theban roots of the Trojan War may account for why the *Thèbes* poet alters the landscape of the city of Thebes and its outlying area to resemble that of Troy. Just prior to the fourth battle in the OF *Roman de Thèbes*, Hippomedon, one of the commanders defending Polliniccés' right to the throne of Thebes, holds council to work out a strategy for defeating the Thebans once and for all. Consulting with two other commanders, he reviews the current status of the siege and, in doing so, he describes the terrain of Thebes and its surrounding area:

*'Ja la vile ainsi ne prendroiz,  
ne par ester nes destraindroiz,  
ne ja nes pourrez afamer,  
car navie lor vient par mer  
qui leur aporte assez vitaille;..  
Ceste grant eve devers aux  
les a de l'autre part enclaux;  
oultre ce pont a praireries  
ou pessent les granz bercheries;  
par la garanne et par la sable  
la est la terre gaaingnable.'* (8181-96)

['We will never take this city  
 or distress them by staying;  
 You will not be able to starve them,  
 because a fleet of ships comes to them over the sea,  
 which brings them plenty of provisions...  
 The great raging water there  
 Has shut them off on the other side;  
 Beyond that bridge, on the prairies,  
 there the great herds of cows graze;  
 Over the woody plain, across the sand,  
 The land there is cultivatable.'](trans. mine)

The poet presents here a coastal city surrounded by pasture and woody plain and flanked by a river. But from everything we know about the ancient Greek city of Thebes, this is not a description of Thebes. In his *Thebaid*, Statius describes a hilly, rocky landscape surrounding Thebes. Adrastus' army sets up camp on a high, grassy ridge overlooking the city surrounded by large rocks and mounds that serve them strategically.<sup>102</sup> Above all, Thebes was an inland city, not a coastal city. Statius, therefore, makes no mention of ships bearing provisions.<sup>103</sup> Hippomedon does not describe Thebes in this scene. Instead, he appears to describe Troy, and this landscape figures in the one of the final battles of the *Roman de Thèbes* whose outcome imitates the final victory at Troy.

### TROJAN BATTLE TACTIC ON THE THEBAN PLAIN

By far the most sustained use of Trojan history in the poem comes in the fourth battle at Thebes. Nowhere else in the poem do we find such a concentration of echoes from the Trojan War. First, as we have seen, the poet alters the terrain of the Theban war so that it resembles that of the Trojan War. Thebes, like Troy, has become a seaport surrounded by plain. Second, the poet voices sentiments among the Greek host that are more characteristic of the Trojan conflict than of the Theban. For instance, in the same council with other Greek commanders, Hippomedon expresses frustration about the pace of the campaign, and his assessment echoes the situation at Troy.<sup>104</sup>

*'Cist sejour, fet il, nous afole;  
 mout longuement avons ci sis  
 et mout y avons pou conquis.'* (8178-80)

['This waiting lames us,' he said.  
 'We have sat here very long,  
 And we have won very little.' (Coley 8616-18)]

His statement seems unwarranted here because the Greeks had *not* been at Thebes that long by this point in the narrative. And, in fact, they *had* won a rather significant advantage in the previous episode (the famous *Daire le Roux* episode) when they exposed internal weaknesses in the Theban high command. Instead, he recalls the frustration among the Greek host nine years into the siege of Troy.

As a result of this of frustration (my third point) Hippomedon proposes a change of tactic, a “trick” (*engingnier*, 8208) he says, for bringing an end to the conflict: he proposes a mock withdrawal designed to draw the Thebans out of the city. Statius describes no such tactic. There is no mock withdrawal of the Argive troops in the *Thebaid*, but at Troy, this exact strategy enables the Greek army to gain entry into the city. According to the account of Dictys Cretensis, the chief source for events of the Trojan War for twelfth-century readers, the Greeks negotiated a peace settlement with the Trojans that included the gift of the wooden horse. As the Greeks board their ships and pretend to sail away to Sigeum, the Trojans destroy a portion of their own walls in order to draw the enormous horse into the city. By night, the Greeks secretly return and it is the beginning of the end of the Trojan War.<sup>105</sup> While the Greeks here at Thebes do not retreat by sea, Hippomedon recalls that other, more famous retreat at Troy when he lays out their own method of withdrawal. He says:

*‘Nous n’entrons pas en mer salee,  
n’i avons barge ne galee;  
par mer ne fu pas nostre voie  
que par les deserz de Nemoie.’* (8187-90)

[‘We will not go out on the salt sea —  
We have neither boat nor galley.  
Our route was not over the sea,  
But through the deserts of Nemea.’ (Coley 8627-30)]

These lines seem especially superfluous, for the other Greek commanders would be well aware that they did not arrive by ship, and ships have not figured at all in the narrative up to this point. But the reference to ships as an aid in their mock withdrawal recalls the Greek withdrawal by ship to nearby Sigeum during the Trojan War. Here at Thebes, the Greeks cannot employ this method of withdrawal, but Hippomedon’s words associate his army with the Greeks at Troy precisely by denying any association with them.

Finally, the OF poet creates a victory in this battle where there is none in Statius. Anyone even vaguely familiar with the *Thebaid* will recall how difficult it often is to determine the outcome of any given battle. But here, we have a decisive Greek victory, just as there was a Greek victory at Troy. After a successful ambush, the poet exclaims “*a ceus de l’ost* [the Greeks] *est aventure:Il ont fait grant desconfiture*” (Constans

8993-4) ["The outcome is in favor of the Greeks:/They have inflicted a great defeat" (Coley 8993-4)]. No such decisive victory falls to the Argive host in the *Thebaid*. There, both armies seem to lose all of the time. This Greek victory at the fourth battle in the *Roman de Thèbes* is deliberately contrived in such a way to make the outcome here at Thebes resemble that of Troy.

Thus in several important ways, the conflict in OF *Roman de Thèbes* has taken on a Trojan guise. The poet reconfigures the two opposing sides along collective lines (Greek versus Thebans) rather than familial lines as we have in Statius. He supplements the ranks of the Theban army with members of the Trojan ranks, and enlists Greeks from the Trojan conflict into the ranks of Adrastus' Greek army. He alters the terrain of Thebes to resemble more closely that of Troy, a coastal city (*joste le mer*) surrounded by plain. He borrows from the story of Troy the winning military tactic of a mock withdrawal, and with this tactic secures victory for the Greek army, a victory they do not enjoy in Statius. In this way, the *Roman de Thèbes* pre-stages the siege of Troy, which forms the next important chapter in ancient history.

Perhaps, however, the *Roman de Thèbes* does not so much *pre-stage* the Trojan War as *re-stage* the Trojan War in order to alter its balance of sympathy. After all, the contending armies in this Theban/Trojan conflict also include, as I have detailed, members of the contending sides of the First Crusade. Thus, this is not strictly an ancient conflict. More importantly, however, if we superimpose the two mantles of the Trojan War and the First Crusade which the poet has introduced to the story of Thebes, it becomes clear that the poet has reversed the medieval balance of sympathy in the Trojan conflict away from the Trojans, the ancestors of western civilization, and towards the Greeks; as allies of the Infidel-Thebans located within the city of Thebes, the Trojans fight behind enemy lines in the *Thèbes*, while the ancient Greeks of the Trojan conflict have become allied with the Crusader-Greeks of Adrastus' army. The poet creates a conflict between Trojan-Infidel-Thebans and Greek-Crusader-Greeks. Looked at from another angle, the poet has pitted the ancient Trojans against medieval crusaders, the eminent, ancient ancestors of the West against their medieval heirs, who, at the time the *Roman de Thèbes* was composed, were still reaping the successes of the First Crusade and planning for a second.

The fourth battle scene of the *Thèbes* illustrates wonderfully this fictional convergence of the Trojan War and the First Crusade. In addition to recreating the winning tactic of the Trojan War (the mock withdrawal) on the field of Thebes, the OF poet also recreates the famous circumstances of battle in the *Chanson de Roland*, a poem about a military expedition into Spain. Hippomedon elects a select group of men for the "*L'arriere garde*" (8231) ["rear guard"], who will lie in ambush for the Thebans venturing out. The poet tells us that "*L'arriere garde est ordenee:/Es quatre eschièles de Rollant,/Dont cil jogleor vont chantant,/Ne fu tant bèle ne tant riche*" (Constans 8826-29) ["The rear guard was lined up in formation;/And in the four squadrons of

Roland/Of which the troubadours sang,/There was not one so beautiful or so powerful” (Coley 8826-29). Of course, this same situation spells disaster in the *Chanson de Roland*, a poem about a failed crusading campaign. But unlike the crusaders in the *Roland*, the Greek-Crusaders achieve victory here at Thebes, for, the poet tells us, “*a ceus de l’ost* [the Greeks] *est aventure*” (Constans 8993) [“The outcome is in favor of the Greeks” (Coley 8993)]. Again, in this scene the poet contrives a victory for his army of Crusader-Greeks where there is none in the source. In this scene, the poet has mixed and matched two famous battle scenarios, one from the Trojan War and the other from the crusade narrative of the *Chanson de Roland*, in such a way as to achieve a victory for the medieval crusaders over the ancient Trojans.

### THE THÈBES AND NORMAN IDENTITY

It is clear that the OF poet uses the ancient past of the Theban war as an arena in which to celebrate and develop the achievements of the medieval present. However, of all possible western achievements, why does the *Thèbes* poet valorize the crusades specifically? And whose “West” is at stake in the *Thèbes*? We have seen that Ethïoclés’ forces include people from Southern Italy, Sicily, and the southern ports of France, and the single English combatant in the poem fights behind enemy lines. Moreover, one of Ethïoclés’ allies includes a certain “Faramond,” King of Valfecond, who leads an attack on the Greeks during their expedition into Russia. According to at least one chronicler, Faramond is also the name of a descendant of the Trojan aristocracy, and the legendary first king of the Franks from whom the Merovingian kings claim direct descent.<sup>106</sup> The Greek-crusaders in the *Thèbes*, therefore, do not represent the *whole* of western Christendom.

Like the other *romans antiques*, the *Roman de Thèbes* was written in western France, a region under the rule of Henry II Plantagenet, King of England, Count of Anjou and Duke of Aquitaine.<sup>107</sup> Consequently, scholars have identified the aims and methods of the *romans antiques* in general, and the *Thèbes* in particular, with Henry’s aspirations to consolidate his kingdom.<sup>108</sup> But few have pursued the Anglo-Norman context of the poem beyond the token reference. Perhaps the most comprehensive attempt to ground the *Thèbes* in its historical context comes from Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, who takes up the theme of civil war. She aligns the conflict between Ethïoclés and Pollinécés with the recent conflict between Stephen I and Matilda, to which Henry II put an end, and with the latent conflict between Henry II and King Louis VII (1137-80) of France. The French kings watched as Henry’s holdings grew, first through his inheritance of Anjou in 1151, then through his marriage one year later to Eleanor of Aquitaine (Louis’s former queen), and finally through his ascension to the English throne in 1154. Louis VII indeed had reason to feel threatened by Henry. Within this context, Kosinski read the *Thèbes* as an anti-war poem, as an *exemplum* on the dangers of civil war.<sup>109</sup>

Critics, both medieval and modern, have applied such a reading to Statius' *Thebaid*, and with good reason. At least two medieval commentaries claim that Statius composed the *Thebaid*, a story of fraternal strife, to avert conflict between Domitian (his patron) and Domitian's brother, Titus.<sup>110</sup> Both commentaries classify the *Thebaid* within the branch of philosophy dealing with political ethics. Recent critics of the *Thebaid* also find an anti-war message in the poem, citing such details as the absence of a central hero, no clear moral superiority of one side over the other, and the lack of closure or triumph at the end. John Henderson, for example, suggests that Statius' *Thebaid* is a clear critique of militarism, that it undermines the imperialistic agenda promulgated in Vergil's *Aeneid* (though the *Aeneid* contains its own internal critique of imperialism).<sup>111</sup>

However, the *Roman de Thèbes* is a very different poem generated by a very different political situation, despite its roots in Statius. Unlike the *Thebaid*, the *Thèbes* offers a single hero, Thideüs, whose preeminence comes at the expense of Pollinices (Statius pairs them throughout the *Thebaid*), and who is clearly differentiated from his cannibalistic predecessor in the *Thebaid*. Moreover, the poet sharpens the moral opposition of the story using the moral categories constructed in crusade literature. Finally, while the *Thèbes* concludes with the same number and pattern of deaths as the Latin source (six of the seven commanders against Thebes die), the poet celebrates the defeat of Ethïoclés and the triumph, however expensive, of the Greek host. The *Thèbes* is not a pacifist work. On the contrary, it glorifies the use of force in the service of a righteous cause. It solidifies and justifies that cause (the reclamation of a forfeited inheritance), rallies an army whose members are qualified defenders of Christendom to defend that cause, and celebrates the defeat of an enemy army of idol-worshippers. Moreover, all of the substantial additions to the poem concern martial matters drawn from the chronicle accounts of the most significant military campaign of the twelfth century. In short, the *Thèbes* is an imperialistic work emanating from a court whose prominence rested on its impressive record of territorial expansion.

At his coronation as king of England in 1154, right around the date of the *Thèbes*, Henry II Plantagenet became successor to the Norman kingdom, which spanned from Scotland, through most of France, and was expanding into Southern Italy and Sicily. Between 1050 and the mid-twelfth century, the Normans had completely altered the political terrain of Europe. David C. Douglas characterizes the Norman impact:

In place of what had been a congerie of French fiefs there had been formed an Anglo-Norman empire, expanded from the Tweed to the Pyrenees under Henry II, and including more of France than was ruled by the Capetian kings reigning from Paris. Similarly, in place of a number of Italian and Sicilian provinces under Byzantine, Lombard or Saracen government, there had been established a single Norman kingdom with its capital at Palermo, including not only Sicily but also almost all

Italy south of Benevento — a dominion which extended from Termoli to Agrigento and from Capua to Syracuse.<sup>112</sup>

Douglas further points out that all of these conquests were seen by the Normans and their contemporaries as “forming part of a single movement of Norman progress resulting in the imposition of comparable ideas and institutions on widely separated lands and on notably distinct communities.”<sup>113</sup> While the Normans were by no means motivated by a “national” sentiment in the modern sense, they nevertheless shared a collective identity founded upon the feudal institutions they created and proliferated. Most importantly, all of the Norman conquests were girded by an ethos of crusading.

The Normans readily exploited the idea of holy war in each of their conquests and became the driving force behind the First Crusade to the Holy Land.<sup>114</sup> Norman chronicle accounts of the conquest of England give the campaign the aspect of a holy war, and the Norman conquest of southern Italy and Sicily, especially, took on the form of holy war since it essentially ended Saracen rule there.<sup>115</sup> Paradoxically, many of the Norman victories in southern Italy included areas already under Christian control, regions such as Apulia, which belonged to the Byzantine empire. Nevertheless, in his charters, Roger of Sicily, who took southern Italy, styled himself “champion of the Christians” (in Greek) and “strong in the protection of God, girt with heavenly sword, and adorned with the helmet and spear of heavenly hope” (in Latin).<sup>116</sup> Similarly, Geoffrey of Monmouth, writing in post-conquest England for Angevin patrons characterizes King Arthur’s face-off with Roman officials, who have come to demand tribute from the Britons, using polarities typical of crusade literature. Arthur’s supporters include Danes, Norwegians, Normans, Angevins, Poitevins, and other western peoples, while their Roman opponents include the kings of the Orient, Mustensar, king of the Africans; Ali Fatima, the King of Spain; Sertorius of Libya; Evander of Syria; and other leaders of eastern origin or allegiance.<sup>117</sup> Thus, the Normans used the language of holy war to describe their conquests of areas already under Christian dominion and to reflect back on the ancient history of those places.

Norman ambition also lay behind the First Crusade. The papacy of Urban II, who preached the crusade at Clermont in 1095, had been put into place by Norman leaders. Urban II, a Frenchman, was elected outside of Italy and escorted to Rome by the Norman prince Jordan I, prince of Capua. After a year of struggle with the forces of Pope Clement III in 1088, Urban finally replaced Clement.<sup>118</sup> Norman protection sustained Urban’s papacy in its early years, and raised the level of papal authority. When, in 1095, Urban II preached the Crusade to the Holy Land, he re-invoked the concept of holy war that the Normans had already employed in their previous campaigns.

At every turn, the Normans directed the course of the First Crusade. Not only were they behind the papacy that launched it, but of the eight chief leaders of the First Crusade, five were Norman or had Norman connections, including the son and

son-in-law of William the Conqueror.<sup>119</sup> The rulership of the first Latin settlement in the East, the Principality of Antioch, was granted to a Norman, Bohemund I. The capture of Antioch formed the climax of Norman involvement in the First Crusade, and is considered by some historians to be the third Norman conquest after England and Italy.<sup>120</sup> Additionally, the very first chronicle account of the crusades, the *Gesta Francorum*, was composed by a Norman who served under Bohemund I.<sup>121</sup> Thus the First Crusade, at least in the early phase, was a Norman enterprise, driven by Norman political interests, carried through by Norman generalship, maintained by Norman rulers (in certain Latin territories in the East) and first reported on by a Norman participant. One can easily imagine that the original audience of the *Roman de Thèbes* would have included the sons of veterans of the First Crusade, and that this audience still celebrated that triumph in the East.

The Norman context of the *Roman de Thèbes* accounts for many of the ideological and stylistic features of the poem. For one, it illuminates the poem's political landscape: all of the regions targeted for Norman conquest appear in the poem as Theban allies, including southern Italy, Sicily, England (one reference), the southern trading ports of France (who conducted business with the Muslim kingdom), North Africa, the Greek (Byzantine) empire, and, of course, the Near East. Included among enemy lines is eastern France under Capetian rule, if we take into account Faramond, ally of Ethïoclés and the legendary ancestor of the French kings.<sup>122</sup> The Norman context of the *Thèbes* may also account for some of the more perplexing combatants in Adrastus' army such as the Almoravids, who fight under Jordan (4651). In his military campaigns, Roger of Sicily willingly allied himself with Saracen rulers if it proved advantageous, and also employed Saracen mercenaries in southern Italy in 1091, 1094, and 1096.<sup>123</sup> By the time of the *Thèbes*, the Almoravids had long since been subdued politically and militarily. Similarly, while this "Jordan" may correspond to Alphonso Jordan, one of the crusaders in Spain, he may also correspond to Jordan I (1078-1093), the Norman prince of Capua who supplanted the Lombard dynasty. Thus the network of political allegiances in the poem coincides with Norman political and military interests.

Second, all of the substantial additions to the poem, drawn from crusade narratives, come from portions of the chronicles that concern the siege of Antioch. The famine and expedition episode corresponds to an episode that took place during the siege of Antioch. The *Daire le Roux* episode corresponds to the famous Pious Traitor episode that relates how Antioch fell to the Franks. The Montflor episode, too, resembles many of the lesser sieges that preceded Antioch. Antioch represented the pinnacle of Norman achievement in the First Crusade. It was the longest siege of the entire campaign (lasting roughly seven months) and established the first Latin settlement in the East under Norman rule. It also receives the longest and richest coverage in the

chronicle accounts. Not surprisingly, then, the *Thèbes* poet selected his source material from this chapter of the crusades.

Finally, the central hero of the *Thèbes*, Thideüs, carries a highly symbolic sword: “*Galanz le fevre la forga/et Volcanus la tresgita*” (1579-80) [“Wayland the arms maker forged it/And Lord Vulcan formed it” (Coley 1561-2)]. Vulcan, the Roman name for Hephaestus, is the Roman god of metalwork and the maker of Aeneas’ armor. Wayland, on the other hand, belongs to the Germanic tradition. He is a lesser spirit and the arms-maker of Norse mythology, the ancient religion of the Northmen, or the Normans. Thideüs’ sword marks the meeting point of the Classical Latin and Germanic (Norman) traditions in the poem, a point of transference between the two, perhaps the most concise and powerful image of *translatio imperii* in the entire poem.

In conclusion, the OF *Roman de Thèbes* uses the ancient past as a safe fictional environment in which to investigate and celebrate the concerns and possibilities of the present. It invites us to imagine a fourth Norman crusade (after England, southern Italy and Sicily, and Antioch): the conquest of the ancients by the moderns. By the “ancients” I mean the Trojan ancestors at the root of western monarchical genealogies, and by the “moderns” I mean their medieval political and intellectual heirs. As twelfth-century poetic prefaces (including that of the *Thèbes*) attest, this ancient legacy posed both a case for and a threat to recent claims to political and artistic supremacy among newly emerging European monarchies, including the Angevins. Thus, the poets contrive a transference, a “*translatio*,” of ancient Latin learning to their own vernacular works, and fashion themselves as arbiters in this exchange. The *Thèbes* poet, however, goes one step further in this *translatio* of classical heritage: he uses the plot of the *Thèbes* to stage that transference of learning and power from the ancients to the moderns as an actual battle between the two. The triumphant representatives of twelfth-century Norman culture encounter and vanquish their ancient Trojan ancestors who, in the poem, fight alongside the most recent enemies of the Normans in the Near East. The *Roman de Thèbes*, therefore, is an experiment in history that combines personnel from three discrete conflicts (Thebes, Troy and the First Crusade) in a fictional contest of strength and belief. It stages an exciting imaginary encounter between the giants of antiquity and the recent political and military giants of the medieval West, and flatters those medieval victors with fantasies of another triumph.



## Chapter Two

# Boccaccio's *Teseida* and the Destruction of Troy

As an organizing principle for reconceiving the events of the Theban war, crusading proved to be a short-term experiment. After the OF *Roman de Thèbes*, no subsequent Theban narrative of the Middle Ages placed crusading at the center of the main action. While Chaucer appears to have modeled the Theban setting for his *Anelida and Arcite* to some extent on the crusading landscape of the *Roman de Thèbes*, crusading in no way drives the central crisis of the poem. Even the prose translations of the *Roman de Thèbes*, which began appearing in the early thirteenth century, drop the crusading element from the story entirely.<sup>1</sup> By contrast, the OF poet's blending of Theban matters with Trojan history had a lasting impact on the medieval tradition of Thebes, and, in fact, lies at the heart of the next vernacular Theban narrative, Giovanni Boccaccio's *Il Teseida*, a poem set in the period between the Theban and Trojan wars. While Boccaccio signals the advent of the Trojan War by including such figures as Menelaus, Odysseus, and Nestor, the full extent of the poem's Trojan content has remained entirely unexplored. In fact, the story of Troy, as transmitted through various classical and medieval sources, forms the basis for much of the poem, conceptually and structurally, including some of its more puzzling aspects, such as its long, digressive first Book and its seemingly shapeless second half, among other portions. Boccaccio's *Teseida* is, therefore, as much a prequel to Troy as a sequel to Thebes.

Whenever scholars approach the subject of history in Boccaccio's *Teseida*, they invariably turn to Thebes.<sup>2</sup> This is understandable. The two main protagonists of the poem, Arcita and Palemone, are descended from the royal house of Thebes; the poem picks up where Statius' *Thebaid* leaves off, with Theseus' attack on Thebes at the end of the Theban war; and one of the most memorable scenes of the poem is set in Thebes, when Arcita escapes imprisonment in Athens and returns to Thebes only to find a shell of his former home. These elements, coupled with the numerous and dense allusions to Statius' *Thebaid*, have led scholars to view the *Teseida* as a sequel to

the *Thebaid*, as Boccaccio's fictional expansion of Theban history, and in many ways it is. However, the subject of history in the *Teseida* also includes future events, with respect to the poem's timeframe, namely the Trojan War.

In 1339, Giovanni Boccaccio began writing what he claimed to be the first epic in the Italian language.<sup>3</sup> He chose as his subject matter the events between the end of the Theban war and the beginning of the Trojan War, an uncharted chapter in ancient history indicated only by signposts in both the literary and historical accounts of ancient history available to him. Approaching this period as a transitional moment in history, Boccaccio created his *Teseida* as a fusion of elements from the Theban and Trojan wars: he borrows characters, episodes and narrative circumstances from the Theban conflict, as recorded by Statius, as well as from the Trojan conflict, as preserved in a variety of classical and medieval sources; he designs the main action of the poem (a conflict between two kinsmen over possession of a woman) in such a way that it combines the mode of conflict at Thebes (civil strife) with the source of conflict at Troy (a woman), so that it becomes both a repeat of the Theban conflict and a rehearsal for the Trojan conflict; he populates the armies of the opposing sides with personnel from both the Theban and Trojan wars; and he manipulates epic type-scenes to guide the narrative out of one conflict and into another. The result is what I call a "transitional epic" designed to both substantiate the rather nebulous period between the Theban and Trojan wars and to construct a precise relationship between these two conflicts.

From the early middle ages on, poets and thinkers attempted, with variable success, to join the histories of Thebes and Troy. The relationship between the Theban and Trojan wars was partially explained by the paradigm of Providential history established by St. Augustine of Hippo. In his *City of God*, Augustine locates the human race within two spiritual spaces, or "cities, speaking allegorically, . . . one of which is predestined to reign with God for all eternity, and the other doomed to undergo eternal punishment with the Devil."<sup>4</sup> The one occupies the heavenly city, which emanates from "love of God," while the other occupies the earthly city, which "created itself by self-love."<sup>5</sup> As the heavenly city experiences eternal bliss, the earthly city, by contrast, is locked into a pattern of dominion and fall. Each historical city on earth is but another incarnation of that earthly city. Thus, "the city of Rome was founded to be a kind of second Babylon, the daughter, as it were, of the former Babylon."<sup>6</sup> The rise of Rome, he goes on, coincided with the fall of Babylon, and "these two powers present a kind of pattern of contrast, both historically and geographically. . . . All other kingdoms and kings I should describe as something like appendages of those empires."<sup>7</sup> In other words, all earthly cities take part in a cycle of rise and decline; the demise of one gives rise to another whose own demise resembles that of the previous one, and all earthly cities suffer a similar fate. While Augustine argues emphatically that human beings can freely choose membership in the heavenly city over membership in the

earthly city by choosing the path of righteousness, nevertheless he concludes that earthly history tends to fall into a repeating pattern of disaster precisely because human beings consistently choose the path of error and false belief.<sup>8</sup>

This understanding of history as destructive repetition governs the versions of Theban and Trojan history available to Boccaccio. Thebes, like Troy, had become another famous destroyed city. For example, the *incipits* and *explicit*s of manuscripts of the OF *Roman de Thèbes* and the OF *Roman de Troie* announce a link between the destruction of Thebes and that of Troy; Thebes becomes the “root” (*racine*) of Troy, and these two works more often than not appear together in the same manuscripts.<sup>9</sup> This link between the two cities survives into the prose redactions of the *Thèbes* and *Troie*. For instance, a somewhat late (fifteenth-century) example of the *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César* appears to reproduce the *explicit* of MS P of the OF *Roman de Thèbes* which places the destruction of Thebes twenty years before the Trojan War.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, Boccaccio's personal copy of Statius' *Thebaid* (Bibl. Laurentiana MS. Plut. 38.6) bears the title “*Statius Thebaydos ystoria destructionis Thebarum*” [“*The Thebaid of Statius: the history of the destruction of Thebes*”], a heading frequently assigned to histories of Troy.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, in his *Filocolo*, written some five years earlier, Boccaccio himself aligns the destructions of Thebes and Troy in a mural in king Felice's palace, which includes depictions of “*la dispietata rovina di Tebe*” [“the pitiless destruction of Thebes”] and “*l'altra distruzione della superba Troia*” [“the other destruction of proud Troy”] (II.32).<sup>12</sup> The tragedy of Thebes in this mural centers around the physical destruction of the city of Thebes, reflecting a distinctly medieval interpretation of Theban history. For Statius, the tragedy of the Theban war always lay in the issue of civil war, in “*fraternas acies alternaque regna*” (I.1) [“The strife of brothers and alternate reigns”] to which the city of Thebes forms a mere backdrop.<sup>13</sup> However, medieval poets and audiences, Boccaccio among them, locate the tragedy of the war, instead, in the destroyed remains of the city itself, and viewed it as an earlier instance of the misfortune that struck Troy. Thebes and Troy came as a pair, and both cities, despite their vastly different histories, were united in a common fate that reflected a pattern of historical repetition which bears the hallmark of Augustinian historiography.<sup>14</sup>

However, Augustine's model of secular history and the medieval vernacular accounts of ancient history that it influenced do not specify the precise causal link between the Theban and Trojan wars. Both cities rise to prominence, experience a siege and suffer destruction, but the parallels between the nature of the Theban conflict and that of Troy seem to end there. One represents a civil war, the other a war between two foreign powers; one revolves around possession of a throne, the other around possession of a woman; and no single individual or event at Thebes seems to have laid the foundation for the Trojan War. Thus, in the medieval accounts of Thebes and Troy, it is not at all clear exactly *how* Thebes formed the “root” of Troy. In his *Teseida*,

Boccaccio sets out to forge that link by creating an intervening conflict between the Theban and Trojan wars which bears some resemblance to both conflicts.

I begin by asking the question, how would a poet in early fourteenth century Naples imagine and construct a chapter in ancient history which had received so little prior coverage? After all, the accounts for Theseus' reign in Athens between the Theban and Trojan wars were scarce and brief. Theseus' campaign against the Amazons appears only as a headline in the well-known Latin universal histories of Orosius and Eusebius.<sup>15</sup> Ovid mentions Theseus in connection with Helen (later Helen of Troy), and with his participation in the Calydonian Boar hunt, and with the battle between the Lapiths and the Centaurs, and with his defeat of the minotaur.<sup>16</sup> But he makes no mention of his defeat of the Amazons. Later medieval vernacular histories, such as the *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*, give equally scant coverage to Theseus. In fact, the Amazon episode in the *Histoire ancienne* highlights Hercules' encounters with this race of women warriors over Theseus' encounters with them, quite a different picture from Boccaccio's account.<sup>17</sup> For the most part, therefore, Boccaccio had limited historical or literary material from which to reconstruct the temporal gap between the Theban and Trojan wars, not to mention Theseus' activities during this period.

Boccaccio would begin, then, by reviewing the events immediately surrounding this period in history, the events of Thebes and Troy. For Theban history, he could turn to his copy of Statius' *Thebaid* and the commentary on the *Thebaid* by Lactantius Placidus.<sup>18</sup> He might also turn to the OF *Roman de Thèbes* of 1154-6, or a prose redaction of the *Thèbes* which had been incorporated into a vernacular universal history, copies of which we know existed in Naples during Boccaccio's years there.<sup>19</sup> (As the seat of the Angevin Empire, Naples was saturated with French influence, with French and Provençal figures occupying many religious and secular posts.)<sup>20</sup> For Trojan history, Boccaccio could consult the same universal chronicles, or, for the more expanded version, Guido delle Colonne's *Historia Destructionis Troiae*, a text well-known to Boccaccio and from which he borrowed extensively for his earlier work, *Il Filocolo*.<sup>21</sup> Or he might turn to Guido's source, Benoît de Saint Maure's OF *Roman de Troie*, which also circulated in abbreviated prose redactions as part of the *Histoire ancienne*.<sup>22</sup> He might also consult Dares Phrygius and Dictys Cretensis, whose accounts of the Trojan War from opposite sides were accepted as eyewitness testimony by medieval readers. There was also, of course, the account of Troy in book II of the *Aeneid*. (Homer was, as yet, unavailable to Boccaccio as to medieval readers in general.)<sup>23</sup> He might also consult Ovid for additional versions of ancient history, namely his *Metamorphoses*, *Heroides* and *Fasti*, all of which Boccaccio knew. With these sources, Boccaccio could reconstruct the period of Theseus' reign in Athens using accounts of the events immediately preceding and following that period, accounts of the Theban and Trojan wars. The result of this enterprise in historical reconstruction, *Il Teseida*, contains as much Trojan material as Theban material. In fact, Troy dominates the very first book of the *Teseida*.

## SCYTHIA AS A PREVIEW FOR TROY

Having summarized the “*crudeltate*” (1,13) [“excessive cruelty”] of the Amazonian kingdom in refusing to admit any men into their domain, Boccaccio depicts Teseo mobilizing an army to attack them, preparations that recall those of Menelaus’ army for the siege of Troy. In Athens, “*commosi adunque e popoli dintorno*” [“all the neighboring tribes”] gather and load up the “*sopra le navi già apparecchiate/cavalli e arme ciascun caricava con ciò che a fare oste bisognava*” [“waiting ships with horses and weapons and whatever else is needed to wage war”] (1.17).<sup>24</sup> Boccaccio then imitates the epic convention of the launching of ships, in this case (as in the case of Troy) those of “*la greca gente*” [“the Greek nation”] headed for Scythia (1.18-20). From this point on, Teseo’s army becomes known as “the Greeks” (*Greci*). Arriving at the shores of Scythia, however, the Greek army is prevented from disembarking, as they see “*un bel castel vicino al mare/sopra una montagnetta, onde calatili ponti, genti vidono avval-lare/bene a cavallo armati*” (1.47) [“well-armed troops mounted on horses descending upon them over lowered drawbridges from a splendid castle set on a small mountain near the sea”]. Barraging the ships with a hail of arrows, darts and missiles, so that “*l ciel n’era covertò*” (1.54) [“the sky was darkened”], the women-warriors keep Teseo’s men trapped on their ships, while the slaughter turns the water and sea foam red with blood (1.56). Eventually, enough men disembark to challenge the women hand to hand until the Amazons begin to retreat. Soon, all the women flee back to the castle gates and to the safety of their fortress, which Boccaccio characterizes as a fortified city:

*Era la terra forte, e ben murata  
da ogni parte, e dentro ben guarnita  
per sostener assedio ogni fiata,  
lunga stagion, ch’ella fosse assalita;  
però ciascuna dentro bene armata  
non temeva né morte né ferita;  
chiuse le porti al riparo intendeano  
e quasi i Greci niente temeano. (1.78)*

[The country was strong and well walled around every side. Within it was well supplied enough to withstand a long season of siege every time they were attacked. Well armed and safely inside, they feared neither death nor injury. Once they closed their doors, they retreated to their shelter and hardly feared the Greeks at all.]

Meanwhile, Teseo’s army sets up camp and begins preparation for the siege.

Scholars have long contested the importance of Book One of the *Teseida*, the Amazon episode. Indeed, Book One seems to demand justification for its presence in

the *Teseida* precisely because Boccaccio announces it as a digression from the main action of the poem (i.e. the story of Arcita, Palemone, and Emilia) (1.6, gloss). Robert Pratt suggests that Boccaccio intends Book One “merely to bring the three main figures of the plot onto the stage.”<sup>25</sup> And, in fact, Boccaccio himself explains that he includes the events of Book One to show “*onde Emilia fosse venuta ad Atene*” (256) [“whence Emilia came to Athens”] (48). Some feminist critics, among them Carla Freccero, view Book One as Boccaccio’s attempt to establish a prototype in the poem for the masculine containment of the “autonomous and resistive femininity in the form of Amazons.”<sup>26</sup> Taking the perspective of medieval allegoresis, Janet Levarie Smarr reads Book One as the “restoration of proper order” by Theseus over the “insurrection of the passions against the control of reason” displayed in the Amazons’ insurrection against men.<sup>27</sup> David Anderson argues that Boccaccio intended Book One primarily “to introduce his positive *exemplum*, Theseus” and to “set up his main action as a continuation of the *Thebaid* itself.”<sup>28</sup> While all of these explanations inform our understanding of the opening of the *Teseida*, none of them fully accounts for the particular configuration of characters and action in Book One, perhaps the most epic segment of the poem. Much of the uncertainty has, I think, to do with a misidentification of the source(s) for Book One.

Scholars have identified two ancient sources for Book One of the *Teseida*: *Aeneid* XI and *Thebaid* V, both of which depict female warrior societies. Carla Freccero traces Teseo’s derisive address to his men in this scene to Tarchon’s speech in *Aeneid* XI just prior to the death of Camilla, Vergil’s woman warrior.<sup>29</sup> While there exists an undeniable similarity between these two speeches, this single speech in *Aeneid* XI fails to account for the larger structure and project of *Teseida* I, even if, as Freccero suggests, Boccaccio had Camilla in mind when he designed Ipolita and her Amazon kingdom. For this larger picture, David Anderson and Disa Gambera look to *Thebaid* V, in which Hypsipyle recounts the rise to power of the Lemnian women, for the source of Book One of the *Teseida*.<sup>30</sup> Hypsipyle tells of how the women murdered their husbands and fathers, established control over the island, and then fought against the incoming ship of the Argonauts. To be sure, Boccaccio borrows a number of details from this episode in the *Thebaid*. Like the Lemnian women, Ipolita’s Amazons kill their husbands and fathers in order to secure power, and like the Lemnian women who fight off Jason’s incoming ship, Boccaccio’s Amazons fight off Teseo’s incoming ships.

However, there are several obstacles to viewing *Thebaid* V as the primary source for Book One of the *Teseida*, despite the fact that it, too, portrays a matriarchal society. The perspective and choreography of Boccaccio’s siege at Scythia are entirely different from what we find in Statius, as are the women themselves. First of all, Statius relates the exploits of the Lemnian women as a first-person narration of past events, whereas Boccaccio relates the Amazon episode using an omniscient narrator to tell of

current action. Second, Statius relates the scene from the point of view of the Lemnian women, whereas Boccaccio relates the episode from the perspective of the invading Greek army. Third, the Lemnian women fight off a single ship (Jason's), whereas the Amazons face an entire fleet of ships. Fourthly, Statius ends the battle between the women and the Argonauts abruptly with the Argonauts overcoming the women and marrying them promptly. There is no siege following the battle on the shore, and no mention of a fortified city. Finally, the Amazons in Boccaccio do not share the same bloodlust that the Lemnian women exhibit; instead, as Gambera points out, they "act very much like Teseo and the Greeks who have come to attack them."<sup>31</sup> They anticipate Teseo's attack and carefully plan for retaliation like any well-trained army — quite unlike the Lemnian women.

A more likely main source for Boccaccio's episode of Teseo and the Amazons is a medieval Troy narrative: Guido delle Colonne's *Historia Destructionis Troiae* of 1287. Many details suggest that Boccaccio modeled this episode on Guido's description of the establishment of the siege at Troy.<sup>32</sup> Boccaccio, like Guido, relates this scene from the perspective of the invading Greek forces; Boccaccio's "*Greci*," like Guido's Greeks, anticipate resistance when landing on the shore; Guido indicates that the Trojans had been planning for the coming Greek assault, while Boccaccio depicts Ipolita rallying defensive forces to meet the coming Greek offensive. Boccaccio, like Guido, depicts the launching of a fleet of ships from Greece and both authors have their armies pass through Tenedos. (There is no launching of ships in *Thebaid* V since only one ship, Jason's, is involved in the attack on Lemnos.) Guido, like Boccaccio, then has the Greek ships arrive at the scene of combat (in Guido's case Troy) only to face a throng of mounted, armed soldiers who, upon seeing their approach, "*inordinato cursu festinant ad litus*" (XIV, 120) ["hastened down to the shore at an inordinate speed" (XIV), 116]. The Greeks are unable to disembark as "*densantur nubes in aere ex emissione continua sagittarum*" (XIV, 121) ["a cloud of arrows in a continuous stream darkened the sky" (XIV, 117)]. Those few Greeks who attempt to scramble to the shore are promptly slain so that "*vicine aque litoris interfectorum cruore rubescunt*" (XIV, 121) ["the water near the shore was red with the blood of the slain" (XIV, 117)]. After finally gaining the shore, the Greeks manage to force the Trojans to retreat. At this point, "*Trojani ergo ciuitatis portas duris firmant repagulis*" (XIV, 126) ["the Trojans accordingly secured the stout gates of their city with bolts,"] while the Greeks fastened their ships and "*obsidionem in multa commoditate... firmauerunt*" (XIV, 126) ["made the siege permanent with great ease" (XIV, 122)], just as Boccaccio's Amazons retreat into their fortified city and prepare for an assault.<sup>33</sup> Table 1, a listing of the salient parallel motifs, makes this relationship clearer.

Thus in its narrative perspective, scale of operation, battle tactic, and choreography, Teseo's attack on Scythia shares far more detail with Guido's account of the beginning of the Greek siege of Troy than with Statius' account of Jason's attack on

**Table 1** Parallel Motifs in *Historia Destructionis Troiae*

Motif	<i>Historia</i>	<i>Teseida</i>
1. Launching of fleet of ships	XIV, 114	I, 18-20, 40
2. Anticipation of resistance	115	21-39
3. Throng of soldiers rushing to shore	116	47
4. Cloud of arrows darkens sky	117	54
5. Water at shoreline stained red with blood	117	56
6. Retreat into city, establishing of siege	126	78

Lemnos. In this way, Boccaccio opens his sequel to the Theban war with a scene that imitates the beginning of the Trojan conflict.

In fact, throughout the scene, Boccaccio foreshadows the future siege of Troy. For instance, Boccaccio has Teseo anticipate an inordinately long campaign while strategizing the siege at Scythia:

*Esso, ch'ognor con sollecita cura  
al suo più presto spaccio più pensava,  
imaginò che, se 'ntorno alle mura  
di quella terra il suo campo fermava,  
è potrebbe avenir per l'avventura  
che senza utile il tempo trapassava;  
però che quando pure elli avvenisse,  
poco avea fatto perché lor vincesse. (1.83)*

[The more carefully he thought about his latest expedition, the more he considered that if his camp remained along the walls of that land, time would pass, perhaps, without any advantage. For, even if the women should sally forth, he would have done little to subdue them.]

Teseo exhibits an eerie foresight here that approaches authorial omniscience. Indeed, his expectation of a long, fruitless campaign seems unwarranted; if anything, he would be confident of a quick victory since his opponents are women. Nor do his concerns bear any relation to the Lemnian battle in *Thebaid* V which concludes very shortly after the Argonauts land on the shores. Instead, Teseo's concerns seem to anticipate the circumstances of the Trojan War, where a long time *will* pass without any advantage.

Should the Trojan overtones of Book One not be clear enough, Boccaccio ends the scene by making an explicit comparison between Ipolita and Helen: once Teseo defeats the Amazons and claims Ipolita as his wife, he looks upon her and thinks “*Costei trapassa Elena, /cui io furtai, d'ogni bellezza piena*” (1.130) [“She surpasses Helen, whom I abducted, and who was the epitome of all loveliness.”] Thus in several

subtle and some not so subtle ways, Boccaccio configures Book One as a preview to the Trojan War. In doing so, he invokes the nature of the conflict at Troy (i.e. a war between two rivals over a woman) as a vital context for understanding his sequel to the Theban war, that is, the conflict he is about to portray between Arcita and Palemone over Emilia. Thus, at the very outset, he begins forging the connection between Thebes and Troy that he will pursue throughout the rest of the poem.

## THE CATALOG OF TROJAN WARRIORS

Another powerful, and far more obvious, Trojan presence occurs in Book Six of the *Teseida* with the catalog of warriors. After Palemone and Arcita are discovered fighting in the grove, Teseo commands that they reconvene in one year's time and settle their dispute with two armies of equal size. Men arrive from all over Greece to participate in the battle, providing the occasion for an epic catalog. Such catalogs of warriors typically serve as an inclusive, universalizing device.<sup>34</sup> As a roster of men from disparate regions who have gathered for a common cause, the epic catalog showcases and celebrates the collective martial talent of each army. Boccaccio models his catalog on the earlier catalog of warriors in *Thebaid* IV, and in this way situates his *Teseida* within the larger tradition of classical Latin epic.<sup>35</sup> He, too, shows men arriving from "every country" (*per tutti*) and representing "*Furvi altri assai e popoli e contrade, tanti che ben non gli saprei contare*" ["many other peoples and districts, so many that I really would not know how to count them"] (6.13 and 6.64). However, Boccaccio departs from that tradition in some important and revealing ways. First, he brings together personnel from two conflicts, Thebes and Troy, rather than one. As the survivors of the Theban war encounter the future heroes of Troy, we witness not a single, coherent army so much as a changing of the guard between one conflict and another. Second, he uses the tragedy of the earlier Theban conflict to foster ambivalence about the future conflict at Troy, and this comes across immediately in the episode.

The catalog of warriors in Book Six is as much *exclusive* as *inclusive* of martial talent; it records who is not present as much as who is present. It marks the extensive losses of the recent war at Thebes by including only lesser characters from the *Thebaid*, the remnants of the Theban conflict. For example, the catalog opens with king Ligurgo (Lycurgus), "*ancora lagrimoso per la morte d'Ofelte*" (6.14) ["still weeping and dressed in black for the death of Opheltes (Archemorus)"]. Lycurgus, who took in Hypsipyle, appears in Book Five of the *Thebaid*, a book quite removed from the main action of the poem, and is not a major figure in the Theban conflict. Following him, we see Foco (Phocus) and Telamone (Telamon), the long lost sons of Hypsipyle, again lesser figures in Theban history (6.19). Flegiàs (Phlegias) of Pisa, another lesser Theban player, appears alongside them. The theme of absence and loss repeats itself at the end of the catalog where Boccaccio lists mythological figures who could not make it:

Narcissus has already turned into a flower, and Leander has already drowned, while Erysichthon has already died from hunger following Diana's curse (6.62-3).<sup>36</sup> Though Boccaccio mentions them in good humor, he ends the catalog, as he begins it, by marking absences. In place of the Theban absentees come the future heroes of Troy, as yet untested.

In contrast to the air of recent misfortune surrounding the Theban figures of the catalog, Boccaccio presents the Trojan figures in the inexperienced bloom of youth. For example, in order of appearance, we see Pelleo (father of Achilles and whose wedding spawned the Trojan conflict), here "*giovane ancora*" ["still young"] and carrying an axe of Thermadon which Ovid associates with the death of Achilles (6.15-17).<sup>37</sup> Shortly afterwards, Agamemnon appears, already showing "*degno... degli onori ch'ebbe da' Greci nella ossidione/la Troia fatta*" (6.21) ["that he was worthy of the honors he received from the Greeks in the siege of Troy"]. Following him comes Menelao, "*giovinetto*" ["a young man"] dressed beautifully though "*sanz'alcuna arme*" ["without (any) armor"], and worthy to be Venus' lover (a possible allusion to the Judgment of Paris in which Venus' promise sparked the abduction of Helen by Paris [6.23]). Then come Castor and Pollux, Helen's brothers, who bear on their shields the story of Leda and the Swan, alluding to their common origin (along with Helen) from the same egg (6.25). (Castor and Pollux die before reaching Troy, a detail which Boccaccio mentions in 8.25). Further along the ranks, "*giovane Nestore*" ["young Nestor"] arrives from Pylos, "*la cui etate/nelle vermiglie guancie il primo fiore/monstrava, poco ancora seminate/di crespo pel*" ["showing the first bloom of his youth in rosy cheeks still barely covered with curly hair"], in contrast to his role at Troy as the aged general (6.30). After Nestor comes Evandro (Evander), who will later show Aeneas the site that will become Rome. In this scene, he is "*prospero e regnante*" ["still reigning and prosperous"], though, as Boccaccio's notes indicate, "*poi ne fu cacciato*" ["later he was expelled"] from his kingdom in Arcadia (6.35 and gloss). Further along, Ulisse (Ulysses) appears, "*giovinetto ancora molto*" ["still a young man"] and sent by his father, Laertes (6.44). He brings with him Diomede (the son of Tydeus) who will later join Ulysses on a diplomatic mission to Troy. And after him, comes Sicceo (Sichaeus), "*poi fu sposo dell'alta Didone*" (6.45) ["who later became the husband of noble Dido"]. Thus we see the future heroes of the Trojan conflict and its aftermath in an earlier stage of their careers, still new recruits in the historical tapestry.<sup>38</sup>

As part of his larger project of creating a transitional epic about the historical episode in ancient history between the Theban and Trojan wars, Boccaccio constructs a catalog of warriors who gather for the conflict at Athens out of personnel from those two other conflicts immediately preceding and following it. Theban ranks give way to new Trojan recruits. This blend of two armies also enables Boccaccio to reflect on the Trojan War, for he modifies the traditional use of the epic catalog as a solidarity-building device for a conflict whose outcome remains unknown.<sup>39</sup> Into the rather

carefree gathering of Trojan talent, Boccaccio introduces an element of foreboding by evoking the casualties from the recent tragedy at Thebes, whose losses he records through blank omission. The fact that only minor players from the Theban scene appear reminds us of all who did not survive; there is simply no one left from that war to recruit at Athens. Against the desolate backdrop of Thebes, Boccaccio presents the inexperienced Trojan recruits as yet unaware of the similar disaster that awaits them at Troy.

## HELEN AS ABSENT PRESENCE

Another way that Boccaccio figures the *Teseida* as a transitional epic between Thebes and Troy involves the figure of Helen, who constitutes an absent presence throughout the narrative. In both the text and the glosses, Boccaccio uses Helen's history (both her past and her future with respect to the poem) for both chronological and typological purposes, that is, the events of her life serve to both establish the time-frame of the poem and to provide a paradigm with which to understand the events it relates. As already noted, she first appears in the narrative as a former love-interest of Teseo, as he recalls his earlier abduction of Helen when he gazes upon his new conquest, Ipolita (1.130). Later in Book Five, Teseo agrees to pardon Arcita and Palemone for breaking their pledges to him because, he says, "*io già innamorato fui / e per amor sovente folleggiai... [ma] perdon più fiate acquistai... a cui la figlia già fur-tai*" (5.92) ["I once fell in love and committed follies for love... (but) received pardon... through the mercy of him (Tyndarus) whose daughter I once stole"]. Again, at the funeral games of Arcita, Boccaccio recalls this early encounter between Theseus and Helen. As Teseo participates in the palestral games, we learn that earlier he had surpassed all others at this game, "*e ben lo seppe Elena*" (11.62) ["as Helen well knew"], and Boccaccio's glosses provide the full details: Helen had been seized by Theseus while she was playing this game. Theseus' mother then returned her to her brothers, Castor and Pollux, while Theseus was off ravishing another maiden (glosses to 1.130, 5.92, 7.4, 11.62). In all, Theseus' encounter with Helen is mentioned in the *Teseida* a total of eight times, hardly a passing reference.<sup>40</sup> Boccaccio then brings us into the historical present of the poem in Book Twelve where he indicates that Helen is now the wife of Menelaus, who too will lose her through abduction (12.67 and gloss).

By recalling Helen's early abduction by Theseus (which really has no immediate bearing on the circumstances of the poem), Boccaccio sets up a pattern of historical repetition: Teseo's capture of Ipolita recalls his previous capture of Helen, whom he recalls as he looks upon Ipolita. Likewise, Teseo's pardon of Arcita and Palemone for a crime motivated by desire recalls Tyndarus' pardon of Teseo's own crime of abducting Helen, which was also motivated by desire; Teseo uses Tyndarus' gesture of pardon

as a model for his own pardon of Arcita and Palemone. By weaving this episode in Helen's past into the poem, Boccaccio makes his own fictional episode of royal pardon repeat an earlier episode of pardon in ancient history. Thus Helen's past foreshadows the present of the poem.

Helen's past also foreshadows the future, beyond the timeframe of the *Teseida*. Helen's story solidifies the link between Theban and Trojan history as Boccaccio previews key aspects of Helen's experience at Troy in the figure of Emilia. The associations between Helen and Emilia surface during the combat between Arcita and Palemone. For instance, Pollux, Helen's brother, fights so well in the struggle over Emilia, that, Boccaccio tells us, "*per Elena a Troia/al grande Ettor donata molta noia*" (8.25) ["he would have given great Hector considerable trouble at Troy for the sake of Helen"]. This remark makes the present conflict over Emilia prefigure the future conflict over Helen. Similarities between the two women (and conflicts) intensify when Emilia laments her role in the battle between Arcita and Palemone:

*'Deh, quanto mal per me mi diè natura  
questa bellezza di cui pregio fia  
orribile battaglia, rea e dura,  
che qui si fa sol per la faccia mia!  
La quale avanti ch'ella fosse oscura  
istata sempre volentier vorria,  
che tanto sangue per lei si versasse,  
quanto qui veggio nelle parti basse.'* (8.98)

[‘O how unfortunate for me that nature endowed me with this beauty, the price of which had to be horrible, wicked, and ruthless conflict waged here only because of my face! How heartily I wish that it might have been kept veiled always, rather than that so much blood should be spilled for it, as I now see here in this place below.’]

Emilia's *teichoscopia*, or “viewing from the walls,” anticipates Helen's sentiments while observing the Trojan War from atop the walls of Troy. Like Helen, Emilia is “*con le forze di molti/chesta da due*” (8.104) [“sought by two with the forces of many”] on account of her beauty, her face. And, like Helen, she laments “*quante madri, padri, amici e frati, /figliuoli e altri, me maladicensi*” (8.100) [“how many mothers, fathers, friends, brothers, sons, and others will curse me”].<sup>41</sup>

The connection between Helen and Emilia arises again at Arcita's funeral as Menelaus gazes upon Emilia as she enters into the temple and “*la reputò sì di bellezza piena, /che la prepose con seco ad Elena*” (12.67) [“thought her beauty so perfect that in his mind he preferred her to Helen”]. This desire that he now feels for Emilia is precisely what will bring him to Troy on account of Helen. Thus Emilia becomes an object of desire and conflict very much like Helen will later become at Troy.

Boccaccio, therefore, uses the absent presence of Helen in the *Teseida* in order to foreshadow the Trojan War. Events of Helen's history are both repeated and foreshadowed in the events of the poem. In Ipolita, Helen's past experience is repeated as she becomes another love conquest for Teseo. In Emilia, Helen's future experience is anticipated as Emilia becomes a contested love object much like Helen herself.

However, Boccaccio uses Emilia to affect a transition of another kind. As some critics have noted, she replaces the throne of Thebes as the source of conflict between two Theban kinsmen, but Boccaccio also uses a beautiful woman as a substitute for the throne of Thebes in order, more precisely, to establish a connection between the source of the Theban war and that of the Trojan War.<sup>42</sup> In Emilia, Boccaccio creates a typological link between Theban and Trojan history at the root level of motivation: he implies that a fundamental covetousness underlies both the struggle between Eteocles and Polynices over the Theban throne and that between Menelaus and Paris over Helen. The love triangle of the *Teseida* combines the combatants of Thebes (in Palemone and Arcita, the Theban kinsmen) and the source of conflict of Troy (a beautiful woman). At the same time, Boccaccio reduces both conflicts to nothing more than *cupiditas*, since throughout the *Teseida* both the throne of Thebes and Helen of Troy assume the mere importance of an indifferent young woman, or, as Teseo calls it, "*si poca di cosa*" (7.5) ["such a small thing"].

## THE RUINS OF THEBES AND TROY

Thebes and Troy come together again in a pattern of destructive repetition in Book Four, when Arcita goes into exile. Leaving Athens, Arcita heads into Boetia and arrives at the deserted ruins of the city of Thebes (4.12ff). Seeing that "*tutta quella regione/esser diserta allora d'abitanti*" (4.13) ["the entire region was deserted of inhabitants"], Arcita launches into an *ubi sunt* lament for his former home. In the process, he catalogs the major historic landmarks of Thebes, not simply those pertaining to the recent war, but also the landmarks relating to the city's founding. He mentions "*le case eminenti/del nostro primo Cadmo*" (4.14) ["the eminent house of our first Cadmus"], Semele's (Cadmus' daughter) chambers where she had lain with Jove (4.14), the rooms of Alcmena (mother of Hercules) (4.15), the "*eccelsi segni ancora/dé popoli silvestri libiani*" (4.15) ["lofty banners of the wild Libyan people (who had been conquered by Bacchus, the god the Thebes)]," "Laius," "sorrowing Oedipus" and their children (4.16). He laments:

*'Nessun qui al presente ne dimora:  
li re son morti, e voi, tristi Tebani,  
dispersi gite, e n' cenere è tornato  
ciò che di voi fu già molto lodato.'* (4.15)

[‘No one dwells here now. The kings are dead, and you, unhappy Thebans, wander dispersed. What you once praised so highly has been reduced to ashes.’]

He concludes that only “*io e Palemone, / né altro più, del sangue d’Agenore rimasi siamo*” (4.17) [“Palemone and I, no one else, remain of the blood of Agenor (father of Cadmus)].”

Several possible sources may have served as a basis for Arcita’s visit to the ruined city of Thebes. Boccaccio may have based Arcita’s exile on that of Pollinices in the OF *Roman de Thèbes* or a prose redaction of it. Statius, of course, and the OF poet after him, also has Pollinices go into exile. (Boccaccio, like the OF poet, has Arcita search out a new court in which to serve). However, I propose that a more likely model for this scene in terms of structure and mood is Caesar’s similar detour through the ruined city of Troy in Lucan’s *Pharsalia*, a work quite familiar to Boccaccio.<sup>43</sup>

Having just defeated Pompey, Caesar pauses to do some sight-seeing. Arriving at the shores of the ancient city of Troy (9.961), Caesar makes a tour of the “*exustae... Troiae*” (9.964) [“charred Troy”].<sup>44</sup> So dense is the overgrowth of vines that “*ac tota teguntur/Pergama dumetis: etiam periere ruinae*” (9.968-9) [“all Pergamum now was choked with thorny thickets: everything had perished — even the ruins”]. Here, too, we get a catalog of historic landmarks: “*Hesiones scopulos*” (9.970) [“Hesione’s crag”] [where Leomedon’s daughter was chained to await the sea monster], “*Anchisae thalamos*” (9.971) [“Anchises’ honeymoon cottage”], the cave of Paris’ judgment (9.971), the spot where Ganymede was whisked into heaven by Jove (9.972), and the peak where “*luxerit Oenone*” (9.973) [“Oenone sobbed”]. Caesar steps over the Xanthus, now reduced to an “*in sicco serpente puluere riuum*” [“rivulet snaking through dry dust”], and unknowingly tramples “*manes Hectoreos*” [“Hector’s ghost”] walking through the tall grass (9.974-977). “*Ueneranda uetustas*” (9.987) [“awesome antiquity”] had deteriorated into rubble; “*discussa iacebant/saxa nec ullius faciem seruantia sacri*” (9.977-978) [“stones lay scattered, no air of mystery about them”]. Caesar completes his tour with a prayer to the gods of former Troy [“*di cinerum*” (9.990) “gods of the ashes”] to whom he vows that he and his people “*moenia reddent Phrygibus*” (9.998-999) [“[will] build Phrygian walls anew”] should the gods help him take control of Rome. With his victory, he says, “*Romanaque Pergama surgent*” (9.999) [“a Roman Pergamum shall rise”].

Caesar’s detour through the ruins of Troy participates in Lucan’s larger project of challenging Vergil’s “myth of Rome.” Where Vergil’s *Aeneid* relates the story of Rome’s rise from humble origins to Imperial greatness, Lucan’s *Pharsalia* tells the story of Rome’s inexorable decline and collapse, what Gian Biagio Conte calls the “anti-myth of Rome.”<sup>45</sup> Conte points out how Lucan organizes his narrative of the civil war between Caesar and Pompey around a series of prophecies that reveal Rome’s immanent

collapse. The scene at the ruined city of Troy foreshadows the ruin that awaits Rome now that Pompey is dead and the Republic doomed.<sup>46</sup> Lucan aligns the two cities when he has Caesar promise the “gods of the ashes” to rebuild Troy in the form of Rome. Throughout the poem, Caesar views himself as the successor of Aeneas, as his prayer to the “*di . . . Aeneaeque mei*” (9.991) “Aenean Hearth-gods of mine” expresses. But in his determination to make Rome rival Troy in greatness, he fails to anticipate that Rome will suffer the same fate as Troy.

Just as Lucan uses the ruined city of Troy to foreshadow the coming ruin of Rome, Boccaccio uses the ruined city of Thebes to foreshadow the coming ruin of Troy. Boccaccio, of course, does not align Thebes and Troy overtly the way Lucan aligns Troy and Rome, but Troy, nevertheless, dominates the scene of Arcita's wanderings for a number of reasons. First, the scene in Lucan's *Pharsalia* from which Boccaccio derives this scene is set in Troy. Troy was on Boccaccio's mind. Second, Arcita heads directly from Thebes to the courts of Menelao (Menelaus) and Pelleo (Peleus), the seedbeds of the Trojan conflict. After all, it was at Peleus's wedding feast that Eris threw the apple inscribed “for the fairest,” which led to the judgment of Paris, which led to the abduction of Menelaus' wife, which caused the Trojan War.<sup>47</sup> Third, Boccaccio draws in this scene upon the popular, Augustinian notion of one ruined city begetting another, which we also find in the OF *Roman de Thèbes* and the *Roman de Troie*, and in later prose redactions of those poems. Fourth, both Lucan and Boccaccio include this scene as a pause in the main action of the poem, a reflective retreat from the course of current events in which the specter of history (past and future) looms large. Troy and Rome form the bookends of Caesar's detour; Thebes and Troy form the bookends of Arcita's. Finally, both Lucan and Boccaccio conjure up in these scenes not just the recent fall of a city, but that of an entire civilization. Lucan's list of landmarks ranges from Troy's founding to its fall, as does Boccaccio's list of landmarks for Thebes. In this instance of Arcita's wandering in exile, Boccaccio has once again constructed an episode as a transition between the conflicts of Thebes and Troy by combining the circumstances of a scene about Troy with content derived from Theban history. Furthermore, he once again uses his own intervening narrative, the *Teseida*, to interrogate the historical and cultural preeminence of both wars by focusing on the devastating consequences of each campaign.

## BOCCACCIO'S USE OF THE EPIC TYPE-SCENES

Trojan history also helps to make sense of much of the seemingly static quality of the second half of the *Teseida*, perhaps the most frustrating segment of the poem for the modern reader. With the battle over Emilia having ended in Book Eight, the battery of the plot has expired. From this point, the narrative shifts into a series of ceremonies (an awards ceremony, a funeral, funeral games and a wedding) in which, as one scholar says, “quasi-epic heroism seems continually on the point of being wholly subsumed

by courtly ritual.”<sup>48</sup> The narrative seems to continue to no end. It is also at this point in the poem that the correspondences in the main action between the *Teseida* and the *Thebaid* documented by David Anderson begin to break down (although Boccaccio continues to borrow material from Statius).<sup>49</sup> The apparent formlessness of the poem from Book Eight on has led more than a few scholars to feel that Boccaccio somehow lost control over his material at this point, leading to the poem’s reputation as a “failed epic.”<sup>50</sup> If, however, we approach the second half of the poem as a preview for the Trojan War, it becomes clear that Boccaccio maintains his original intent for the poem as an epic, and that he maintains very tight control over his material.

Boccaccio structures the second half of the *Teseida*, from the battle of Book Eight to the ending in Book Twelve, around a series of epic type-scenes, characteristic of Latin epic, each of which echo Thebes and anticipate Troy, and which function collectively in the narrative as a transition device between the two conflicts. The scenes are as follows: 1) the formal description of a woman, or blason (not a feature of ancient epic, but a standard rhetorical device in medieval epic and romance), 2) funeral games, 3) the arming of the hero, and 4) battle. I will discuss them in the order that they appear in the *Teseida*.

The battle of Book Eight of the *Teseida* has been characterized as more of a medieval tournament than an epic battle, despite Boccaccio’s avowed intentions of writing the first Italian epic.<sup>51</sup> After all, it operates along explicit rules with each side being assigned exactly one hundred combatants, is presided over by a judge, Teseo, who refers to the battle as “*giuoco a Marte*” (7.13) [“games for Mars”], and takes place in an amphitheater before an audience. Moreover, unlike Latin epics, the *Teseida* confines the battle neatly to a single book and a single battle. Thus, despite his conscious imitation of classical epic models, Boccaccio appears to diminish the most central activity of ancient epic: war. The battle of Book Eight, therefore, seems to have less in common with epic battle and more in common with epic (and medieval) martial games. This is because, as Anderson has revealed, Boccaccio modeled the battle of Book Eight on the funeral games of *Thebaid* VI, the games commemorating the death of Archemorus (known to Boccaccio as Opheltes).<sup>52</sup> The result is what Anderson calls a “simulated war,” not a war but a rehearsal for war. More importantly for our purposes, games in ancient epic serve a proleptic function in that they preview the course and outcome of the war to come. Statius’ games are no exception, and he announces the games in *Thebaid* VI as an exercise by which “*praesudare paret seseque accendere virtus*” (6.3-4) [“martial spirits may prepare to catch fire and may have a foretaste of the sweat of war”].

Boccaccio appropriates this proleptic function of the epic games by using his battle/games as a foretaste of war, in this case the Trojan War. Indeed, most of the combatants in the battle will later fight at Troy, and Boccaccio evaluates their performance in battle (both in the catalog of Book Six and during the battle itself) not in terms of *this* war, but in terms of the Trojan War. For example, Agamemnon assumes the same

leadership role here that he will later have at Troy; as noted earlier, Pollux shows that he “*per Elena a Troia al grande Ettor donata molta noia*” (8.25) [“would have given great Hector considerable trouble at Troy for the sake of Helen”]; Ulysses and Diomedes share the same close association in Athens that will surface at Troy in their embassy to Priam, while Diomedes acts with the characteristic impetuosity that he will later display at Troy. So, too, we have the cameo appearance of Dictys (8.34), the name of the Greek chronicler who followed Idomeneus and Meriones to Troy and who left what medieval readers considered an eyewitness account of the Trojan War from the Greek perspective. Appropriately, Boccaccio shows him in this single instance attempting to rescue Minos, who, according to Dictys’ own account, bequeathed the rule of his cities and lands to none other than Idomeneus and Meriones.<sup>53</sup> Finally, Boccaccio interrupts the battle with Emilia’s Helenesque lament from atop the walls discussed earlier (8.94ff.). (No such scene occurs in the *Thebaid*, certainly not during the funeral games.) Boccaccio appears to have modeled his battle on Statius’ games not simply because the games better suit the style and scale of a medieval tournament, but also because games in Latin epic typically function as a preview of war.

A ceremony follows the battle in which Emilia grants prizes to the winner, Palemone. In Book Nine, Teseo presents Palemone to Emilia to do with as she pleases. She decides to set him free and bestows on him a series of gifts which, for the most part, include battle gear: a sword, a quiver, arrows, a Scythian bow (recalling her own epic origins as an Amazon), a charger, a lance, and armor crafted by Vulcan. This scene in Book Nine has not generally been recognized as an “arming of the hero” scene for the rather obvious reason that the battle is now over. After all, the occasion for the splendid armor has passed, and the armor now seems superfluous.

However, several elements in the scene indicate that Boccaccio had in mind the epic type-scene of the arming of the hero. First, there is no other formal arming of a hero — either Arcita or Palemone — anywhere else in the *Teseida*. There is a brief mention of the heroes having spurs placed on them just prior to battle, but there is no catalog of the armor used by either man. This scene in Book Nine comes the closest to such a catalog. Second, armor crafted by Vulcan, the Roman blacksmith god, is a very powerful signal for the epic hero going into battle. Vulcan’s armor, in particular, which has a magical and prophetic quality in classical epic, is typically bestowed upon the hero before, not after, battle and generally guarantees the hero’s triumph. Aeneas, for example, receives armor made by Vulcan just before going into battle with Turnus. In fact (and this is my third point), Emilia’s words upon bestowing the battle gear on Palemone echo Venus’ words as she bestows Vulcan’s armor on Aeneas:

*‘... perciò che tu dei vie più a Marte  
che a Cupido dimorar soggetto,  
ti dono queste, acciò che, se in parte*

*avvien che ti bisogni, con effetto  
adoperar le puoi; esse con arte  
son fabricate, che senza sospetto  
le puoi portar: forse l'adoperrai  
dove vie più che me n'acquisterai.* — ' (Tes. 9.75)

[... since you must remain more the subject of Mars than of Cupid, I give you these gifts, so that should it chance that you need them, you can use them to advantage. They have been made with skill, so you may bear them without qualm. Perhaps you will make use of them where you will gain much more than me.]<sup>54</sup>

As a recipient of Vulcan's armor, and as "*più a Marte che a Cupido dimorar soggetto*" ["more the subject of Mars than of Cupid"], Palemone clearly follows in the footsteps of the ancient epic hero.<sup>55</sup>

However, what distinguishes Boccaccio's arming of the hero from previous examples in classical epic is the placement of this scene within the larger narrative. It would seem that Boccaccio intends this scene of the arming of the hero to anticipate a war other than the one in Teseo's Athens, and, in fact, Emilia's own words point to a future battle when she says, "*forse l'adoperrai dove vie più che me n'acquisterai*" (9.75) ["Perhaps you will make use of them where you will gain much more than me"]. Since there is no further armed conflict in the *Teseida* after Book Eight, Boccaccio primes the reader in this scene, as elsewhere, for a future conflict beyond the scope of his own poem, and in the chronology of ancient history, that can only mean the Trojan War, a war which will also revolve around the possession of a beautiful woman.<sup>56</sup>

Boccaccio follows up this episode with another epic type-scene: the funeral games of Book Eleven.<sup>57</sup> Very briefly, funeral games occur in ancient epic when a prominent figure dies and sports competitions are held in his honor for which prizes are given (e.g. Anchises of the *Aeneid*). In this case, the games are held in honor of Arcita (11.18-29), whose funeral just prior to the games contains numerous echoes of Archemorus' funeral in *Thebaid* VI. At first, however the funeral games in Book Eleven seem to suffer from the same purposelessness as the arming of the hero scene did before it for the simple reason that the battle has already taken place in the *Teseida*, and thus the funeral games would seem to have lost their function as a preview of the war.

However, the funeral games of the *Teseida* do anticipate war, the Trojan War, and we can see this by looking through the roster of winners, all of whom have some connection with Troy and its aftermath:<sup>58</sup> Idas (11.59) (who sailed with Jason and the Argonauts in the expedition that sparked the first destruction of Troy (an event related by Dares and Dictys and by Guido delle Colonne), Theseus (11.62) (who abducted Helen prior to her more famous abduction by Paris), Castor and Pollux (11.59) and

64) (the brothers of Helen of Troy), Agamemnon (11.68), the famous Greek general on the battlefield of Troy; Evander (11.66) (later allied with Aeneas, and the one who guides Aeneas around the area that will later become Rome). Thus, through these winners, Boccaccio previews the Trojan conflict in all its stages: 1) "First sack of Troy" indicated by Idas, whereby the young Priam's sister Hesione was abducted, 2) "Abduction of Helen" indicated first by Theseus, whose earlier abduction of Helen is alluded to in the games, and second by Castor and Pollux, for after the first attack on Troy, Paris abducts their sister, Helen (allegedly in revenge for the abduction of Hesione), 3) "Siege of Troy" indicated by Agamemnon, who commanded the Greek forces on the Trojan plain, and 4) "Fruition of Troy" indicated by Evander, who was instrumental in Aeneas' enterprises as recounted in the *Aeneid*. Thus the winners of the games of Book Eleven represent each phase of the Trojan conflict, from its inception to its fruition.

Boccaccio employs a final type-scene in the last book of the *Teseida*, Book Twelve: a blason, or a catalog of female beauty, in this case Emilia's. While the blason belongs to the romance tradition rather than to the tradition of ancient epic, we do find them in medieval adaptations of ancient history, such as Guido delle Colonne's *Historia Destructionis Troiae*, thus it is by no means unusual for Boccaccio to employ one in his own adaptation of classical Latin epic.<sup>59</sup> Book Twelve presents a peaceable resolution to the conflict of the *Teseida*. Mourners cease their grieving for Arcita, Palemone marries Emilia, and the numerous kings and nobles who participated in the conflict return home. In every way, this seems a happy ending as the optimism of romance appears to triumph over the destructive threat of epic, of Theban history. As part of his description of the wedding festivities of Palemone and Emilia, Boccaccio pauses in the main action of the episode to describe Emilia in a formal blason (12.52ff.), comparing her various features to fruits and flowers, praising each for its good proportion.

The content of the blason of Emilia is unremarkable, a textbook example of *descriptio* applied to female beauty, proceeding from head to toe, focusing mostly on the face and skipping over indescribable parts (12.63). Such descriptions of female beauty constitute a rhetorical commonplace in medieval romance and in the poetic handbooks of the twelfth century.<sup>60</sup> Of course, there are numerous and wonderful variants of this device throughout the middle ages (especially in the works of Chaucer), but this blason of Emilia is not one of them. Yet the various critical discussions of this particular blason all focus on its rather ordinary content while overlooking its extraordinary function within the larger narrative of the *Teseida*.<sup>61</sup>

One constant in the tradition of the blason, certainly for narrative, is that it occurs early in the story, generally when the woman first appears or shortly thereafter. There is a simple reason for this: beautiful women generate narrative. Conflicts and quests so often revolve around them. Thus, for instance, Guido delle Colonne de-

scribes Helen from head to toe early in Book Seven of his *Historia*.<sup>62</sup> Emilia would appear to prove no exception to this rule since without her there would be no *Teseida*. Why, then, would Boccaccio wait until the end of the poem to describe her beauty (the very source of the conflict)? Why end his narrative with a device that normally launches a narrative?

By focusing, instead, on its placement at the end of the *Teseida*, it appears that Boccaccio introduces the blason of Emilia as a narrative hinge joining both the end of his narrative and the beginning of the story of Troy, and the wars of Thebes and Troy at the opposite ends of the *Teseida*. First, Boccaccio, quite self-consciously, calls attention to his strategic placement (or mis-placement) of the blason through a formal rubric: “*Disegna l'autore la forma e la bellezza di Emilia, e prima invoca l'aiuto delle Muse*” (12.51) [“The author describes the appearance and beauty of Emilia, and he first invokes the help of the muses”]. He marshals the rhetorical tradition of such formal descriptions, a tradition that would normally place it at the beginning of a narrative, not at the end. Second, Boccaccio bookends the blason with images of Thebes on one end and Troy on the other, and specifically the sources of those conflicts: at the beginning of the blason, he invokes those muses “*la quale Anfion/astate a chiuder Tebe*” (12.52) [“who helped Amphion enclose Thebes”], recalling the beginning of Theban history, the construction of the city which became the source of conflict; at the end of the blason, Boccaccio depicts Menelao gazing upon Emilia and comparing her to Helen (12.67), the source of the Trojan conflict. The reference to Helen situates the ending of the *Teseida* at the very beginning of the Trojan War (Menelaus and Helen are still together at this point). Finally, Boccaccio situates the blason in the epic, not romance, tradition in the stanza that follows: the wedding celebrations include musicians as skilled as the “*Anfion tebeo*” [“Theban Amphion”] and songs so well written that “*sarebbero statibelli a Caliope*” [“they would have been lovely to Calliope,”] the muse of epic poetry (12.72). Thus, despite the closure of conflict promised by this “romance ending,” the celebrations themselves announce a continuation of epic concerns — of war, and the only war on the horizon at the end of the *Teseida* is the Trojan War.

Perhaps the most ingenious way that Boccaccio manipulates epic type-scenes as a structuring device for his epic involves his placement of them as a group, for when we chart the sequence of these scenes as they occur in the *Teseida*, we see that they occur in precisely the reverse of the order in which they would normally appear in classical Latin epic (and much of medieval romance). Examined within the exclusive parameters of the poem itself, these four episodes seem to lock the narrative into a series of false starts whereby the hero receives his armor after the battle is over, and where the funeral games showcase warrior talent that will serve no greater challenge, and where the heroine is admired only after her fate has been sealed through marriage. Since the outcome of the Athenian affair has been resolved by Book Eight, episodes which typically generate narrative become stripped of their potential to foster mystery

**Table 2** Epic Types Scenes

	Statius' <i>Thebaid</i>	Vergil's <i>Aeneid</i>	Boccaccio's <i>Teseida</i>
Blason	—	—	Book 12
Funeral Games	Book 6	Book 5	Book 11
Arming of Hero	—	Book 8	Book 9
Battle	Books 7ff.	Books 9ff.	Book 8

and suspense. Thus the second half of the *Teseida* seems to turn into one neverending state function.

However, by approaching the *Teseida* as a transitional epic which attempts to fill the temporal gap in ancient history between the sieges of Thebes and Troy, it becomes clear that Boccaccio enacts on the level of narrative structure the same transition that he is trying to achieve on the chronological level. Table 2 compares the arrangement of these scenes in two Roman epics with their arrangement in the *Teseida*.

In the first half of the *Teseida* (excluding Book One), Boccaccio mirrors the narrative sequence of the first half of Statius' *Thebaid*, moving from the beginning of the conflict between two Theban kinsmen to the tournament (which corresponds to Statius' funeral games of *Thebaid* VI). At this point, he reveals the outcome of the struggle at Athens, but does not end the poem here. In the second half of the *Teseida*, Boccaccio continues to borrow from Statius, but abandons the narrative structure of the *Thebaid*. In its place, he substitutes a series of type-scenes common to Latin epic, but unfolds each of them in reverse order, so that the poem ends the way most classical and medieval narratives begin.<sup>63</sup> Taken as a sequence, the four epic type-scenes punctuating the second half of the *Teseida* (the battle, the arming of the hero, the funeral games and the blason) move the narrative from the end of one conflict to the beginning of another. In the meantime, Boccaccio fills these episodes with Trojan personnel and allusions to the Trojan War, thus affecting a narrative transition into the siege of Troy. Boccaccio's highly imaginative use of epic type-scenes in the second half of the *Teseida* has gone largely unnoticed precisely because it defies the narrative logic of ancient epic, but we see that the poem in its entirety is thoroughly grounded in that tradition, from beginning to end.

We see, then, that Troy forms a vital subtext for understanding Boccaccio's *Teseida*. He shapes the opening campaign of the poem to resemble the opening offensive at Troy, modeling Book One on Guido delle Colonne's account of the establishment of the siege at Troy. He aligns the figures of Ipolita and Emilia with Helen of Troy, making Ipolita's experience repeat Helen's experience prior to Troy, and making Emilia's experience foreshadow Helen's future experience in the Trojan conflict. He models Arcita's exiled wandering into the ruined city of Thebes on that of Caesar's wandering through the ruined city of Troy in Lucan's *Pharsalia*, reaffirming the popular medieval

pairing of Thebes and Troy as two destroyed cities. He enlists into this conflict at Athens men who will later appear at Troy, and previews their future performance in both the catalog of warriors and in the battle itself. He arranges a series of epic type-scenes in reverse order so that they anticipate an event beyond the span of the poem itself, and infuses each of them with allusions to Troy. Thus, in addition to being a restaging of the Theban drama, the *Teseida* also becomes a dress rehearsal for the Trojan drama.

What, then, is Boccaccio saying about the nature of Thebes and Troy? A common theme in all three conflicts — Thebes, Athens, and Troy — that Boccaccio fosters is a fundamental disproportion between the causes and the consequences of conflict. Boccaccio had plenty of precedent for such a judgment about Thebes and Troy. Statius speaks of the “*paupere regno*” (1.151) [“pauper realm”] for which Eteocles and Polynices are willing to fight to the death. A similar sense of disproportion infuses Guido delle Colonne’s account of the Trojan War when he speaks of the “original cause” of the war from “trifling” and “unimportant” things (namely a misunderstanding between Jason and king Laomedon) which nevertheless “troubles human hearts.”<sup>64</sup> And in his own brief account of the Trojan War in *De Claris Mulieribus*, Boccaccio stresses Helen’s unworthiness for the deaths she causes, claiming that the Greek princes “*Paridis potius iniuriam ponderarent quam Helene lasciviam*” [“placed more weight on Paris’ wrongdoing than on Helen’s wantonness”].<sup>65</sup> Boccaccio’s *Teseida* dramatizes the spirit of these assessments of the Theban and Trojan wars in the conflict at Athens over “*si poca di cosa*” (7.5) [“such a small thing”], over love of a woman. The *Teseida*, therefore, heightens the tragedy of Troy by giving us insight into its underlying cause, its “root.”

This is not to say that the *Teseida* is written entirely in a minor key: quite the contrary. Boccaccio, in fact, offers us a hiatus from the grinding progress of ancient history as one disaster after another. After all, in its broadest outlines, the poem undoes many of the mistakes of the past (and future). Teseo, unlike the Greek commanders at Troy, manages to avoid a protracted siege, and gains the woman with minimal resistance. Arcita and Palemone break the Theban curse of mutual destruction, and the object for which they contend, Emilia, survives the conflict, unlike the city of Thebes at the close of the Theban war. The Greek commanders in the *Teseida* return home at the end by “*il cammin suo più corto*” (12.83) [“the shortest route”] (an allusion to the *nostoi*) without getting lost at sea or being murdered by their wives. The *Teseida* explores the possibility of alternate outcomes to familiar events of ancient history, to the events of Trojan as well as Theban history.

But the very presence of these variations of familiar historical scenes recalls their originals, many of which are about to take place in the timeline of mythical history, scenes which the poet cannot change. Hence the tragedy of Teseo’s statement of consolation to the beleaguered warriors following the battle that “*Questo ch’è stato, non tornerà mai per alcun tempo che stato non sai*” (9.59) [“what has happened here will not

come again in any future time"]. These events *will* come again and, similarly, for “*si poca di cosa.*”

More than anything, the Trojan dimension of the *Teseida* enables us to reassess the poem as the work of a mature artist rather than that of an overly ambitious youth. To be sure, Boccaccio finished the *Teseida* at the age of twenty-eight, while still a young man, and well before his international bestseller, the *Decameron* (1351), and for this reason it belongs among his “early works.” However, the achievement of the *Teseida* reveals a young poet already in command of a wide variety of texts and traditions, including the tradition of historical epic, which he manipulates in highly creative and effective ways. Of course, not all aspects of his experiment in epic may seem equally effective; for instance, his rather unorthodox use of epic type-scenes has never, to my knowledge, been reproduced, and perhaps with good reason. However, the Trojan mantle of the *Teseida* affirms that we can indeed take seriously Boccaccio’s claim to writing the first Italian epic. With its unusual blend of Theban and Trojan events and themes in an imaginary recreation of the period intervening these two conflicts, the *Teseida* provides the missing volume on the shelf of ancient history.



## Chapter Three

# Restoring Thebes: Chaucer's Theban Poems

With Boccaccio's *Teseida*, two trends in the medieval Theban legend reached their zenith: first, the matter of Thebes became inextricably intertwined with the matter of Troy. This process had already been underway in the OF *Roman de Thèbes*, where the poet weaves certain Trojan personnel and battle tactics into his account of the Theban war, but in the *Teseida*, this blending of Thebes and Troy became the core of the project. Second, Theban identity, with its hallmark propensity towards deviant and destructive behavior, had begun to ameliorate in the face of new and redeeming influences, namely Christianity. In the OF *Thèbes*, the poet rehabilitates one of the sons of Oedipus, Pollinicsés, by placing him among respectable men with crusading ambitions, though he never goes so far as to make him the hero of the poem (very likely due to his Theban lineage). Ethïoclés, meanwhile, remains king of their native city, Thebes, now crawling with Infidels. In his *Teseida*, Boccaccio takes this process of rehabilitation begun by the OF poet to its full fruition; he removes his fictional Theban kinsmen from their ancestral seat of destruction, Thebes, exposes them to love and, indirectly, Christianity, makes Arcita the undisputed hero, and has that hero "convert" the other Theban kinsman, Palemone, away from the modes of behavior and thought that had set their race apart from its inception. In short, the distinctiveness of Theban history and racial identity now faced extinction. This was the state of the Theban legend when Chaucer turned his own pen to it some forty years later, and it is precisely these two trends, so fully realized in Boccaccio's *Teseida*, that Chaucer set about undoing. Chaucer became the first medieval poet to untangle the Theban legend from the various other historical threads, chiefly Troy, introduced by his predecessors in order to isolate and restore Theban criminality as a distinct historical phenomenon.

Geoffrey Chaucer took up the matter of Thebes in two works composed within several years of one another, *The Complaynt of feire Anelida and fals Arcite* and the *Knight's Tale*.<sup>1</sup> Their similarities suggest that these two poems may represent drafts of

the same work, but many scholars cite the differences between the two works as evidence that they represent separate narratives that happen to share a common historical setting.<sup>2</sup> That common historical setting forms the subject of the present chapter, for despite the numerous differences between the *Anelida* and the *Knigh't's Tale*, both works attest to Chaucer's desire to revisit Thebes in its original, ancient form, to revive Thebanness as a historical and imaginative force. Chaucer's two Theban poems constitute separate phases of a single poetic enterprise to restore a classical, Statian, definition of Theban identity. Chaucer's restoration of Thebes involved several key innovations.

To begin with, Chaucer is the first medieval adaptor of the Theban legend to completely isolate Theban history from Trojan history.<sup>3</sup> As discussed in Chapter 1, the OF poet conflates the stories of the Theban and Trojan wars by recruiting personnel from the Trojan conflict into the ranks at Thebes, by altering the landscape of Thebes and its outlying area so that it resembles Troy, and by redesigning some key military strategy employed by the Thebans to make it resemble that used in the Trojan War. Additionally, he distinguishes the opposing sides of the conflict at Thebes as "the Greeks" and "the Thebans" (despite the fact that the Thebans are Greek) in imitation of the later conflict between the Greeks and the Trojans. Thus various aspects of the Theban war in the *Thèbes* anticipate the Trojan War. Boccaccio, too, includes a great deal of Trojan material in his *Teseida*, choosing as his timeframe the transitional period between the Theban and Trojan wars. Boccaccio establishes a causal connection between the two conflicts, a connection lacking in medieval chronicle accounts of ancient history and vague in the OF *Roman de Thèbes*. He achieves this transition by including a host of Trojan personnel in the *Teseida*, by refocusing the conflict between his two Thebans around a woman (the issue at Troy) rather than a city, and by modeling Emilia's predicament as a victim of her own beauty, and as the object of conflict between two armies of rival suitors, on that of Helen of Troy. Thus, Boccaccio's *Teseida* integrates material from accounts of both Thebes and Troy. Chaucer, however, removes all traces of Troy from his Theban works, the *Knigh't's Tale* especially. In fact, as we shall see, Trojan material constitutes the bulk of what Chaucer excised from his Italian source. In doing this, Chaucer focuses entirely on Theban concerns and dilemmas.

Second, Chaucer is the first medieval adaptor of the Theban legend to reverse the tendency to view the conflict anachronistically. The OF poet reconfigures the Theban conflict as a medieval crusade, transforming the side of Pollinicés into an army of crusaders and the side of Ethïoclés into a host of infidels. In this respect, the Theban war becomes a medieval conflict framed by the medieval Christian concerns of the twelfth-century poet and audience. Similarly, Boccaccio, while classicizing the setting of the *Teseida* in many ways, nevertheless gives his Theban heroes access to essentially Christian experience through the lens of medieval chivalric romance.<sup>4</sup> Through loving Emilia, Boccaccio's heroes (especially Arcita) go through a process of

suffering, awakening, repentance and reconciliation that echoes the Christian experience, and this process enables them to overcome the most destructive aspects of their Theban heritage. Unlike his medieval predecessors, Chaucer situates his narrative in a distinctly pagan past and denies his characters access to Christian revelation, the absence of which in the tale has aroused much critical discussion.<sup>5</sup> Although Chaucer's characters frequently employ the language of Boethian philosophy and of medieval romance, they inhabit a world whose modes of thought are ultimately non-Christian and, therefore, they fail to undergo the kind of transformation that Boccaccio's heroes experience.

Third, Chaucer is the first medieval adaptor of the Theban legend to represent Thebes as a living, functioning city well beyond the end of the Theban war. The destruction of Thebes, as we have seen, had symbolic importance in the medieval imagination in the same manner as the destruction of Troy. Thebes, like Troy, became another ruined city in a line of ruined earthly cities, reflecting the Augustinian model of secular history as a series of disasters. Thus, at the end of at least one manuscript of the *Roman de Thèbes* we have the city of Thebes sitting as a burned out shell until the beginning of the Trojan War; the poet links Thebes and Troy as two ancient cities which arrived at the same end. Boccaccio's *Teseida* also represents Thebes as a destroyed, uninhabitable city after the conclusion of the Theban war, perhaps best dramatized by Arcita's exilic wandering through the ruins of Thebes. Boccaccio's emphasis on the ruined state of Thebes underscores his larger project of severing his Theban heroes from their blighted history.<sup>6</sup> Chaucer, however, maintains the city of Thebes as an inhabited, working city in both his Theban works. The *Anelida* is set in the city of Thebes just before Theseus' final attack, and Anelida herself is involved romantically with a Theban citizen, Arcite. Whether or not Chaucer intended to depict the destruction of the city in a continuation of the poem, he clearly wished to explore life within the city of Thebes while it still stood. In the *Knight's Tale* as well, Chaucer represents Thebes as a functioning city well after the war, and makes Palaemon the new leader of Thebes at the end of the tale; this constitutes perhaps his most concrete departure from the medieval Theban tradition. The range and extent of Chaucer's innovations within the Theban tradition have gone largely unnoticed due to misunderstandings surrounding his relationship with his Theban sources, notably the *Teseida*.

### CHAUCER AND THE *TESEIDA*

Several scholars have argued, convincingly, that Chaucer models his *Knight's Tale* more closely on the *Thebaid* of Statius than on Boccaccio's *Teseida*.<sup>7</sup> Robert Haller, in his study of the *Knight's Tale* as an epic (rather than a romance), demonstrates that Chaucer translates the Statian rivalry over a throne into a rivalry over love. Palaemon and Arcite fight over possession of Emelye with the same vehemence and determina-

tion with which Polynices and Eteocles fight over possession of the city of Thebes. In effect, Chaucer has made “love take the place of the usual political center of the epic.”<sup>8</sup> Expanding on Haller, David Anderson documents how Chaucer reproduces the narrative pattern in the *Thebaid* (while borrowing characters from the *Teseida*) and therefore eliminates the segments of the *Teseida* that do not pertain directly to the theme of fraternal strife. For instance, he drops Boccaccio’s opening sequence of Theseus’ campaign in Scythia, returning to the brief, Statian treatment of Theseus’ campaign. Similarly, he reduces the role of Emelye, thus imitating Statius’ estimation of Thebes as a “starveling realm” (“*Pugna est de paupere regno*” *Thebaid*, 1.151), whose price is disproportionate to the reward.<sup>9</sup> In this respect, Anderson concurs with Haller that Chaucer resurrects the conflict between Polynices and Eteocles in that of Palaeamon and Arcite. Finally, Chaucer preserves (indeed expands) the influence of the pagan gods in human affairs in accordance with the well-known Servian definition of epic.<sup>10</sup> Anderson concludes that Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale* is an “open imitation not of Boccaccio’s narrative, but, like Boccaccio’s narrative, of Statius.”<sup>11</sup> Winthrop Wetherbee identifies the often grotesque descriptions of combat and death in the *Knight’s Tale* as typical not only of ancient epic in general but of the *Thebaid* in particular, the bloodiest Roman epic.<sup>12</sup> These studies demonstrate that Chaucer sought to return to the narrative strategies and themes of the *Thebaid* more than those of the *Teseida*.<sup>13</sup>

However, the *Thebaid*-centered approach to the *Knight’s Tale* raises a number of questions. If Chaucer wished to revive the pre-Boccaccian Theban experience, then why does he not return to the narrative devices of plot and character of Statius’ *Thebaid*, as the Old French poet had done, for instance? Why not treat the affairs of Polynices and Eteocles? Why use Palaemon and Arcite as substitutes for Eteocles and Polynices when he could simply use the Theban brothers themselves? If he wanted to revisit the nature of the conflict in the earlier chronological period of Statius’ *Thebaid*, why does he adhere to Boccaccio’s post-Theban war time frame? And why does he retain Boccaccio’s substitution of rivalry over love for rivalry over a throne only to re-inscribe the nature of the earlier, political conflict onto the love affair? In short, why bother with Boccaccio?

The nature and extent of Chaucer’s response to Boccaccio’s treatment of Theban history in the *Teseida* continues to be underrated. The most dominant theory framing discussions on the relationship between Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale* and Boccaccio’s *Teseida* is what I refer to as the “quarry theory.”<sup>14</sup> Briefly, this theory defines the *Teseida* as merely a repository of raw materials for Chaucer. Devoid of much literary merit in its own right, the *Teseida* nevertheless provided Chaucer, the true artist, with a kit of useful material and ideas. This theory begins with Robert Pratt’s early assessment of the poem as “lacking unity and power of theme, design, and execution... but possessing numerous effective descriptions and elevated passages of poetry.”<sup>15</sup> Its estimated value to medieval literature as a whole, and to Chaucer in particular, resembles that of an

especially large *florilegium*. Such is the prevailing critical assessment of the poem, as itemized here by W. A. Davenport:

*Il Teseida* offers a good range of possibilities to the adaptor, a choice of styles, material suitable for excision (some of which is actually identified by the author), literal, natural behavior woven in with the historical strangeness of the matter, a dual story of sad and happy outcome, exotic pictures and noble speech, moral, religious and philosophical themes.<sup>16</sup>

Boccaccio, lacking any clear direction, gathered together a wide variety of rhetorical styles and themes, freely blended historical with romance material, and then called the work an epic.

Implicit in the quarry theory is the belief that the “real story” of the *Teseida* involves only the love triangle between Arcita, Palemone, and Emilia, precisely the portion that Chaucer excerpted. The historical and mythographic material, on the other hand, plays no meaningful part in the love affair and represents, instead, Boccaccio’s “lengthy amplification” of the story.<sup>17</sup> Because Boccaccio intended the *Teseida* as an epic, and epics tend to be long, he “larded his narrative” with details about the Theban and Trojan wars and trivia about the pagan gods.<sup>18</sup> Chaucer cut this material, reducing the poem to its “bare essentials,” because, as critics argue, he saw it as extraneous to “the story.”<sup>19</sup> Thus the omissions Chaucer made to his Italian source “are important changes but not substantive ones.”<sup>20</sup>

Chaucer becomes, therefore, the master confronting the apprentice. As Helen Cooper remarks, Chaucer, as the experienced poet in full command of his craft, “makes Boccaccio’s rambling and unfocused romance-epic a perfectly balanced and tightly symmetrical work of deep human significance.”<sup>21</sup> Chaucer, the assumption goes, saw neither structure nor deep human significance in the *Teseida*; he removed the excess (history) and, left with the basic plot, added a philosophical dimension wholly lacking in his Italian source.<sup>22</sup>

A second theory concerning the source relationship between the *Teseida* and the *Knights Tale* is what I call the “cleared path” theory. The consensus in these studies is that Chaucer used Boccaccio’s *Teseida* predominantly as a tool for accessing the *Thebaid*. David Anderson claims that Chaucer’s use of the *Teseida* “is governed by an interest in doing again what Boccaccio had already done before, even while acting within the smaller space permitted by the frame of the *Canterbury Tales*.”<sup>23</sup> Chaucer, he suggests, wanted primarily to travel the same literary path back to Statius cleared by Boccaccio. Winthrop Wetherbee refines this argument further when he claims that “the *Knights Tale* can be described as working back through Boccaccio... to a confrontation with a more authentic, historical version of its Theban-Athenian material represented by the *Thebaid* itself.”<sup>24</sup> According to Wetherbee, Chaucer not only wished

to follow the same path as Boccaccio, but to go further than Boccaccio did back to Statius, and he demonstrates that Chaucer recuperates a more ancient (more Statian) treatment of Theban themes than Boccaccio. Concurring with Anderson and Wetherbee, James McGregor claims that “Chaucer’s innovation... is not thematic; *Teseida* and the *Knight’s Tale* share similar themes and similar points of view.”<sup>25</sup> These scholars suggest, therefore, that Chaucer borrows the *Teseida*’s narrative apparatus because he agrees with the work’s ideological underpinnings, most important of which involves returning to the classical source of the legend, the *Thebaid*.

Undoubtedly, this scholarship comes as a long overdue corrective to what David Anderson calls “the narrow focus on *Teseida-Knight’s Tale*” to include the larger literary tradition of *Thebaid*.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, it ascribes greater overall value to the *Teseida* in Chaucer’s literary consciousness, and does much to dispel the prevailing view of the *Teseida* as the “baggiest of baggy monsters,” to use Anderson’s term. However, like the “quarry theory,” the “cleared path” theory maintains that Chaucer viewed the *Teseida* as essentially disposable, as something to be used in the short term on the way to more distant goals, whether that goal be medieval philosophy or ancient history.

I argue, instead, that Chaucer did, in fact, find great value in Boccaccio’s *Teseida*, and that his Theban poems, particularly the *Knight’s Tale*, engage and challenge that Italian source directly and continuously throughout. Chaucer’s attitude towards the *Teseida* is far from neutral, as current critical opinion might suggest, and his Theban works constitute his response to Boccaccio’s attempted transformation of Theban history. We find this response behind the most salient critical observations on the *Knight’s Tale*, including its distinctly pagan world-view and its concern with divine *purveiaunce* (the divine plan). Critics have tended to view these features of the tale as Chaucer’s innovations, or “additions,” when, in fact, we find precedents for these in his Italian source.<sup>27</sup> Chaucer’s innovation lies, instead, in how he challenges Boccaccio’s handling of these same concepts.

These concepts lie in the historical content of the *Teseida*, the portion all too quickly relegated by critics to “background.”<sup>28</sup> In fact, the *Teseida*’s historiographic program creates the significance of the “foreground” of the poem, the love triangle. The rivalry between Arcita and Palemone derives its meaning from its participation in a long history of Theban, familial rivalries, a history that Boccaccio broadcasts at several points throughout the *Teseida*. Additionally, Emilia’s role as love object gains increasing resonance from how it overlaps with Helen’s role at Troy as the source of conflict between two contending armies of rivals in love, armies comprised largely of men who will later appear on the battlefield of Troy. By substituting a woman for a city as the source of conflict, Boccaccio creates a transition between Theban and Trojan history. He merges the mode of Theban conflict (fraternal strife) with the object of the Trojan conflict (a woman), and thus repeats Theban history as he prefigures Trojan history. Athenian society emerges from the Theban historical pattern of

fraternal strife only to fall unawares into the equally destructive historical pattern that will consume Troy. Thus, far from providing a mere “background” to the story, the historiographic material in the *Teseida* determines the very meaning of the story. It makes what would otherwise be a rather uneventful love story into a work of deep human significance.

Chaucer’s Theban poems are equally muscle-bound with history. In adapting the *Teseida* into the *Knights’ Tale*, Chaucer does not enrich the romantic component in any way; he does not add scenes in which the two heroes interact with Emelye, scenes that would, at least, render the love interest more plausible. If anything, he impoverishes the love interest even further by making Emelye a less compelling figure than Boccaccio’s Emilia; we have less access to her private thoughts and feelings than in Boccaccio. Moreover, he reduces Arcita as a hero, stripping away much of the interiority that makes him so interesting, and indeed powerful, in the *Teseida*. Thus, Chaucer does not modify the love plot all that much in his version of the story. By contrast, he enacts very sweeping changes to the historical context of the story. Not only does he shave away the historical material of Troy in order to gain a more narrow focus on Thebes, but he changes the directions that Thebes itself had begun to take.

### BOCCACCIO’S REDEMPTION OF THE THEBAN CHARACTER

In his handling of Theban history in the *Teseida*, Boccaccio stages an experiment in nature versus nurture with regard to the Theban character. He invents a new generation of Thebans, Palemone and Arcita, removes them from Thebes, exposes them to new, beneficial influences (namely, love) and allows them to respond positively to those influences by reconciling themselves to one another after a potential repeat performance of Theban criminality. One of them survives the conflict (unlike Eteocles and Polynices) as does the object of their contention, Emilia (unlike the city of Thebes in the Theban war). Nurture prevails as the more formative influence, and Theban criminality is eradicated. Boccaccio, therefore, restores the pattern of Theban history in order to reverse it.<sup>29</sup>

Boccaccio transforms Theban history ostensibly through the intervention of romance: his heroes fall in love, are changed by that love, and subsequently alter their actions.<sup>30</sup> However, in the *Teseida*, as in much of medieval romance, the romance experience mirrors the Christian experience; Boccaccio transforms Theban history by granting his Theban heroes Christian insight.<sup>31</sup> Despite its pre-Christian setting, the *Teseida* explores an essentially Christian understanding of love as a Divine gift with the power to alter the course of history. Boccaccio’s characters, while nominally pagan, undergo transformations of consciousness that mimic the experience of Christian conversion.<sup>32</sup> Arcita (and later Palemone) suffers, experiences an awakening of compassion, repents and finally reconciles himself to his enemy; in short, he has the

quintessential Christian experience. Moreover, while earthly love for a woman may provide the impetus for this experience, the love exerts far more influence over the relationship between the Theban cousins themselves than between either of them and Emilia, and the cornerstone of their experience is suffering, another hallmark of Christian heroism.

Boccaccio makes Palemone and Arcita into victims, not perpetrators, of the Theban curse. At every turn, we see them suffering; they are rescued from certain death from the battlefield outside of Thebes; they are imprisoned; they succumb to the despair of circumstance and then to the despair of love; they fall victim to the pattern of Theban strife (which Arcita articulates at length); they are again wounded in conflict at Athens; Arcita dies; Palemone grieves; and then the poem ends in a marriage, the first reprieve from suffering. No prior Theban narrative or commentary on the *Thebaid* depicts either Eteocles or Polynices as passive victims. Eteocles and Polynices embody the destructive pattern of Theban history; their persons and their history are the same. Boccaccio, however, separates his Thebans from their Thebanness by making Palemone and Arcita victims, not simply perpetrators, of their own history, and by doing so he elicits sympathy for his Theban heroes. Throughout the poem, they come to watch their own history encroach upon their lives and they struggle to separate themselves from their past.

The experience of love enables Arcita and Palemone to achieve this separation and to avoid the fate that destroyed their ancestors. On his deathbed, Arcita describes the transformative effect love has had on him in terms loaded with Christian resonance:

*'El [amor] m'insegnò a divenire umile,  
esso mi fè ancor senza paura,  
esso mi fè grazioso e gentile,  
esso la fede mia fè santa e pura,  
esso mostrò a me che mai a vile  
io non avessi nulla creatura,  
esso mi fè cortese e ubidente,  
esso mi fè valoroso e servente.'* (10.23)<sup>33</sup>

[‘Love taught me to become humble; it made me fearless, it made me gracious and gentle, it made my faith holy and pure. It showed me that I should never hold any creature in contempt, it made me courteous and obedient, it made me valiant and steadfast.’]

He speaks of humility, graciousness, pure faith, compassion towards Creation and obedience, all fundamental precepts of Christian doctrine. More importantly, he mentions these virtues apart from Emilia herself; his love has expanded beyond the

love object. Loving Emilia has prompted a general sense of compassion and a desire for reconciliation over conflict, and Palemone becomes the beneficiary of this change of heart. Hence Arcita's extended argument for a peaceful resolution of their conflict in the grove scene (5.45ff.), and hence his apology for engaging in combat with Palemone (10.98). David Anderson notes that Palemone and Arcita are the first Thebans to gain any insight into their own participation in the destructive cycle of Theban history and to transcend it.<sup>34</sup> I would add that this becomes possible precisely through access to something analogous to Christian experience via its manifestation in medieval romance. While Boccaccio's reform of the Theban character stakes out a new and productive direction for this cursed race, Chaucer seems to have calculated this transformation as a great loss to literature, for he attempts to cut this loss in his own Theban works, beginning with the *Anelida and Arcite*.

### THE ANELIDA AND THE RETURN TO THEBES

Chaucer's first move in recuperating Theban historical and racial identity involved restoring the city of Thebes itself. Boccaccio had gone to great lengths to distance his Theban heroes from Thebes. First, he removed them to Athens, away from the corrupting seat of Theban crime. Second, he destroyed the very fabric of the city itself as a symbol of that crime. In Chaucer's first Theban poem, however, we are back in Thebes. More importantly, the Theban setting he creates in the poem is distinctly corrupt in a way that all medieval audiences would appreciate, for Chaucer recreates not the ancient landscape of the *Thebaid*, but the medieval, and eastern, landscape of the OF *Roman de Thèbes*, an area firmly under the control of infidels.

The most substantial and interesting studies of Chaucer's use of the *Thèbes* concern its relationship to Chaucer's *Troilus*, not to his Theban poems.<sup>35</sup> This has been the case especially since Alain Renoir first argued that the version of the Thebes story Criseyde reads at the beginning of Book II of the *Troilus* is, in fact, the OF *Thèbes*, not Statius' *Thebaid*, thus establishing the most concrete record of Chaucer's familiarity with that poem. The studies examining Chaucer's use of the *Thèbes* in his Theban works have been both fewer in number and more tentative in their claims.<sup>36</sup> This is understandable, given that Chaucer did not compose a full-length adaptation of the *Thèbes* as he did with some of Boccaccio's works. Complicating matters is the question of whether Chaucer knew the OF poem itself or only a Middle French prose redaction, for the latter omits substantial material from the verse *Thèbes* pertaining to its twelfth-century historical context, constituting an altogether different version of the Thebes story. In the discussion that follows, I add my own tentative observations to those of others pertaining to Chaucer's knowledge of the French tradition of Thebes. Chaucer, I feel, did indeed know the OF *Thèbes* (as well as a prose redaction) and modeled the geographic and political setting of his first Theban

poem, the *Anelida*, far more on the *Thèbes* than on any other Theban narrative available to him.

While Chaucer's *Anelida* draws its time frame (Theseus' actions at the end of the Theban war) and one of its main characters, Arcite, from Boccaccio's *Teseida*, it derives its political landscape from the OF *Roman de Thèbes*. Critics have generally accepted that Chaucer replicates the historical setting of the *Thebaid*, incorporating some Boccaccian overlay.<sup>37</sup> However, several important details indicate that Chaucer sought to reproduce the Eastern political landscape of the OF *Thèbes* which, as we saw in Chapter 1, is modeled on the political terrain of the First Crusade. Thebes in the OF poem lies in the East, in the Holy Land, and relies for its defense on various pagan and Muslim peoples including Turks, Persians, Slavs, Syrians and Moors, among others. Additionally, Thebes in the OF poem is not the lone city it is in the *Thebaid*; it presides over an entire region, and participates in a network of alliances between various eastern peoples. Moreover, many of Ethïoclés' councilors within the city come from other parts of this region and preside in the city for the duration of the war. In the *Anelida and Arcite*, Chaucer reproduces this political landscape. We see Creon, for instance, taking control of not only the city of Thebes, but of an entire region:

*And when the olde Creon gan espye  
How that the blood roial was broght a-doun,  
He held the cite by his tyrannye  
And dyde the gentils of that regioun  
To ben his frendes and wonnen in the toun.  
So, what for love of him and what for awe,  
The noble folk were to the toun idrawe. (ll. 64-70, emphasis mine)<sup>38</sup>*

Thebes here lies within a "regioun" of peoples allied to it. The "gentils" do not come from Thebes; they come from the region surrounding the city and are "drawn" (*idrawe*) into the city by Creon, whose autocratic style of leadership resembles that of Ethïoclés in the *Thèbes*. Neither Statius' *Thebaid* nor Boccaccio's *Teseida* depict Thebes as the center of a regional political network; only the *Thèbes* characterizes Thebes in this way.

The setting of the OF *Thèbes* also accounts for Chaucer's choice of heroine. Among these foreign *gentils* living in Thebes is Anelida, queen of *Ermony*, which most critics interpret as "Armenia." This reference to Armenia has puzzled scholars of the poem, since Armenia appears extraneous to the Theban setting of the poem.<sup>39</sup> Armenia does not figure in Statius' *Thebaid*, of course, but it does constitute one of the many eastern territories allied to Thebes in the *Roman de Thèbes*. One of the "*miex de Thèbes*" ("best of Thebes") accompanying queen Jocasta and her daughters into negotiations with Adrastus is the son of the king of Armenia (4114).<sup>40</sup> Elsewhere in the *Thèbes*, king Adrastus summons an Armenian physician to tend to Thideüs' wounds

(1877-8). It is highly probable, therefore, that Chaucer derived the Armenian-Theban connection from the OF *Thèbes*, and the Armenian presence in the OF poem as an eastern territory involved in Theban politics explains why Chaucer would include Anelida, queen of Armenia, in his Theban narrative without any further explanation as to why an Armenian would be in Thebes in the first place.<sup>41</sup> It also bears mentioning that in Chaucer's own day Armenia, and to some extent Thebes, was still embroiled in crusading politics as it underwent various shifts between Islamic, Mongol and Christian rule, all the more reason why Chaucer, in evoking the crusading landscape of the OF *Thèbes*, might choose to include an Armenian in this poem.<sup>42</sup>

Another important clue to Chaucer's use of the *Roman de Thèbes* in constructing the political landscape of *Anelida and Arcite* lies in his designation of the opposing sides of the recent Theban war as one between the peoples "Of Thebes and Grece" (53).<sup>43</sup> The dichotomy of Greeks vs. Thebans does not belong to the *Thebaid*: Statius does not, and would not, distinguish Thebes from the rest of Greece. Throughout the *Thebaid*, the conflict involves the followers of Eteocles and those of Polynices. In his *Teseida*, Boccaccio refers to the great onslaught of the "Lernean" (by which he means "Greek") people against the Thebans (2.10) (which he very likely derived from the *Thèbes*), but he does not situate Thebes in an eastern political landscape. In the *Thèbes*, however, the poet re-designates the opposing sides along regional and political lines, and establishes a dichotomy of Greeks versus Thebans (very much in imitation of the later conflict between the Greeks and the Trojans).<sup>44</sup> The "Greeks," we have seen, include men skilled in crusading, while the "Thebans" include people from an array of eastern peoples. Thus Chaucer's first step in restoring Theban identity involves restoring Thebes itself, and, more importantly, a version of Thebes that locates the sources of corruption as much in the geographical and political setting as in the Theban people.

Chaucer's next move in recuperating Theban history and identity from Boccaccio's reforms involves borrowing and re-corrupting Boccaccio's hero, Arcita. In contrast to Boccaccio's gentle and visionary hero, Chaucer's "Theban knight" (210), Arcite, seems decidedly dishonorable.<sup>45</sup> Chaucer clearly draws the name "Arcite" from Boccaccio's *Teseida*, but Arcite undergoes a dramatic character transformation in the translation process. In Boccaccio, Arcita, a Theban rescued by Theseus from the battlefield outside Thebes, receives the poet's full sympathy, despite his criminal ancestral stock. Upon becoming aware of the destructive pattern of Theban history, Arcita promises to break the Theban curse once and for all by attempting to pursue a peaceful alternative to the combat with Palemone. This awareness arises out of his experience in loving Emilia: love of Emilia extends to love of Palemone, and enables him to transcend the fratricidal impulses that repeatedly drove his ancestors to ruin. As a figure of redemption, Boccaccio's Arcita represents a distinct break from both Statius and the OF *Thèbes*; in the former, the Thebans remain doomed by their heredity,

while in the latter, they remain politically cursed because of their dubious connections with infidels.

Chaucer, while borrowing the figure of Arcita from Boccaccio, circumvents Boccaccio's attempts to redeem Theban history (and Arcite in particular), and returns to a pre-Boccaccian portrait of the Thebans as a cursed race. Thus, Arcite is repeatedly referred to as "fals," and he deliberately pursues a course of "traitorie" and "trecherie," that of a "thef" (156, 158, 161). We never see Arcite in the poem; we only hear of him in the context of the complaint of Anelida (very much in keeping with the tradition of the *Heroides*). On the other hand, the narrator, quite independently of Anelida, incriminates Arcite for his disloyalty, for well before Anelida launches into her lament, the narrator himself characterizes Arcite as "fals" (141, 149, 168). Above all, Chaucer returns Boccaccio's hero to his city of origin, to Thebes, which still stands and thrives. Thus we see Arcite (or hear of him) in his Theban milieu, which by all medieval accounts is corrupt. In his *Teseida*, Boccaccio moves Arcita out of Thebes permanently, perhaps as part of his plan to sever his hero from a blighted ancestry. However, Chaucer puts Arcite back in Thebes and allows us to see him as a Theban citizen, an identity that cannot benefit him

Discussions about the Theban scene in the *Anelida* have become inextricably bound up with the question of the poem's state of completion. Broadly speaking, explanations of the nature of the poem fall into two categories: those which claim that the poem is complete, and those which claim that it is incomplete. Generally, critics who argue for the poem's completeness focus on the lament portion of the work, which concludes one stanza before the end of the poem. They argue that the final stanza of the poem, which picks up the narrative portion of the poem, represents a scribal addition, and not Chaucer's, since only four of the thirteen manuscript witnesses to the text include this final stanza (also known as the "continuation stanza").<sup>46</sup> They argue further that Chaucer designed the poem, first and foremost, as a complaint framed by a short tale, similar to the *Complaint of Mars* and *The Complaint Unto Pity*.

On the other hand, those who argue for the poem's incompleteness tend to focus on the frame narrative of Theban history, which appears to pick up again in the final stanza of the poem, ending abruptly with "as ye shal after here" (357).<sup>47</sup> Some argue that Chaucer abandoned the project for any number of reasons: perhaps it was too difficult to integrate the story of Anelida with that of Arcita and Palaemon, or perhaps it became too difficult to meet the competing generic demands of Italianate epic and French Complaint. Lee Patterson, in an attempt to bridge these two schools of thought on the nature of the *Anelida*, argues that Chaucer deliberately left the poem unfinished. Both the Complaint and the frame narrative, he argues, remain "ostentatiously and deliberately incomplete." Chaucer, he insists, sought to represent, in both portions of the poem, "a consciousness *in medias res*," a view of Theban history, in all

its ugliness, that resists closure. Patterson reclassifies the poem as a “memorial poem” that “articulates a form of consciousness that remembers everything yet understands nothing.”<sup>48</sup> The crimes of Theban history continue to haunt the medieval understanding of ancient history, as the crimes of Arcite haunt Anelida. Thus, for Patterson, the poem is complete in its very incompleteness.

With respect to its Theban content, however, all of these debates have emphasized what is *not* there, what Chaucer left out either by intent or by default. However, internal evidence in the poem as it stands provides important information about Chaucer’s plans for handling Theban history. First, whether or not Chaucer intended a continuation of the *Anelida*, details in the poem suggest that he sought to bring together the entire Theban tradition, from Statius to Boccaccio and including the OF *Thèbes*. He appears to model the political landscape of the poem on the eastern landscape of the OF *Roman de Thèbes*, making Thebes an eastern city within a larger region governed by a loose federation of eastern peoples, and he designates the opposing sides of the Theban war as Greeks vs. Thebans, a dichotomy that originates with the *Thèbes*. He makes the heroine of the poem one of these eastern people, a queen of Armenia, a region represented in the *Thèbes* but not in the *Thebaid* or the *Teseida*. Second, Chaucer seems interested in Thebans as a criminal race not as a reformed people (as Boccaccio proposes); while Chaucer derives his hero (or anti-hero), Arcite, from Boccaccio, he reverses Boccaccio’s revisionary measures on his Theban hero, restoring Arcite’s Theban identity with all its negative associations. These associations, moreover, are typical of the OF *Thèbes* (not of the *Thebaid*), whose poet judges the Theban people far more harshly than Statius ever does. Statius’ tragic race becomes, in the OF poem, a race of deceitful and disloyal worshippers of false gods, the likely ancestors of Chaucer’s “*fals Arcite*.” In this first Theban work, therefore, Chaucer appears to use one medieval source, the *Thèbes*, as part of a mounting effort to challenge another, the *Teseida*. Finally, part of Chaucer’s exploration of Theban criminality entails revisiting Thebes as the scene of the crime: Chaucer takes us back into the city of Thebes, a place Boccaccio keeps at a safe distance. Thus, complete or incomplete, the *Anelida* tells us much about Chaucer’s misgivings about Boccaccio’s handling of the Theban legend. His misgivings later came to include, though less directly, aspects of the OF *Roman de Thèbes* as well, as we see in the *Knight’s Tale*.

### THE KNIGHT’S TALE, THE TESEIDA, AND THE THEBAN CHARACTER

Chaucer redoubled his efforts to challenge Boccaccio in his second Theban poem, the *Knight’s Tale*. This meant entering into the *Teseida* much more fully, borrowing more characters, more of the setting, and the central plot device of the love triangle. It also appears to have meant abandoning the material of the OF *Thèbes*, for there is virtually

no hint of the French poem in the *Knights Tale*. While he continues to maintain the city of Thebes as a functioning city and to explore the criminality of the Theban character, he relies more on Statius for this material than on the French tradition. He, nevertheless, remains in continuous dialogue with Boccaccio's *Teseida*.

A large part of the misunderstanding surrounding Chaucer's "use" of the *Teseida* derives from a misunderstanding of precisely *what* Chaucer dropped from the *Teseida*. Representative critics like Helen Cooper tend to generalize the content of the excised material as simply "the heroic sections of legendary history and military campaigns."<sup>49</sup> However, if we look more carefully at the edited material, we find that Chaucer removed the Trojan component of the *Teseida*. He cuts Theseus' opening campaign against the Amazons, which Boccaccio modeled on Guido delle Colonne's account of the opening offensive at Troy.<sup>50</sup> He also cuts the catalog of warriors from Book Six of the *Teseida*, and, in doing so, eliminates all Trojan personnel from the story.<sup>51</sup> Nor do Trojan figures appear in the funeral games, which Chaucer reduces to a mere phrase (ll.2959-60). He cuts Emilia's lament of Book Eight of the *Teseida*, during the battle scene, thus eliminating the *teichoscopia* that links her experience with Helen's as a victim of her own beauty. Gone, too, are all references to Theseus' early relationship with Helen (which Boccaccio mentions eight times in the *Teseida*); in fact, Chaucer never refers to Helen at all in the *Knights Tale*. Similarly, Chaucer cuts Arcita's tour through the ruined city of Thebes, a scene that Boccaccio uses to foreshadow the coming destruction of Troy. Chaucer's Arcite stops in his exile at Thebes (still a functioning city), never venturing, as Boccaccio's hero does, to the courts of Menelaus and Peleus, the seedbeds of the Trojan War. Finally, Chaucer removes Boccaccio's closing allusion to the *nostoi* at the end of the story of Troy whereby the warriors depart for home by sea.

We cannot know for certain whether Chaucer would have recognized all the sources for the passages of the *Teseida* that he cuts, although we do know that he read these authors. He borrowed from Guido delle Colonne for the *Legend of Good Women*, where he mentions him by name twice (ll.1396 and 1464). Chaucer also mentions Guido as an *auctoritas* for Trojan history in the *House of Fame* (l.1469), and he draws upon Guido's *Historia* for his *Troilus and Criseyde*.<sup>52</sup> Likewise, Chaucer had at least some familiarity with Lucan's *Pharsalia*, the source of the scene for Arcita's wandering in the *Teseida*. He mentions him by name several times in his works, and refers to Lucan's account of Julius Caesar in the *Monks Tale* (l.2718), although his account differs from Lucan's.<sup>53</sup> Of course his familiarity with these texts does not presuppose that he would have recognized Boccaccio's adaptation of key scenes from them. What we can say for certain, however, is that none of the copious Trojan material in the *Teseida* made its way into the *Knights Tale*, including the very obvious references to Trojan personnel and to Helen. As a result, unlike Boccaccio's *Teseida*, nothing about the *Knights Tale* appears to anticipate the Trojan conflict, although chronologically, for

both poems, the Trojan War is immanent. In this respect, Chaucer is unique among medieval adaptors of the Theban legend, since both previous medieval Theban narratives attempt to join Theban and Trojan history to some degree. Thus, Chaucer's first step in challenging Boccaccio's handling of Theban themes involves shaving away all of the Trojan material from Boccaccio's sequel to the story of the Theban war. Having isolated the Theban component of the *Teseida*, Chaucer begins undoing Boccaccio's intricate transformation of Theban history.

In the *Knights Tale*, Chaucer restages Boccaccio's experiment in nature versus nurture with regard to the Theban character, but, unlike Boccaccio, he deems nature (not nurture) to be the dominant and persistent shaper of Theban behavior. Thus, the very same plot line that brings about change and reconciliation in Boccaccio's poem brings about continued violence and contention in Chaucer's poem. Using the same non-Theban setting that served as a reform camp for Boccaccio's heroes, Chaucer moves the Theban propensity for destructive and competitive relationships, unchanged, into a new arena. He wished to explore the authentic Theban experience in the private lives of its latest generation (as invented by Boccaccio), and to explore how Theban criminality might manifest itself once removed from the historical seat of Theban crime, the city of Thebes. In order to capture the authentic Theban (and ancient) experience, however, he had to remove Boccaccio's chief mode of intervention, Christianity, for once Boccaccio had "redeemed" the Theban cousins with experience akin to Christian insight, they ceased to be Thebans. Thus Chaucer restores a Theban identity to Palaemon and Arcite by restoring their pagan identity.<sup>54</sup>

Of course, given the powerful interconnectedness between the genre of chivalric romance and medieval Christianity, it may seem difficult to determine whether the insights that Boccaccio had allowed his heroes, and which Chaucer denies his heroes, are specifically Christian or whether they simply derive from the romance treatment of love as a transforming and refining power. Did Chaucer, in other words, perceive the experience of Boccaccio's heroes as the Christian experience first and foremost? I argue that Chaucer did, in fact, remove specifically the Christian intervention into Theban history from the *Teseida*, and perhaps the best evidence for this is the fact that in the *Troilus* Chaucer replicates the transformative effects of love on a pagan hero that we find in the *Teseida*, including all of the language of religious devotion. The fact that he does not replicate this transformation in the *Knights Tale* indicates that he very deliberately sought to eliminate the Christian dimension of this experience even while telling the story of a love triangle.

To further illustrate Chaucer's elimination of the Christian dimension of Boccaccio's *Teseida*, I turn to a scene in the *Knights Tale* that reflects not so much on the figures of Palaemon and Arcite but rather on Theseus. This is an especially useful illustration because it concerns a figure in the poem who is *not* undergoing any "transformation" because of earthly love and, therefore, the Christian overtones of his

experience are more readily disentangled from the discourse of *cupiditas*. In the *Teseida*, Teseo, after discovering the two young Thebans in the grove, forgives their open violation of his terms concerning imprisonment and release, and in doing so he reflects on his own similar experience as a young man in love:

*‘... però ch’io già innamorato fui  
e per amor sovente folleggiai,  
m’è caro molto il perdonare altrui,  
perch’io perdon piu fiate acquistai,  
non per mio operar, ma per colui  
pietà a cui la figlia già furtai;  
però sicuri di perdono state:  
vincerà il fallo la mia gran pietate.’* (*Teseida*, 5.92)

[‘... since I once fell in love and committed follies for love, it is very pleasing to me to pardon others. For I have received pardon many times, not on account of my deeds, but through the mercy of him (Tyndareus) whose daughter (Helen) I once stole. And so you can be certain of my pardon. My great compassion will triumph over your wrongdoing.’]

Teseo’s explanation hinges on the concept of forgiveness, both receiving and granting it, another cornerstone of Christian doctrine. When Chaucer appropriates this scene for the *Knights’ Tale*, he alters the emphasis from the matter of forgiveness to that of desire:

*‘A man moot ben a fool, or yong or oold —  
I woot it by myself ful yore agon,  
For in my tyme a servant [of love] was I oon.  
And therefore, syn I knowe of loves peyne  
And woot hou soore it kan a man distreyne,  
As he that hath ben caught ofte in his laas,  
I yow foryeve al hoolly this trespaas ...’* (*Knights’ Tale*, ll.1812-1818)

Theseus pardons Palaemon and Arcite based not upon the experience of forgiveness but rather on empathy with the experience of desire that drove him to do foolish things. Thus, Chaucer retains the scene and its central gesture of pardon, but he sustains that gesture with a decidedly less Christian motive. Had he not been concerned with the Christian dimension of Boccaccio’s treatment of Theban themes, he might just as well have imported this gesture of pardon, unchanged, from his Italian source. It must also be said that Chaucer, in fact, includes a great deal of romance language in the tale, much of which does not derive from the *Teseida*, but, as we shall see, he does not allow this romance presence to bring about a spiritual change in his

heroes.<sup>55</sup> A close examination of two other parallel scenes in both texts, the prison cell scene and the grove scene, reveal how Chaucer further undermines Boccaccio's Theban experiment.

In Book Three of the *Teseida*, Boccaccio employs a prison cell, a space of suffering and deprivation, as the first stage for reforming the Theban character. Here, Palemone and Arcita, newly entranced by Emilia, begin redirecting their attention away from earthy and timely things towards transcendent and timeless things, towards love, and this starts the process of reconciliation between the Theban cousins in the poem. The capacity of love to transcend historical contingency offers an escape from historical reality, and these competing realities of the internal vision of love and the external circumstances of history come to occupy separate spheres in the poem. As Palemone and Arcita observe Emilia, the weight and distress of their literal, historical circumstances quickly evaporate:

*Era a costor della memoria uscita  
l'antica Tebe e 'l loro alto legnaggio,  
e similimente se n'era partita  
la 'nfelicità loro, e il dammaggio  
ch'avevan ricevuto, e la lor vita  
ch'era cattiva, e 'l lor grande eretaggio;  
e dove queste cose esser soleano  
Emilia solamente vi teneano. (3.36)*

[Ancient Thebes and their own lineage had faded from their memory. Their unhappiness and the injury they had received were also gone; that their life was unpleasant, and that they possessed great heritage had faded. Where these things used to be, they held Emilia only.]

So comprehensive is their transformation that Boccaccio does a search-and-replace of all of their literal, material distresses with figurative ones. For instance, Palemone exclaims “*E dicoti che già sua prigionia/m'è grave più che quella di Teseo*” (3.23) [“I tell you (love's) captivity already weighs on me more heavily than that of Theseus”], and he insists “*Io mi sento di lei preso e legato, .../mi veggo qui imprigionatole ispogliato d'ogni mia possanza*” (3.24) [“I see myself seized and bound by her...I see myself imprisoned here and stripped of all my strength”], when, in fact, he has been literally seized, imprisoned and stripped of all strength as a result of recent political events. Similarly, Boccaccio tells us that “*era la piaga fresca che gli accora*” (3.27) [“the wound that pierced them was still fresh”], referring here to the wound of love. But Palemone and Arcita are, in fact, still recovering from their literal wounds which left them near death in the recent war. Boccaccio also tells us that “*essi più dal valoroso iddio/Cupido si stringean nelle catene*” (3.32) [“they were held the more tightly in the chains of the

strong god Cupid”] than those of Theseus. Figurative chains of love have replaced the literal chains of their prison cell. Finally, in an attempt to mask their new source of distress, “*ma di ciò molto/davan la colpa a l'allegrezza e 'l gioco/ch'aver soleano, e ora eran prigionii; così coprendo le vere cagioni*” (3.34) [“they blamed their condition on the fact that they were accustomed to joyous activity and games, whereas now they were prisoners. *Thus they concealed their real reasons*”] (my emphasis). Their literal, material distresses are no longer the “real” problem. In fact, Palemone and Arcita no longer wish to alter their literal circumstances. Boccaccio tells us, “*Né era lor troppo sommo disirel che Teseo gli traesse di prigione*” (3.37) [“it was not at all their greatest desire that Theseus should release them from prison”] for this would mean never seeing Emilia again. Thus, in this scene, we see how Boccaccio uses the transcendent, transformative power of love to negate literal, historical circumstances, and up until this point the historical circumstances governing Theban life revolve around familial conflict.

In the *Knights Tale*, Chaucer employs the same space of Theseus’ prison cell to reinforce the Theban propensity for violence, and he does this largely by denying them the insights that Boccaccio allows his heroes. Palaemon and Arcite remain fixated on the earthly, temporal realm, and because they cannot see beyond their immediate circumstances, they cannot transcend their historical reality. Chaucer, unlike Boccaccio, never separates love from earthly circumstance, and never allows material circumstances to fall away in the face of desire for Emelye. For example, as Palaemon first spies Emelye in the garden, Arcite mistakenly attributes Palaemon’s sighs to their situation as prisoners, and insists, “For Goddes love, taak al in pacience/Oure prisoun, for it may noon oother be” (ll.1084-5). When Palaemon answers Arcite that “This prison caused me nat for to crye” (l.1095), he appears to distinguish his new, emotional distress from his literal distress as a prisoner, but as he falls on his knees in prayer (mistaking Emelye for Venus), his words concern not Emelye (love), but rather his own material circumstances:

*Venus, if it be thy wil  
Yow in this gardyn thus to transfigure  
Before me, sorweful, wrecched creature,  
Out of this prisoun help that we may scapen.*’ (ll. 1104-7)

In his highly influential study of the prison imagery in the *Knights Tale*, V. A. Kolve has argued compellingly that Chaucer uses the prison cell in metaphorical terms, first as a secular metaphor for love and then as a metaphysical image of the world.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, Palaemon’s reference to “Venus” and to the notion of transfiguration seem to indicate a shift in perspective towards a transcendent reality. However, in this passage, his field of vision remains fixed on this world, on his own misery, and the fact that he asks “Venus” to release him from prison indicates that he has undergone no internal change in consciousness that would enable him to release himself from his literal prison, as

Boccaccio's heroes do. While Kolve is correct when he suggests that Chaucer wants us, the readers, to think of the prison metaphorically, Palaemon and Arcite do not themselves think metaphorically. Chaucer's prison is and remains a literal prison.

Arcite, too, never loses sight of their historical circumstances when he spies Emelye. The ensuing jealous argument between him and Palaemon concerns not Emelye, but rather their historical relationship to one another as "cosyn" and "brother" (l.1131).<sup>57</sup> In highly legalistic terms, Palaemon reminds Arcite of an earlier "ooth" (l.1139). They have sworn that "Til that the deeth departe shal us tweyne,/Neither of us in love to hyndre oother,/Ne in noon oother cas, my levee brother,/But that thou sholdest trewely forthren me/In every cas, as I shal forthren thee" (ll.1134-38). Arcite, in his turn, first appears to assert the Boccaccian model of transcendent, unifying love when he says "Love is a gretter lawe, by my pan,/Than may be yeve to any erthely man" (ll.1165-6), but this "gretter lawe" for Arcite translates into nothing more than greater license for lawlessness in pursuing Emelye. As he exclaims to Palaemon, "at the kynges court, my brother,/Ech man for hymself" (ll.1181-2). The means for advancement apply equally in love as in other temporal goals. Love has altered nothing in their perception of their present circumstances. Thus, far from offering the love experience as an antidote (a corrective) to material circumstance, Chaucer makes the love experience of Palaemon and Arcite simply an extension of their current historical circumstances. Love changes nothing, and the prison cell becomes emblematic of their psychological (as well as literal) entrapment.

Hence the very different outcomes of the scene in the parallel prison scenes in the *Teseida* and the *Knight's Tale*: where Boccaccio uses the prison cell to lay the groundwork for reconciliation between the Theban cousins, Chaucer uses it to foster further conflict in the Theban style. In Boccaccio, Arcita and Palemone do not become rivals immediately upon seeing Emilia; there is no quarrel between them in the prison cell. Instead, they each suffer the pains of love silently and simultaneously. For Boccaccio, the prison cell becomes the locus of mutual compassion and empathy between the two Thebans, and again religious language supplies the vocabulary: while in prison, they undergo "*martiri*" ["martyrdoms," "*pianti*" ["lamentations"], "*aspri tormenti*" ["harsh torments"], and "*noie angosciose*" ["painful anguish"], not at the hands of one another, but "*in doppio*" ["twofold"] at the hands of love (3.45). For love, they endure "*vigilie*" ["vigils"] and "*poco cibo*" ["scant food"] (or fasting) together (3,34), and marvel at Emilia jointly, not competitively. Here in the prison, we see the first signs of the mutual affection that will eventually break the Theban curse of fraternal strife, for despite the coming rivalry over Emilia, Boccaccio has established a history of compassion between Palemone and Arcite that resurfaces throughout the remainder of the narrative. Later in the narrative, once conflict has been established, Boccaccio hearkens back to the mutual compassion exhibited in this early prison scene as a precedent for their reconciliation.

Chaucer, on the other hand, sets a precedent of conflict in the prison scene. The prison cell becomes the seedbed of contention, rather than reconciliation, between Palaemon and Arcite. Rather than being the locus for the *transformation* of the Theban character, the prison cell in the *Knight's Tale* becomes a Petri dish for the recultivation of the familiar violent impulses in Theban lineage, and Emilia becomes merely the latest source of fraternal strife. Thus the love experience that unifies the two Thebans in the parallel scene in the *Teseida*, here divides them, and their assessment of their material circumstances, along with their current manner of relating to one another, remain unchanged in this scene because no new revelation takes place. This makes all the difference for the rest of the narrative, for in the *Knight's Tale*, as in the *Teseida*, Palaemon and Arcite's interaction in the privacy of their prison cell soon takes on historical implications.

Chaucer, like Boccaccio, employs a grove scene to reveal the historical consequences of what transpired in the prison cell. Once again, Boccaccio uses a new space, the grove, as a new stage in Theban reform while Chaucer uses the same space to reinforce the Theban propensity for conflict. Boccaccio uses the grove twice in the *Teseida* (once in Book 4 and again in Book 5), but both scenes share the common purpose of applying Arcita's private transformation through love to his public/historical situation as a Theban.

Both grove scenes in the *Teseida* include a speech in which Arcita reveals ambivalence about his Theban heritage, and we see him struggle between, on the one hand, embracing his royal lineage, and, on the other, rejecting its legacy. In the first grove scene, Arcita speaks a monologue, which is overheard by Panfil, one of Palemone's servants. In the second grove scene, we have a dialogue between Arcita and Palemone. In his monologue, Boccaccio's hero acknowledges the wrongdoings of his race and distinguishes his own conduct from the criminal activities of his ancestors when he says "*per l'altrui peccato, non per mio, la gioia e 'l regno e 'l sangue mio perio*" (4.81) ["because of another's sin, not mine, the joy, and the kingdom, and the lineage perished"]. He expresses his ambivalence concerning his lineage more strongly later, in the dialogue with Palemone, where he articulates his new awareness of Theban criminality and tries to enlighten Palemone on that subject. In this second speech, he connects their current conflict with all Theban conflict.

*'Omè, che m'era assai maravigliosa  
cosa a pensar che lunon ci lasciasse  
nostra vita menare in tanta posa,  
e come i nostri noi non stimolasse,  
de' quali alcun giammai a gloriosa  
morte non venne, che si laudasse;  
ond'io mi posso assai ramaricare,  
vedendo noi a simil fin recare.'* (5.56)

[‘Alas, how wonderful it was to think that Juno would allow us to lead our lives in such tranquility and that she would not incite us as she did our ancestors, not one of whom ever went to a glorious death for which he might be praised. I can feel much regret for this, as I see that we are arriving at the same end.’]

He goes on to catalog Theban crimes and concludes “*or resta sopra noi, che ultimi siamo del teban sangue, insieme n’uccidiamo*” (5.59) [“Now it remains for us, the last of the Theban blood, to kill each other”]. And while he agrees to fight Palemone, he insists “*io son del combatter dolente*” and “*volentier vorreil con teco pace*” (5.62 and 63) [“I am grieved by this fighting” and “would willingly make peace with you”], sentiments that he links specifically with “*così amando*” (5.63) [“loving the way I do”].

David Anderson has noted that Arcita’s awareness of the Theban curse that threatens him and Palemone, and his ambivalence about his Theban lineage, distinguishes him from all of his Theban ancestors depicted in Statius. They, by contrast, remain blind victims of Fortune, unable to ascertain or reverse the forces that destroy them, and therein lies the tragedy of Theban history.<sup>58</sup> Arcita’s historical awareness, however, generated by his experience in loving Emilia, promises to break that curse. These grove scenes, especially the second, are pivotal for the plot of the *Teseida* as the first articulations of this insight into the Theban historical pattern, for, above all, we see Boccaccio’s hero acknowledging his Theban lineage by way of *separating* and *liberating* himself from it. This, in turn, foreshadows the conciliatory outcome of this conflict compared to the violent outcomes of previous Theban conflicts.

Chaucer, however, uses the grove scene to articulate the persistence of, rather than a departure from, Theban criminality. He compresses Boccaccio’s two grove scenes into one, retaining the occurrence of a monologue (overheard this time by Palaemon himself) followed by a dialogue, but he radically alters the effect of Arcite’s two speeches, stripping them of their power to change the course of Theban history. The alteration pivots on Arcite’s very different attitude towards his own Theban lineage. Chaucer’s Arcite, like Boccaccio’s hero, claims his royal birth in the monologue, and laments his decline in fortune from lord to servant.<sup>59</sup> But he expresses no ambivalence about that lineage. Quite the contrary, he embraces his “*stok roial*” (l.1551), and laments not simply his own humiliation but that of his entire race:

*Allas, ybrought is to confusioun  
The blood roial of Cadme and Amphioun —  
Of Cadmus, which that was the firste man  
That Thebes bulte, or first the toun bigan,  
Of his lynage am I and his ofspryng  
By verray ligne, as of the stok roial,  
And now I am so caytyf and so thral,*

*That he that is my mortal enemy,  
I serve hym as his squier pourely.* (ll. 1545-54)

Chaucer's Arcite fails to recognize, as Boccaccio's hero does, that his Theban lineage lies at the root of his current predicament. Rather than implicating his Theban ancestors for their own demise, he sees them as noble victims of Mars and Juno, the legendary divine foes of Thebes (l.1559). Moreover, whereas Boccaccio's hero lists Theban crimes in his catalog of Theban ancestry, Chaucer's Arcite leaves out all mention of Theban criminality. In short, in this monologue Chaucer's Arcite embraces the very thing that threatens to destroy him and Palaemon: his Theban ancestry.

For this reason, the ensuing dialogue between Arcite and Palaemon (who has been eavesdropping the entire time) loses the redemptive quality of its corresponding speech in the *Teseida*. In the Italian source, Arcita responds to Palemone's hostility with a cogent argument for reconciliation: Palemone's killing him will accomplish nothing since Palemone will only have to return to prison, and thus lose Emilia; Theseus would never give Emilia to either of them, lowly as they are now; and, besides, why should they kill one another over something beyond their reach? He urges Palemone to follow a wiser course than their ancestors who "*ver lor furon tanto nocenti, / che senza riguardar fraterno amore / fra lor succisero*" (5.57) ["harbored such mutual hatred that they killed one another without regard for brotherly love"]. Although they resolve to fight anyway, Arcita does so only reluctantly.

Whereas Arcita's speech in the *Teseida* marks a departure from the Theban pattern of fratricide, Arcite's corresponding speech in the *Knight's Tale* proliferates and reinforces that destructive pattern. Arcite responds to Palaemon's hostility with more of the same. Lacking any insight into Theban history, Arcite and Palaemon become its latest recapitulators, only in their case love has replaced territory as the source of strife. Chaucer aligns political rivalry with romantic rivalry towards the end of the grove scene:

*O Cupide, out of alle charitee!  
O regne, that wolt no felawe have with thee!  
Ful sooth is seyed that love ne lordshipe  
Wol noght, his thankes, have no felaweshipe.* (ll.1623-6) (emphasis mine)<sup>60</sup>

Like Eteocles and Polynices, who contend for "lordship" of Thebes, Arcite and Palaemon contend for "love" of Emelye. Love, far from being an antidote to Theban strife as it is in the *Teseida*, simply fuels it here, as Arcite notes:

*'Love hath his fryr dart so brennyngly  
Ystiked thurgh my trewe, careful berte  
That shapen was my deeth erst than my sherte'* (ll.1564-6)

Arcite's death from love was destined for him before birth, just like the fates of all his Theban ancestors. Rather than offering an escape from fate, love becomes simply another manifestation of it. Love has changed nothing for Chaucer's Theban heroes, which leads Robert Haller to define the *Knights Tale* as "Chaucer's translation of the traditional rivalry over a throne to a rivalry over love."<sup>61</sup> The source of the rivalry matters little for Chaucer.

Upon close analysis of these two scenes (the prison cell scene and the grove scene) that Chaucer borrowed from Boccaccio, it becomes clear that Chaucer approaches Boccaccio's *Teseida* as more than simply a convenient repository for raw narrative material, as Pratt and Davenport would have us believe, and more than just a lens for viewing Statius' *Thebaid*, as Anderson suggests. I argue that Chaucer read the *Teseida* and paused to consider the implications of what Boccaccio had done to Theban history by reforming the Theban character. Boccaccio, he saw, wished to imagine a transformation of the cycle of Theban internecine violence rather than to study that violence as a historical and psychological phenomenon, as Chaucer himself did. Moreover, in curing the Theban propensity for violence, Boccaccio had effectively ended Theban history as a cycle of destruction by eradicating its underlying predisposition towards conflict. His sequel to Statius' *Thebaid* had eliminated the possibility for any further adaptations of Theban material by eliminating Thebanness as an impetus for generating narrative. If Chaucer wished to compose his own treatment of Theban themes, as clearly he did, he had to reverse Boccaccio's alteration of the Theban mind. Hence he uses Boccaccio's own narrative apparatus for reform in order to deny even the possibility of reform for the Theban race.

Thus Chaucer depicts Palaemon and Arcite as perpetrators, not victims, of Theban history. The *Knights Tale* elucidates the continuation of that history, not the transformation of it, and Chaucer accomplishes this largely by removing the victim status of its two heroes. To be sure, we see them dug out of a heap of bodies at the beginning of the tale, but from that point on they do little to evoke sympathy: in their prison cell, they exhibit the attitude of mercenaries, not compatriots; in their private laments, they express jealousy at what the other is (or might be) doing; they pray to repulsive gods; they help one another "As frendly as he were his owene brother" (l.1652) only as they prepare to kill one another in the grove; we see no evidence of negotiation, as we do in Boccaccio, even during their one-year residence together in Thebes. Therein lies the heart of Chaucer's response to Boccaccio's *Teseida*: for Chaucer, nature proves superior to nurture as a shaper of the Theban character and of Theban history. As Thebans, Palaemon and Arcite are destined to repeat the crimes of their ancestors regardless of a new environment and regardless of exposure to new influences.

Many critics have argued that Chaucer *does* introduce a spirit of reconciliation between his Theban heroes, and they cite Arcite's deathbed speech as evidence.<sup>62</sup> They

argue that Arcite does, in fact, learn modesty and compassion through loving Emelye and that when he recommends Palaemon as his worthy replacement as her spouse, he expresses genuine consilience. Again, however, if we read Arcite's funeral speech against its Italian source what becomes most striking is the lack of change in heart. In the *Teseida*, Arcita's final words in which he reflects on love's influence over him indicate that he has long since moved beyond his early fixation on Emilia as love object. In the passage from Book 10 quoted earlier in the chapter (10.23ff.), he speaks of how love taught him humility, compassion, purity of faith and obedience. He does not refer to his feelings for Emilia so much as his new general disposition towards Creation. The same speech in the *Knigh's Tale*, however, reveals that Arcite's thinking has remained centered on Emelye alone:

*'Naught may the woful spirit in myn herte  
 Declare o point of alle my sorwes smerte  
 To yow, my lady, that I love moost,  
 But I biquethe the servyce of my goost  
 To yow aboven every creature,  
 Syn that my lyf may no lenger dure.  
 Allas, the wo! Allas, the peynes stronge,  
 That I for yow have suffred, and so longe!  
 Allas, the deeth! Allas, myn Emelye!  
 Allas, departyng of oure compaignye!  
 Allas, myn hertes queene! Allas, my wyf,  
 Myn hertes lady, endere of my lyf!  
 What is this world? What asketh men to have?  
 Now with his love, now in his colde grave  
 Allone, withouten any compaignye.  
 Fare wel, my sweete foo, myn Emelye!'* (Ll.2765-80)

He bequeaths his spirit to Emelye, has suffered for Emelye, departs from Emelye, and must now go without Emelye. Chaucer's Arcite remains fixated on Emelye as love object and, more importantly, as the source of conflict. He remains as focused on her at the end of the tale as at the beginning. Undoubtedly, Arcite expresses devotion in this moving speech, but he remains devoted to the very thing that brought conflict (not to mention his own death).

Of course there is the question of Arcite's attitude toward Palaemon in this final hour. Immediately after these words of devotion to Emelye, Arcite recommends Palaemon as his replacement as Emelye's spouse.<sup>63</sup> Again, critics are justified in hearing sounds of reconciliation between the Theban cousins in these words. Arcite expresses respect and admiration for his former enemy. However, upon comparison

with Arcita's funeral speech in the *Teseida*, several details in Arcite's speech diminish its persuasiveness as an expression of genuine growth.

First, unlike in Boccaccio's poem, there is no evolution of sentiment building up to this speech; Boccaccio begins the process of reconciliation between the Theban cousins as early as Book Three in the prison cell, then pursues the process of reconciliation in the grove scenes where Arcita negotiates with Palemone to seek an alternative to armed conflict. Throughout the episodes where the two armies consolidate in books Six and Seven, and through the battle of Book Eight, we know that Arcita participates in this war with great reluctance, because Palemone refused to resolve their differences any other way. In the *Knight's Tale*, by contrast, Arcite only expresses a favorable disposition to Palaemon on his deathbed. It is true that earlier in the grove scene the two cousins assist one another in arming, which might be interpreted as a precedent for reconciliation, but they cooperate with one another in this scene only as they prepare to kill one another. Chaucer includes nothing in his grove scene comparable to Boccaccio's endearing depiction of Palemone happening upon the sleeping Arcita and addressing him as "*bello amico molto da lodare*" (5.36) ["beautiful and praiseworthy friend"].

Second, Palaemon simply has not earned the praise Arcite bestows upon him. Arcite speaks of Palaemon's "trouthe, honour, knyghthede, / Wysdom, humblesse, estaat, and heigh kynrede," (ll.2789-90), but neither Palaemon nor he himself have exhibited such virtues in the course of the poem. Nor has Palaemon earned the title "worthy to ben loved" or "gentil man" (ll.2794 and 2797). For this reason, Arcite's words do not fit organically into the drama of the poem, and seem to owe more to the demands of public occasion than to any change of consciousness that we have witnessed.

Third, Chaucer, unlike Boccaccio, never has Arcite address Palaemon directly in his final hour. In the *Teseida*, Arcita addresses first Theseus, to whom he recommends Palemone (10.17ff.), and then Palemone himself (10.38-47). He does not address Emilia herself, though he reiterates his love for her to Theseus and Palemone. For Boccaccio's two heroes, their final conversation becomes final proof for their reconciliation as Arcita releases the object of their contention to Palemone, while Palemone attempts to return her, saying "*tu l'acquistasti e tu per tua l'avrai*" (10.49) ["you won her and you shall have her for your own"]. Chaucer's Arcite, however, speaks in the presence of Emelye and Palaemon jointly, but the "yow" of the speech is Emelye, never Palaemon. Thus Chaucer omits an important opportunity to reconcile his Theban heroes concretely.

## RESTORING THE CITY OF THEBES

Perhaps the most conspicuous clue to the persistence of Theban strife in the *Knight's Tale* is the continuing presence of the city of Thebes itself in the narrative. Despite

the recent war, which by all previous accounts has destroyed the city, Thebes still stands as a functioning city in the *Knight's Tale*. This constitutes one of Chaucer's most important responses to the Theban tradition in general and to Boccaccio in particular. According to that tradition, the city of Thebes is destroyed in the final outcome of the war. For medieval accounts, in particular, the image of the destroyed city of Thebes became linked symbolically with that of Troy as yet another example of an earthly civilization come to ruin. Both the OF poet and Boccaccio clearly indicate the destruction of Thebes at the end of the Theban war. The buildings are razed and the population either killed or dispersed, so the end of the Theban war means the end of Thebes itself.

It is possible that a copy of the Middle French prose redaction of the *Roman de Thèbes*, which had been available since the thirteenth century, provided Chaucer with a source for the preservation of the city of Thebes after the conclusion of the war. A total of four separate versions of the prose *Thèbes* have been identified, and according to Léopold Constans, all of the versions of the prose *Thèbes*, including the most abbreviated ones, report the rebuilding of the city of Thebes at the end of the Theban war under the new name "*Estives*."<sup>64</sup> We cannot be certain whether Chaucer had used a prose redaction of the *Thèbes* as a basis for preserving Thebes after the war. After all, he does not depict the Theban citizens rebuilding the city, nor does he change the name of Thebes to "*Estives*" or any similar name.

It is clear, however, that in the *Knight's Tale* Thebes continues to function as an inhabited city despite the recent war there. This causes some confusion in the tale, since the state of the city seems to shift throughout the narrative. In Part One of the tale, we see Theseus' siege of Thebes and its effects: "And by assaut he wan the citee after,/And rente adoun bothe wall and sparre and rafter" (ll.989-90). Theseus tears down both the stone walls and the wooden structures within the city. Later, Palaemon speaks of "Thebes with his waste walles wyde" (l.1331), restating the familiar image of the city with its walls destroyed. However, we soon see Arcite returning to Thebes upon his exile from Athens. In Boccaccio, of course, Arcita returns to Thebes, but only to find it reduced to rubble. Here in the *Knight's Tale*, however, Arcite stays "a yeer or two.../At Thebes, in his contree, as I seyde" (ll.1381-3), a fact that the narrator seems to emphasize in these lines. Still in prison in Athens, Palaemon speculates that Arcite "walkest now in Thebes at thy large" (l.1283) and that he may now "Assemblen alle the folk of our kynrede" (l.1286) and make war on Athens, implying that the citizenry have survived. Upon his escape from prison, Palaemon ventures "Thebes-ward, his freendes for to preye/On Theseus to helpe him to werreye" (ll.1483-4), doing precisely what he accused Arcite of plotting. Furthermore, in the grove scene, Arcite laments to Juno "How longe... thurgh thy crueltee/Woltow werreyen Thebes the citee?" (ll.1543-4), and though he appears to mean "the Theban race" (given his catalog of Theban figures), he says "Thebes the citee," implying that

the city remains standing. Additionally, following Theseus' command to reconvene at the end of the year, Palaemon and Arcite both return "To Thebes with his olde walles wyde" (l.1880), referring to the ancient walls that Amphion built with the power of his music, in this case still intact.

Perhaps the most striking example of the persistence of Thebes as both a city and a race comes at the end of the tale, where Theseus orders the marriage of Palaemon and Emelye in order to secure the "obeisaunce" of the Thebans (l.2974) (whom Palaemon now rules). By this new arrangement, Thebes now becomes a vassal state of Athens. Thus Chaucer depicts Thebes as a functioning city, inhabited by Thebans, although by all accounts the city and its inhabitants should have been eradicated by now. In a bold departure from the Theban tradition, Chaucer maintains the city of Thebes both architecturally and politically well beyond the end of the Theban war.

For the most part, critics have completely sidestepped the survival of the city of Thebes in the *Knigh't's Tale*. Paul Clogan, in his article on the subject of Thebes in the *Knigh't's Tale*, ignores this fact entirely.<sup>65</sup> Derek Pearsall explains that Thebes in the *Knigh't's Tale* has become less of a historical locale than a symbolic place of exile.<sup>66</sup> But in classical and medieval tradition, Thebes is not a place of exile so much as a place *from which* one is exiled (e.g. Polynices leaves Thebes for Argos). Even in Boccaccio, Arcita spends his exile at the courts of other Greek leaders, not in Thebes itself. Only in Chaucer does Thebes become a place of exile, and only in Chaucer does it remain standing. Chaucer, it would seem, does not eliminate Theban influence once and for all. Robert Haller suggests that the closing alliance between Athens and Thebes represents a final "re-establishment of the Theban house in such a manner that its past mistakes will not be repeated." Haller argues that Palaemon, having overcome the destructive effects of love and strife, will "rule in a manner quite different from his ancestors."<sup>67</sup> Chaucer, he asserts, subdues the destructive Theban impulse once and for all. However, given that Chaucer, in fact, refuses to subdue the Theban impulse towards civil violence in his two Theban heroes, it seems implausible that an alliance between Athens and Thebes would prove sufficient to ensure Theban compliance.

Instead, Chaucer preserves the physical city of Thebes and, more importantly, its race, in an attempt to resuscitate Thebanness in the wake of Boccaccio's *Teseida*. Boccaccio had redeemed the Theban character by severing Palemone and Arcita from their Theban ancestry, experientially, geographically, and politically. For Boccaccio, Thebes and Thebans have been effectively destroyed, and Palemone, the last remaining Theban, recognizes and repents the errors of his ancestry (not to mention the fact that, as the only surviving Theban, there is no chance of him committing fratricide, parricide or incest). Palemone becomes assimilated into Athenian society, quite removed from his place and people of origin. Chaucer, however, preserves the power center of Theban influence (the city itself) and its perpetrators, and he makes his hero, Palaemon, its lord and representative. Moreover, as David Anderson

demonstrates, Chaucer's designation of Palaemon as "a kynges brother sone" (l.3084) makes him a direct descendent of Polynices, son of Oedipus and brother of Eteocles, and who, according to Lactantius' commentary on the *Thebaid*, had an incestuous affair with his sister, Antigone.<sup>68</sup> Like his father before him, therefore, Palaemon has incestuous origins. Interestingly, Chaucer mentions this hallmark of Theban identity as Theseus arranges the alliance between Thebes and Athens, at the very end of the tale. Thus the conclusion of Chaucer's Theban narrative leaves the infrastructure of Theban influence, from its home base to its leader, well in place.

## CONCLUSION

What does Chaucer's revision of Boccaccio's Theban experiment accomplish then? First, it keeps Thebanness alive as a narrative subject matter. As the most recent work in Chaucer's day to treat Theban material, Boccaccio's *Teseida* had threatened to nullify Thebes as a theme for narrative by destroying the city of Thebes as a geographic and political power and by altering the last of the Thebans beyond recognition. In its handling of Theban history, the *Teseida* tries to suggest that given the right conditions Thebans, too, can lead normal, productive lives and not be held hostage any longer by corrupt ancestry. After the *Teseida*, subsequent narratives exploring Theban criminality would appear redundant. Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* rescues Thebanness from potential obscurity by undoing the results of Boccaccio's experiment.

Second, Chaucer's appropriation of Boccaccio's characters and story line, despite his rejection of Boccaccio's larger historical-literary project, enables him to explore the intimate workings of the Theban mind separate from the events of Theban history itself. The *Teseida* had forged neutral ground for the Theban character to take a new direction. Then it designated that direction and choreographed the journey. The new non-Theban setting freed Boccaccio from having to contend with any on-going Theban influence over his heroes that might sabotage his reform efforts. Chaucer uses that same neutral ground to explore how the *unreformed* Theban mind might operate once out of its familiar climate. Unlike Boccaccio, there is nothing interventionist in Chaucer's approach to Theban history; he allows us to observe the evolution of a Theban-style conflict from conception to maturity in the same way that we might observe wild animals living and breeding in captivity.<sup>69</sup> The instincts which enable them to survive in the wild continue to shape their behavior even in an unfamiliar environment where those instincts no longer serve useful purposes. Likewise, Arcite and Palaemon instinctively turn to conflict even once they are removed from their native conflict-ridden home.

I do not wish to suggest that Chaucer objected to Boccaccio's intervention of Christian experience into pagan culture generally. After all, in *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer imitates Boccaccio's blending of Christian and pagan as Troilus undergoes a

conversion experience, as a result of falling in love, similar to that of Boccaccio's heroes. Thus, Chaucer was clearly interested in reproducing Boccaccio's experiment with the pagan mind. However, Chaucer does reject Boccaccio's transformation of the Theban character in particular. Or, at very least, he wanted to experiment with several different treatments of the classical past, one which is stripped of Christian revelation, as in the *Knight's Tale*, and one which blends the themes of historical epic and chivalric romance, as in the *Troilus*.

Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* constitutes, among other things, a study of the human underpinnings of a very particular chapter in ancient history. I emphasize "particular" because global readings of the tale, of which there are many, tend to either minimize or generalize its Theban context. The tale becomes, for example, a study of pagan antiquity,<sup>70</sup> or an exploration of the "human condition,"<sup>71</sup> or a mirror for princes in which Theseus becomes a model ruler.<sup>72</sup> To be sure, the *Knight's Tale* is all of these things and more, but it does these things in more specific terms than such discussions suggest. To say that the tale explores "pagan antiquity" implies that Chaucer and his audience conceived of the classical past as a monolithic, undifferentiated chunk of time. In fact, the stories of ancient history came down to medieval readers, as they do to us, in chapters, of which Theban history forms a distinct unit. Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* treats the specific concerns of that chapter in ancient history. Likewise, the "human condition" it explores is a uniquely Theban form of misery rooted in distorted family relations, in which the sufferer is also the author of his own misery, unable to apprehend, let alone alter, his contribution to his own demise. Of course, Chaucer may, indeed, use Theban misery as a metaphor for all humanity, but the "condition" he explores in the *Knight's Tale* is, first and foremost, the Theban condition. Finally, while Theseus may exhibit certain characteristics of the model ruler, we observe his performance as a ruler specifically as it relates to his need to resolve a conflict between two men from a historically ungovernable race. A full understanding of the *Knight's Tale*, therefore, must begin with at least some consideration of its Theban context. Chaucer's audience would no more have overlooked the Theban cultural connection of the *Knight's Tale* than a contemporary audience would overlook the *mafia* connection of *The Godfather*.

We see from Chaucer's handling of Theban material, both in the *Anelida* and in the *Knight's Tale*, that he wanted to engage the entire tradition of Theban narratives, from Statius to Boccaccio. Comparing the *Anelida* and the *Knight's Tale*, we see that Chaucer shifted some emphases in his second treatment of Theban material. In the *Anelida*, he borrowed the eastern political landscape and military dichotomy of Greeks vs. Thebans from the OF *Roman de Thèbes*. He also represents his Theban, Arcite, as "fals" and sexually fickle in keeping with the OF poet's portrait of Thebans as duplicitous and often lustful infidels, and invents a fictional character, Anelida, who comes from one of Thebes' eastern allies. While borrowing as well from the *Teseida*

and the *Thebaid*, Chaucer seems to have intended to set the *Anelida* in the terrain and ethos of the OF poem. He changed his mind in the *Knight's Tale*. There he relies more heavily on Boccaccio's *Teseida* for setting and character. At the same time, he recuperates much of the pagan flavor of Statius' *Thebaid* as well as the unrelenting nature of the conflict between Eteocles and Polynices. Except for a few scattered phrases and details, he draws much less from the *Thèbes* here.

Despite the shifts in strategy between the *Anelida* and the *Knight's Tale*, Chaucer exhibits in both a desire to return to Thebes. First, in the *Anelida*, Chaucer takes us back into the city of Thebes in the final stages of the war, and although the poem seems to use Boccaccio's starting point in the *Teseida*, with Theseus' returning from Scythia, Chaucer turns away from Theseus and brings us into the city of Thebes within this same time frame. Boccaccio does not cover events within Thebes during this period or any other. Then, in the *Knight's Tale*, Chaucer returns to Thebes both geographically and imaginatively: he retains Thebes as a center of power and influence, allowing his Theban heroes brief sojourns there, and he restores "Thebanness" to his Theban heroes, his most sweeping revision to Boccaccio's *Teseida*. We see his interest in the story of Thebes as an distinct chapter in ancient history in his excision of all Trojan elements in his adaptation of the *Teseida*; he separates Theban and Trojan history, resisting the tendency of his medieval predecessors to read Thebes through the lens of Troy, a lens which defuses the characteristic futility and incomparable destructiveness of Theban history. Chaucer liberates the ethos of Thebanness from its Trojan entanglements, from its crusading trappings in the OF *Thèbes*, and from the aims of medieval Christianity in both texts. He isolates it as a historical phenomenon and dwells in it.

At the same time that Chaucer looks back at Theban history, through the various medieval overlays, and into its pagan past, he also carries Theban influence into the future by resurrecting Thebes, Thebans and Thebanness from the grave of Boccaccio's *Teseida*. In this sense, his two Theban narratives, and the *Knight's Tale* in particular, mark an important shift in the medieval Theban tradition. We will never know if Chaucer had planned to depict the destruction of Thebes by Theseus' army in the *Anelida*, but in the *Knight's Tale*, Thebes survives Theseus' attack in the last phase of the Theban war. It prevails as a seat of power, under the rule of Palaemon, a direct descendent of Polynices, who has, in effect, now accomplished Polynices' mission of recapturing Thebes. Chaucer's fascination with Thebes, its development and influence, continued beyond the *Knight's Tale*, however, for it resurfaces again in another of his classicizing works: *Troilus and Criseyde*.

## Chapter Four

# Faulty Connections: The Theban Context of the *Troilus*

In the discussion of the *Knight's Tale* in the previous chapter, we saw how Chaucer separated Theban matters from Trojan matters by removing the copious Trojan content of his Italian source, Boccaccio's *Teseida*. This enabled him to deal exclusively with the Theban question and, more precisely, with the turn the story of Thebes took in Boccaccio's tale of the two Theban kinsmen, Palemone and Arcita. However, it should not be assumed that Chaucer separated Thebes and Troy in the *Knight's Tale* because he in any way objected to the medieval interpretive practice of pairing these two famous disasters, for he himself reconnects them in his *Troilus and Criseyde*, his adaptation of another of Boccaccio's works, the *Filostrato*. In this case, he adds to his Italian source rather than taking away, introducing Theban references and allusions into Boccaccio's story of two Trojan lovers where there are none in the *Filostrato*. Given the fact that the Theban content of the *Troilus* represents Chaucer's invention, no discussion of Chaucer's handling of Theban history would be complete without some discussion of that poem.

If the *Knight's Tale* is any indication, Chaucer was keenly interested in the afterlife of Thebes after the most famous episodes of that city's history had played themselves out. That afterlife included for Chaucer, first, the fate of its royal line with its characteristic brand of criminality and, second, the later uses made of Thebes' history by subsequent civilizations. In the *Knight's Tale*, Chaucer explores, as Boccaccio did before him in the *Teseida*, the first of these questions, the life and livelihood of the descendants of Cadmus after the end of the Theban war, and his alterations to Boccaccio's *Teseida* indicate a desire to preserve for future generations the uniqueness of the Theban character with all its inherent problems. In the *Troilus*, Chaucer turns to the second question concerning the fate of Thebes after the war, that is, how later peoples, including Chaucer's own, understood and used Theban history. What forms did the story of Thebes take? In what contexts did people encounter it? How did they

interpret it? What value, both potential and actual, does the story of Thebes hold for both characters and audience? Chaucer does not change the story of Thebes in the *Troilus* in any way, as the OF poet of the *Roman de Thèbes* had done, for example, or as, to some degree, Boccaccio had done in the *Teseida*. Rather than seeking to reinterpret the events of the Theban war, the *Troilus* dramatizes the process by which Theban history is transmitted, consumed, understood and employed by later generations.

The fundamental relationship between Thebes and Troy that medieval poets and readers insist upon, and which Boccaccio verifies (albeit fictionally) in his *Teseida*, concerns prophecy. If, as St. Augustine argues, all earthly cities follow the same cycle of rise and decline, thus offering different versions of the same story, then the fate of one city prophesies the future fate of another city, whose own fate prophesies the fate of another, and so on. This assumption underlies the medieval tradition of Thebes and Troy, so that medieval poets used the destruction of Thebes to prophesy the destruction of Troy. Thus, when we read the account in OF *Roman de Thèbes* of the “Greek” army at Thebes staging a mock withdrawal as a final battle tactic in the siege of Thebes, we are meant to think of the future mock withdrawal of the Greeks from Troy.<sup>1</sup> So also, when Boccaccio’s Emilia looks down upon the fighting between the armies of Palemone and Arcita at Athens and laments the destruction brought about on account of her face, we are meant to think of “the face that launched a thousand ships” (in Marlowe’s later formulation) headed for Troy.<sup>2</sup> In both cases, the allusion to Troy acts as an omen; what happens at Thebes, or Athens, will happen again at Troy. This model of history also underlies Chaucer’s use of Theban history in the *Troilus*.

Chaucer adheres to established tradition in forging prophetic associations with Theban history in his narrative of Troy. In fact, all the major scenes dealing with Theban history in the *Troilus* feature a figure of prophecy. For example, when in Book II Pandarus ventures to Criseyde’s house and disturbs her reading the OF *Roman de Thèbes*, Criseyde indicates that she and her women companions have left off at the well-known scene where the prophet Amphiorax (Amphiaraus) “fil thorough the ground to helle” (II.104-5). In the *Thèbes*, as well as in the *Thebaid*, Amphiaraus is one of the seers consulted by King Adrastus on the question of the outcome of the war. When he foretells disaster for the forces of Polynices, no one believes him and the army sets off for Thebes despite his warnings. He then becomes one of the Seven Against Thebes and dies a fantastic death in the course of the war.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Troilus compares himself to Oedipus (IV.300), a figure bound up in prophecy in being both the subject of prophecy (with respect to his father Laius) and the decipherer of prophecy (with respect to the Sphinx). Later in Book V, Diomedes prefaces his brief account of his father Tydeus’ death at Thebes with a reminder to Criseyde of her father Calchas’ prophecy concerning the fate of Troy (V.883-938). Finally, the longest passage dealing with Theban history in the *Troilus* comes in Book V where Cassandre, the Trojan prophetess, recounts for her brother, Troilus, the entire history of Thebes in

an effort to interpret his dream of the boar (V.1457ff.). Thus, in each case where Chaucer revisits the Theban past in the poem, he includes a figure skilled in prophecy. However, while Chaucer adheres to tradition in employing Thebes to foreshadow Troy, he uses a different tactic than his predecessors.

Prior to Chaucer, the histories of Thebes and Troy were woven together prophetically by means of shared choreography and staging in certain key scenes. For example, the OF poet of the *Roman de Thèbes* uses the choreography of the mock withdrawal of troops from the story of Troy to render his version of the fourth battle at Thebes, and he redesigns Thebes, an inland city, as a coastal city surrounded by a plain in imitation of the geographic conditions of Troy. Similarly, Boccaccio employs the choreography of Caesar's tour through the ruined city of Troy in Lucan's *Pharsalia* in his rendering of Aricta's tour through the ruined city of Thebes in the *Teseida*.<sup>4</sup> In each case, the authors create echoes between Thebes and Troy by using the same basic pattern for certain scenes for both wars. Key to our understanding of this technique, however, is that the authors intend these echoes to be recognized by the reader, not by the characters themselves. The men in the fourth battle at Thebes in the *Thèbes* do not know that they are employing the famous battle tactic from the final battle of Troy, but the readers do know. When Arcita tours Thebes, he does not know that Caesar will undertake a similar tour of Troy at a later stage in ancient history, but we do. It is typical of epic that the author creates a situation of dramatic irony whereby the reader has an advantage over the characters in knowing the "big picture," including the ending. This superior vantage results, in part, from our knowledge of the body of texts that preserve the story of Thebes and Troy, texts with which the characters themselves have no familiarity. This wider knowledge of texts gives the reader a historical consciousness not shared by the characters themselves. This disparity between character and reader perspective held firm in the Theban tradition until Boccaccio's *Teseida*.

With the figure of Arcita, Boccaccio becomes the first medieval poet writing in the Theban tradition to grant his characters a level of historical consciousness — that is, knowledge and understanding of past events as distinct from, yet pertinent to, the present — previously enjoyed only by the reader.<sup>5</sup> For Aricta, the emotional revelation of falling in love with Emilia brings with it an intellectual revelation regarding his position as a member of the royal house of Thebes with its long record of internal strife. In a pivotal scene in Book V of the *Teseida*, when Arcita and Palemone prepare to fight one another in the grove, Arcita makes the connection between his present conflict with his kinsman and the pattern of recurring civil conflict among their Theban ancestors (V.55ff.). This historical awareness on the part of the protagonist marks a critical shift in the medieval tradition of Thebes, for Arcita uses this awareness to reverse the destructive cycle of Theban history. Arcita's knowledge and understanding of past events (namely the history of Theban internecine warfare) enables him to make sense of the present (his conflict with his kinsman) and moves him to alter the

future (by working toward a peaceful reconciliation with Palemone). Historical awareness prevents historical repetition. Thus Boccaccio, rather optimistically, proposes better education about the past as the solution to historically grounded social unrest. Chaucer seems to have been most interested in this aspect of Boccaccio's experiment in ancient history, for he takes it one step further in the *Troilus*.

Chaucer introduces Theban history into the lives of his Trojan characters predominantly in the form of texts and knowledge about texts. While Arcita's understanding of Theban history in the *Teseida* appears to derive from his own memory, representing a single, personal version of the Theban past, Chaucer's characters know about Theban history through all of the accounts of Theban history, both Latin and vernacular, known to Chaucer's own readers. Criseyde, for instance, owns a copy of the *Roman de Thebes* (II.100), and Chaucer shows her reading this book with her companions in her home. A number of critics have commented on Chaucer's attention to textuality in this scene.<sup>6</sup> Pandarus, in the same scene, claims to have read the "bookes twelve" (II.108) of the story of Thebes, no doubt Statius' *Thebaid*. Later, Troilus compares himself to Oedipus, and, while he gives no specific reference, he clearly knows the story of how Oedipus ended his days "in derknesse" (IV.300). Cassandre later provides him with the full account of Theban history which she knows "by herte" (V.1494), yet she nevertheless refers repeatedly to "olde bokes," (1463, 1478, 1481), written records of the past. Though she never mentions it by title, Cassandre summarizes primarily the contents of the *Thebaid*. The textual milieu of Cassandre's prophecy in this scene also includes the commentary tradition, for, as Francis P. Magoun, Jr., has demonstrated, this summary of Theban history is based on a Latin verse-argument beginning appearing in medieval codices of the *Thebaid*, and which Chaucer seems to have originally included in the text proper of the *Troilus*.<sup>7</sup> Troilus then challenges Cassandre's prophecy by citing more texts (though no exact titles), namely the story of Alceste, "as us the bokes telle" (V.1533). On the whole, therefore, Chaucer's Trojan characters appear well versed in Theban history, versions of which they have lying around in their homes.

In this unprecedented way, Chaucer places his characters — all of them — on a par with the reader, for they, like the reader, have available to them the necessary tools (the books) for developing a historical consciousness. They too have the potential to make the connection between the destruction of Thebes and the imminent destruction of Troy that medieval readers continually made, which means that, like Boccaccio's Arcita, they might use their knowledge of the past to understand the present and, possibly, alter the future. But, unlike Arcita, they do not. Repeatedly, Chaucer's characters appear unable to use their knowledge of Theban history to build insight into their present historical predicament. They fail to understand the prophetic lesson of Theban history. However, they are not entirely at fault for this, and Chaucer dramatizes the reasons for this failed prophetic link in the very first scene that Theban

history features prominently, in the opening of Book II where Pandarus discovers Criseyde reading the story of Thebes with her women companions.

### CRISEYDE AND THE CONDITIONS OF READING HISTORY

This scene is well known and often discussed.<sup>8</sup> Pandarus, having learned the previous day of Troilus' recent infatuation with Criseyde, rises in the morning and sets off for Criseyde's house with the intent of persuading her to at least consider reciprocating Troilus' affection. Upon arriving, he inquires of her servants about Criseyde's whereabouts and is directed to an inner room, a "paved parlour" (II.82). There he finds Criseyde sitting with two other ladies listening to a third woman read to them "the geste/ Of the siege of Thebes" (II.83-4). Interrupting their reading activity, Pandarus exchanges greetings with Criseyde and then inquires after the content of their book, thinking they might be reading "of love" (II.97). Criseyde tells him that they have just been reading a "romaunce... of Thebes" (II.100), and have already read the portion of "how that kyng Layus deyde/Thorough Edippus his sone" (II.101-2) and have left off at the "lettres rede" (II.103), or rubric, where "the bisshop,.../Amphiorax, fil thorough the ground to helle" (II.104-5). Pandarus then claims "Al this knowe I myselve,/And al th'assege of Thebes and the care" (II.106-7) of which "ben ther maked bookes twelve" (II.108). Without discussing it any further, Pandarus says to Criseyde "Do wey youre book, rys up, and lat us daunce" (II.111), and that is the last they speak of Thebes in the scene.

Although neither Pandarus nor Criseyde go on to discuss Thebes at any greater depth, this scene nevertheless forms a microcosm of Chaucer's overall use of Theban history in the *Troilus*, for it reveals all the impediments to using Thebes as a prophetic analogue within the Trojan setting of the poem. All subsequent scenes in the poem dealing with Theban history expand upon one or more of the themes introduced in this scene in Criseyde's home. These themes, moreover, cover all the areas of reception, from text to reading environment to reader to interpretation.

The first obstacle to a Theban prophetic link in the *Troilus*, illustrated so vividly in this scene in Criseyde's home, concerns texts, the form(s) in which the story of Thebes came down to medieval readers. By the time Chaucer was composing the *Troilus*, there were three full-length accounts of the Theban war: the *Thebaid* of Statius (90 A.D.), the OF *Roman de Thèbes* (1155-60), and a thirteenth-century prose translation of the *Roman de Thèbes* which itself survives in several versions, and which I will refer to as the prose *Thèbes*.<sup>9</sup> (This list does not include Boccaccio's fictional extension of the story of the Theban war, *Il Teseida*, which makes extensive use of Statius' *Thebaid*, since it was still too contemporary for most of Chaucer's audience to have any familiarity with it.)<sup>10</sup>

The scene in Criseyde's parlour features two of these versions of the Theban legend. As Alain Renoir first noted, several details in this scene indicate that Criseyde and her ladies have been reading a medieval version of the story, the OF *Roman de Thèbes*, or one of the prose translations of it.<sup>11</sup> She calls her book a "romauunce," (II.100) and claims to have already read the story of how Oedipus killed his father Laius (II.101-2), a story told in full in the *Roman de Thèbes* and the prose *Thèbes* but only summarized at the very beginning of the *Thebaid*. She refers to Amphiaras by the medieval title of "bisshop" (II.104), which corresponds closely to his designation as "archbishop" (*arcevesque*) and in the *Roman de Thèbes*.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Chaucer uses the French spelling of that name, "*Amphiorax*," rather than the Latin "*Amphiaras*."<sup>13</sup> Criseyde remarks that she and her women leave off reading at the point where Amphiorax fell through the ground "to helle," hell (*enfer*) being a purely medieval, not a classical, designation that appears in one of the surviving manuscript witnesses of the OF *Thèbes*.<sup>14</sup> Finally, Criseyde draws Pandarus' attention to a rubricated initial as a division marker in her text, and does not indicate any larger book division. The OF *Thèbes*, unlike the *Thebaid*, is not divided into twelve books; the only division markers in the manuscript witnesses of the poem are ornamented capitals, and while decorated initials also appear in manuscripts of the *Thebaid*, Criseyde's specific reference to a rubricated letter as a division marker in the absence of a larger book division further suggests that she is reading the French poem, not the Latin one.<sup>15</sup> Pandarus, on the other hand, refers to a different version of the story, to the Latin epic of the *Thebaid* of Statius, written in "bookes twelve" (II.108).

The distinction that Chaucer makes between different versions of the legend (one medieval and one ancient) in this scene is important for, in fact, the war fought in the OF *Roman de Thèbes* is not the same war that Statius recounts in the *Thebaid*. Nor is the war in the prose *Thèbes* the same war that we find in the OF verse *Thèbes*. As we saw in Chapter 2, the OF poet re-figures Statius' story of internecine warfare at Thebes as a war between two foreign powers fought in the medieval landscape of the crusades. Thebes becomes an eastern kingdom besieged by the western powers under the leadership of King Adrastus. The thirteenth-century prose redactor of the OF poem reshapes the story still by removing the crusading aspect of the *Roman de Thèbes* entirely, along with most of its martial content, replacing those scenes with numerous scenes of diplomacy between the opposing sides. The prose *Thèbes* presents not so much a story of a war so much as a story of the negotiation process surrounding war. These versions of the story, therefore, represent quite different conflicts.<sup>16</sup> Thus, Criseyde and Pandarus talk about two different wars in her parlor: one, Pandarus' version, relates the story of civil war ending in tragedy for both sides, while the other, Criseyde's version, relates the story of a crusade that ends in the triumph (albeit costly) of the "Greek" (western) powers over the Theban (eastern) powers. Of course, none of the details that Criseyde mentions indicate any awareness of the different

outcomes, and indeed she may not know of Statius' rather different version. However, the broad differences between the competing versions of the story of Thebes suggest that the Theban "lesson" is quite different for Pandarus than it is for Criseyde.

The second obstacle to a Theban prophetic link in the *Troilus* involves the locus of interpretation: the reading environment. When Pandarus enters Criseyde's house, he is led into a paved parlor where he finds Criseyde and her reading-party. This would have been a small, private room off the main hall reserved for the family members of the household and their most intimate friends.<sup>17</sup> Thus the first scene in the poem where Chaucer connects concretely the histories of Thebes and Troy takes place in a private space. If we look elsewhere in the Theban tradition prior to Chaucer, to scenes where Thebes and Troy are linked in a prophetic way, we find that they invariably occur in public, usually military, settings. For example, in the *Roman de Thèbes*, Thebes and Troy come together most explicitly in the catalog of warriors and in the fourth battle scene, which the poet reconfigures to resemble the final offensive at Troy.<sup>18</sup> They do *not* come together in the few domestic scenes of the poem.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, in Boccaccio's *Teseida*, Thebes and Troy are joined in a prophetic relationship in public settings, for example in the battle at Scythia in Book One, or in Arcita's wandering through the ruined city of Thebes in Book Four, or in the catalog of warriors of Book Six, or in Emilia's Helenesque lament while observing the battle (8.98ff.), or at the funeral games of Book Eleven, or at the final wedding scene where Menelaus mentally compares Emilia to Helen (12.67). Although many of these scenes represent the private thoughts and experiences of individual characters, the actual settings are public. In the *Troilus*, however, all of the major scenes where Thebes and Troy are linked prophetically, including the scene in Criseyde's house, occur in private chambers, usually bedchambers, well away from the arenas of political decision-making.<sup>20</sup> Conversely, Thebes and Troy are not linked in the Parliament chamber (IV.141ff.), the setting where the lesson of Thebes would do the greatest political service in possibly helping Troy to avoid the same fate as Thebes. In short, despite the characters' knowledge of Theban history (in its various forms), the story of Thebes has become restricted to private consumption and not consulted as a resource for public policy.

Related to the question of private consumption, the scene in Criseyde's palace also illustrates another obstacle to Theban prophecy in the *Troilus*: the reader, or in this case readers (Criseyde, her ladies, and Pandarus). If we start with Criseyde, the most obvious fact to contend with concerns gender. As a woman, she would have only very limited access to channels of information, as her question to Pandarus in the opening scene of Book II highlights: "telle it us/... is than th'assege aweye?" (II.122-3). Being restricted to the private sphere, she would get all of her information about the course of the war second and third hand, probably from male relatives or friends. In Criseyde's case, her main source of information about the war appears to be Pandarus, a known liar.<sup>21</sup> Her skewed understanding of the events of the war

reveals itself later in the poem, during her argument with Troilus over whether she should go through with the exchange or evade it. She argues for going through with the exchange initially, but all of her predictions about what is likely to happen given this plan prove incorrect.<sup>22</sup> Thus, Chaucer dramatizes Criseyde's mistaken judgments in some key scenes, and, therefore, we cannot assume that Criseyde has an accurate picture of the nature of the Trojan War itself, let alone the Theban war. In any case her gender, as well as the circumstances contingent upon that, greatly restricts her ability to act on whatever prophetic message she were to comprehend. Throughout the poem, her fate is clearly determined and executed by forces and people outside of her control. In this sense, valuable historical information that might aid the political process in Troy is first introduced in the poem within the household of someone least likely to understand or act upon it.

Pandarus, on the other, would appear to be a more suitable recipient (reader) of the Theban prophecy. As a man, he has greater access to more information surrounding the story of Thebes (as he suggests when he refers to the *Thebaid*), and he clearly circulates within the Trojan high command, thus occupying a position to act upon a prophetic message.<sup>23</sup> However, throughout the poem, Pandarus exercises his influence not in the public arena, in the area of Trojan policy, but rather in the private arena, in masterminding the love affair between his niece and Troilus, an affair that seems to serve no larger political function whatsoever. Moreover, Pandarus is a reader with ulterior motives, for he discusses the story of Thebes with Criseyde not for its own sake but rather as a pretext for persuading his niece to accept Troilus as a lover. Thus both Criseyde and Pandarus, as readers, embody issues of readerly bias; one is biased on extrinsic grounds due to limitations of access to knowledge (both written and oral), while the other is biased on intrinsic grounds of personal motivation and desire.

Criseyde's and Pandarus' limitations are rooted in a larger, cultural ignorance of Thebes' significance, since the story has become mere entertainment for consumption of the idle. The scene of the reading party in Criseyde's home illustrates, above all, that the story of Thebes has become irrelevant in the eyes of Chaucer's Trojans. For Criseyde, the irrelevance of Thebes stems from her reason for reading the story in the first place. Given that her movements in Troy may be somewhat circumscribed due to her father's recent treason, given that, as a prominent citizen of Troy, Criseyde would have lots of time for leisure, and given that, as a woman, she is not involved in decision-making circles, we can only assume that Criseyde and her ladies read the story of Thebes for private entertainment.<sup>24</sup> This constitutes perhaps the greatest obstacle to Theban prophecy in the *Troilus*. As a form of polite distraction for ladies, the story of Thebes has become trivialized and culturally disposable. This may account, therefore, for Criseyde's particular choice of passages to highlight: she mentions "how that kyng Layus deyde/Thorough Edippus his sone" (II.101-2) and "How the biss-hop.../Amphiorax, fil thorough the ground to helle" (II.104-5), two passages with

high entertainment value but with no relevance to the circumstances at Troy.<sup>25</sup> If she and her ladies have left off reading at the episode of Amphiarus' death, then Criseyde already knows most of the story of the war between Eteocles and Polynices, and yet she does not mention the war.<sup>26</sup> Thus she highlights two of the most famous episodes in the story of the Theban war but not the episodes that would hold the greatest parallels with the Trojan War, for her own situation. She also fails to note the very broad and rather obvious parallel in the *Roman de Thèbes* that the city of Thebes is besieged by a Greek army in the same way that her own city of Troy is currently under siege by the Greeks.<sup>27</sup> Pandarus, too, perceives the story of Thebes as irrelevant to the current situation at Troy, but for a different reason. For Pandarus, the story of Thebes is old information. This contradicts the very nature of prophecy as, first and foremost, new information, information more or less stolen from the future. For Pandarus, however, Thebes constitutes an old, familiar story with nothing new to be learned. Hence Pandarus' reaction when he hears that Criseyde and her companions have been reading the story of Thebes: "al this knowe I myselve" (II.106). Therefore, he quickly changes the subject from the irrelevant (Thebes) to the "relevant" (his romantic plans for his niece). Thus, for different reasons, both Criseyde and Pandarus find nothing particularly at stake in the legend of Thebes.

I have dwelt on this scene in Book II because I believe that it introduces, *in nuce*, all of the various levels at which the Theban legend fails to provide an adequate and viable prophecy of doom to the characters in Chaucer's narrative of Troy. These levels include all of the aspects surrounding the act of reading: text, reading environment, reader and interpretation. In the subsequent scenes in the poem where Theban history surfaces, Chaucer continues to highlight very particular aspects of the whole process (and problem) of reading.

### CRISEYDE'S LINEAGE: MISSING THEBAN LINKS

One of those aspects of reading that stands in the way of a Theban prophetic link in the poem is the problem of the text: missing or ambiguous information. By this I do not mean competing versions of the same story so much as gaps in information that all versions of the legend share. We see this problem in the next scene in the *Troilus* in which Theban history surfaces, later in Book Four, where Criseyde, lamenting the fact of her upcoming departure from Troy, identifies her mother as "Argyve" (IV.762), which several scholars have interpreted as Chaucer's spelling of the Latin "Argia," the daughter of King Adrastus of Argos who marries Polynices shortly before his march on Thebes.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, there is ample evidence in the poem to support this thesis: Cassandra, in her summary of Theban history in Book Five, mentions "Argyves wepyng and hire wo" (V.1509), Argia's famous lament over the body of Polynices that occurs in Book Twelve of the *Thebaid*;<sup>29</sup> also, Criseyde possesses a brooch that she gives as a

love token to Troilus, a brooch whose description bears considerable resemblance to that of the brooch of Thebes mentioned in Chaucer's *Complaint of Mars* (ll. 245-60). According to Statius, the famous brooch of Thebes passed down from Harmonia, the first queen of Thebes, to Argia (when she married Polynices), who later used it to bribe the wife of Amphiaraus into revealing her husband's hiding place (*Thebaid* IV. 187ff.). It has been argued, for instance by Anderson, that Criseyde's brooch is the brooch of Thebes inherited from her mother, Argia.<sup>30</sup> Thus we appear to have important textual evidence to suggest that Criseyde's mother, "Argyve," is indeed "Argia," the former wife of Polynices, and that Crisedye's brooch holds family connections with the famous brooch of Thebes, the only piece of jewelry associated with that city.

While it could be argued that Chaucer, in identifying Criseyde's mother for the first time in the entire tradition of Troy (both ancient and medieval), attempts to remedy the problem of missing information by providing some where there was none, he in fact perpetuates the problem by creating even further informational gaps. Both of these details in Criseyde's family history come to us shot through with uncertainty, which Chaucer deliberately cultivates. For example, Chaucer is the only poet, medieval or ancient, to specify the maternal descent of Criseyde from Argia (indeed, to specify any maternal descent for her at all). While Benoit de Saint Mauré, Guido delle Colonne and Boccaccio all indicate that Criseyde is the daughter of Calkas, only Chaucer makes her the daughter of Argia. Because he makes it up, there is no textual tradition available to the reader against which to verify this detail. Therefore, we are left with more questions than answers concerning Criseyde's past. To be sure, given that the sources for ancient history available to Chaucer's audience placed the Trojan War roughly one generation after the Theban war, it is chronologically possible that Criseyde is the daughter of Argia. On the other hand, those same sources do not make clear Argia's fate after the end of the Theban war, after her famous lament.<sup>31</sup> How, then, did she come to Troy? How and when did she meet Calkas? Crisedye indicates that she was born in Troy ("Ther she was born," V.711), but we do not know how long her mother lived in Troy with Calkas before conceiving her, let alone where she is now, if indeed she lives. Chaucer capitalizes on the lack of information surrounding Argia in the aftermath of the Theban war to invent a life of sorts for her in connection with Troy, but he does not provide any of the details (however fictional) that would make such a story plausible for his audience.

Compounding the ambiguity of Criseyde's maternal lineage is the presence in the poem of another of Criseyde's relatives: Antigone, one of Criseyde's three "neces" (II.814-16). Scholars who have examined the Theban subtext of the *Troilus* generally include this scene among their discussions not only because the name, Antigone, carries as much resonance for Theban history as does Oedipus or Polynices, but also because, like all of the Theban material in the poem, she constitutes yet another of Chaucer inventions.<sup>32</sup> She is a minor character in the poem, but she bears a major

name, and her Theban connections seem vaguely compatible with Criseyde's relation to Argia.

However, Chaucer does not use the name Antigone with the same chronological accuracy that he applies to the name Argia. Given her youth, as indicated by Chaucer's reference to her as "Antigone the shene" (II.824), and "fresshe Antigone the white" (II.887), she cannot be the famous elder daughter of Oedipus, for then she would be older than Criseyde herself and would be Criseyde's aunt, not her niece (if Criseyde is indeed the daughter of Argia). While Chaucer constructs an aunt-niece relationship for Criseyde and Antigone, he puts it in reverse order, making Criseyde the aunt and Antigone the niece, thus further confusing this Antigone's connection to the Theban Antigone.

It is possible, as Wetherbee suggests, that Chaucer based his Antigone on Statius' Antigone, who also appears young, pure and innocent.<sup>33</sup> But the scene in Criseyde's garden has no parallel in the *Thebaid*, nor does anything Antigone says in this scene correspond in any way to her role as Oedipus' daughter in the *Thebaid*.<sup>34</sup> If anything, Chaucer's Antigone, in her courtly setting, bears more resemblance to the Antigone of the *Roman de Thèbes* who falls in love with Parthenopeus during a diplomatic mission to the Greek camp.<sup>35</sup> Here, however, the parallels also fail in that Chaucer's Antigone sings about some other woman's experience in love, not of her own, and, moreover, she does not link love directly to marriage as the OF heroine does. Alternatively, this Antigone might be the daughter or granddaughter of King Laomedon.<sup>36</sup> However, if she were her status as Criseyde's niece proves equally confusing since it would have to stem from Criseyde's father, Calchas', relation to the royal family, of which we know nothing. Nor does this Antigone appear to exhibit the same precocious and vain behavior that characterizes the medieval portrait of Priam's sister.<sup>37</sup> In this way, Chaucer's Antigone frustrates our attempts to place her within familiar historical contexts, least of all Thebes.

In calling one of Criseyde's nieces "Antigone" (of whom the most famous is the daughter of Oedipus), Chaucer suggests a Theban connection (particularly as this scene falls directly on the heels of Criseyde's reading of the *Roman de Thèbes*). Yet any attempts to align Chaucer's Antigone with the heroines of either the *Thebaid* or the *Roman de Thèbes* must rest on the most general common feature that all three heroines share, youth, a quality that is not particularly Theban. Thus Chaucer tantalizes the reader with sketchy yet semi-credible information that tempts us to construct a Thebes-Troy connection while denying us the necessary information to complete the historical picture. Moreover, the ambiguity surrounding Antigone further undermines the already questionable family connection between Criseyde and Argia, despite its chronological plausibility.

There remains the issue of the brooch, the gift that Criseyde gives to Troilus in Book III (l. 1370-2), and which bears certain resemblances to the brooch of Thebes.<sup>38</sup>

Given the broad constellation of Theban detail in the *Troilus*, and given the fateful role played by the brooch of Thebes in that city's history, and given Criseyde's blood ties to the latest owner of that brooch, it is indeed tempting to see Criseyde's brooch as that same famous item of jewelry. It becomes even more tempting when we consider the origin and nature of the brooch's power. According to Statius (*Thebaid* 2.264-305), the brooch (*monile* (II.266), meaning "necklace" or "collar") was crafted by Vulcan as a "gift" to Harmonia, daughter of Mars and Venus, as a punishment for Mars' adultery. Possessing "*saeva potentia*" ["savage power"], the brooch was shaped by "*Luctus et Irae et Dolor et tota... Discordia dextra*" (II.287-8) ["Grief and Wrath and Anguish and the strong right hand of Discord,"] and was designed to bring misfortune upon all who possess or desire it. Its first victim, Harmonia, suffers on her wedding night as she becomes hideous and serpentine in the eyes of her husband, Cadmus. Thus the brooch is born of sexual misconduct and inflicts punishments of a sexual nature on its victims. The brooch in the *Troilus* holds similar erotic associations in that it acts first as a love-token to seal the relationship between Troilus and Criseyde after their sexual union, but later becomes a symbol of infidelity. Moreover, as Anderson has indicated, there is some physical resemblance between Criseyde's brooch and the brooch of Thebes that Chaucer describes in the *Complaint of Mars* where the figure of Mars describes the condition of those who possess and then lose the brooch as that of "double wo and passiou" (255), the same phrase used to describe the course of Troilus' love for Criseyde.<sup>39</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the family resemblance of these two brooches, identifying the brooch of the *Troilus* as the brooch of Thebes poses serious problems in narrative logistics. First of all, Criseyde's brooch contains a single, heart-shaped ruby, while the brooch of Thebes that Chaucer describes in the *Complaint of Mars* contains multiple rubies along with other stones. So while the two brooches seem similar, they are not identical. Second, according to the *Thebaid*, Argia gave the famous brooch to the wife of Amphiarus as a bribe for revealing her husband's whereabouts (*Thebaid* IV.187-213), in which case she would no longer have it to pass on to Criseyde, if Argia is indeed Criseyde's mother.<sup>40</sup> Third, as many readers have noticed, there seem to be two brooches in the *Troilus*: Criseyde gives one to Troilus in Book III (1370-1) (which presumably stays in his possession), and another (which is not described) to Diomedes in Book V (1040). Surely if Chaucer intended for the brooch given to Troilus to hold the same singular importance in his narrative that the fatal brooch of Thebes holds in Theban history, then he would not have doubled the number of brooches in the story. Again, therefore, in the case of the brooch, Chaucer employs highly suggestive detail with clear ties to the Theban tradition that coaxes us into making historical parallels between Thebes and Troy. At the same time, he disappoints our efforts by introducing a brooch whose description and circumstances are that much different from the brooch of Thebes, making those parallels inconclusive.

The Theban allusions, clustering as they do around the same figure, Criseyde, cannot be coincidental. Through Criseyde's descent from Argia, along with her possession of a brooch, Chaucer wished to plant a seed of Theban historical context into his Troy narrative. If plausible, the Argia connection would create a very strong link indeed between the historic conflicts of Thebes and Troy. However, Chaucer deliberately obscures this information, therefore frustrating any attempts to link these two tragedies. By using fiction to fill in gaps in historical detail, Chaucer merely creates bigger gaps. In fact, the issue of partial information about the past constitutes an important theme in the *Troilus*, particularly as it pertains to the figure of Criseyde. The narrator claims not to know whether Criseyde has children (I.132-3), or what her age is (V.826), or how long she had been in the Greek camp before falling for Diomedes (V.1086-88).<sup>41</sup> The confusion surrounding her Theban ties participates in this larger problem of partial information that Chaucer so expertly exploits.

### THEBAN-TROJAN CHARACTER COMPARISONS: MISREADING THEBAN HISTORY

Another obstacle to the reception of Theban prophecy in the *Troilus* concerns the problem of the reader. By this I mean the characters as readers of Theban history in the poem. In my discussion of the scene in Book II where we find Criseyde reading the OF *Roman de Thèbes* with her ladies, I talked about Criseyde's limitations as a reader, that is, limitations of gender that make her unable to fully understand and make effective use of what historical information (itself limited) she possesses. These limitations lead her to focus predominantly on those aspects of the legend of Thebes that hold the least correspondence to the circumstance that Troy now faces. Thus Criseyde fails to see any similarity between the situation at Thebes and the present one at Troy.

But there is another side to this coin in the poem. Throughout the work, we find a series of scenes in which characters do, in fact, draw parallels between Thebes and Troy, and they do this by comparing their own situations in Troy to those of certain Theban figures: Pandarus compares Troilus to the Theban queen Niobe in Book I (699); Troilus compares himself to Oedipus in Book IV (300); and later in that same Book, Criseyde compares the possible outcome of her situation to that of Athamas (1539), the husband of Ino, daughter of Cadmus. The final of these comparisons comes towards the middle of Book V, when Troilus compares the fate of Troy with that of Thebes (V.599-602). All of these instances foreground the character as interpreter, making us keenly aware of how and why we tend to conjure history in any given situation. In each case, we get a highly unsuitable comparison made between a Theban figure and Trojan character that reveals an essentially subjective view of history which obscures genuine historical insight.

Of these character comparisons, the pairing of Troilus with Oedipus (IV.300) has attracted, by far, the most scholarly attention. In the depths of his despair at losing Criseyde, Troilus prays to Cupid and laments his circumstances. Without Criseyde, he says, he will enter into a living death and “ende I wol, as Edippe, in derknesse/My sorwful lif, and dyen in distresse” (IV.300-1). Scholars have debated whether the comparison reflects primarily upon historical/political dimensions in the poem or upon individual psychological/spiritual dimensions. Does Troilus (however unwittingly) exhibit remarkable historical insight in likening his own unhappy situation (and, by extension, the situation of the city of Troy itself) to that of the doomed Oedipus (and Thebes), or does Troilus exaggerate wildly his own misfortune in love when he compares himself to perhaps the most tragic of tragic figures of ancient history whose personal misfortune led to so much political unrest and bloodshed? Critics who argue the former tend to view Thebes and Troy as separate instances of the same story, and see Troilus as a later incarnation of Oedipus.<sup>42</sup> While they may feel that Troilus indeed exaggerates his own plight (that the comparison is not valid in its literal details), they insist, nevertheless, that Troilus unwittingly points to profound historical similarities in both Thebes and Troy. Those who argue the latter tend to see this scene in Book IV as a snapshot of Troilus’ love-sickness, and view Troilus himself as a juvenile prone to self-dramatization.<sup>43</sup> However, whether they stress the historical/political or the psychological/spiritual ramifications of this character comparison, all critics agree that this scene constitutes a study in perception, in how personal circumstances shape how people view the world, including the past. They view Troilus as a reader, first and foremost, a reader locked in an essentially subjective worldview that determines how he understands history. More broadly, however, this scene (and the other Theban-Trojan character pairings in the poem) illustrates the very process by which medieval audiences understood and used ancient stories.

First of all, throughout the *Troilus*, Theban figures are evoked specifically under circumstances of duress, and usually for purposes of persuasion. Troilus compares himself to Oedipus in the first place because he wants something. Knowing that Criseyde will be traded for Antenor, Troilus finds himself back in the pit of isolation and sorrow into which he had fallen when he first saw Criseyde. He compares himself to King Oedipus, therefore, in the context of a lament in which he apostrophizes a series of figures, including Death (IV.250), Fortune (IV.274), Cupid (IV.288), his own “goost” (IV.302), Criseyde (IV.316), and happy lovers high on Fortune’s wheel (IV.323).<sup>44</sup> From four out of five of these figures, Troilus demands something: from Death, he begs for his own death (IV.250); from Fortune he demands fair treatment as a reward for his own faithfulness: “Have I the [Fortune] nought honoured al my lyve,/As thow wel woost, above the goddes alle?/Whi wiltow me fro joie thus deprive?” (IV.267-9). He wants Criseyde to be able to stay in Troy, and as part of his argument, he proposes alternative kinds of punishment that Fortune might have

inflicted on him, including the rather Oedipal solution of killing his father, Priam, or his brothers (IV.276-7) (which seems more of a punishment on his family than on himself). In addressing Criseyde, he looks for her to “yeven comfort to my peyne” (IV.318). Finally, he addresses happy lovers in general, whom he wants to remember him in “my sepulture” (IV.327) as one who died unfortunate in love. Thus Troilus compares himself to Oedipus in a moment of personal crisis and within the context of an argument on his own behalf. History, therefore, is evoked not for its own sake, as something to be understood on its own terms, but rather for Troilus’ sake, for present and highly personal reasons that have nothing to do with ancient Thebes.

Second, Troilus, in keeping with the entire tradition of linking Thebes and Troy, focuses only on end results, viewing the story of Thebes simply as an *exemplum* of misfortune. He conjures a picture of the old, blinded Oedipus suffering a living death in exile; he does not look at the events or details leading up to that final state, details that would immediately disqualify the comparison. For example, Troilus is not a king; he has not killed his father or married his mother or produced incestuous offspring (or any offspring for that matter); he does not rule a city and, most importantly, the tragedy of his personal affairs sparks no wider political tragedy for Troy as Oedipus’ does for Thebes. In other words, Troilus does not highlight those aspects of Oedipus’ own life that make him legendary, and the aspects of his life that make him utterly different from Troilus himself. Rather than focusing on Oedipus’ historical significance, he highlights his timeless (and not particularly Theban) qualities of suffering and blindness. In the same way, medieval poets and audiences drew parallels between Thebes and Troy based largely upon the common end-result of each conflict, a destroyed city, when, in fact, the causes and nature of these conflicts could not have been more different.

Third, and connected with this point, Troilus, in seeking to magnify the importance of his own suffering by comparing himself to Oedipus, overlooks that king’s contribution to his own demise. He sees Oedipus (as he sees himself) chiefly as a victim. Again, by overlooking the events that led up to Oedipus’ self-mutilation, Troilus ignores the crimes that Oedipus committed, the crimes of parricide and incest, that implicate Oedipus in his own downfall. Interestingly, Chaucer includes mention of these crimes earlier in Book II when Criseyde, in speaking with Pandarus about her book, highlights these episodes in Oedipus’ history. Troilus’ failure to include them in his own estimation of Oedipus as the victim of blind Fortune demonstrates his lack of insight into Theban history and into the figure of King Oedipus. Moreover, as critics have pointed out, it also demonstrates his lack of insight into his own life and history, which constitutes the only valid parallel between Troilus and Oedipus, whose ignorance of his own personal transgressions brought about his fall.<sup>45</sup>

If we turn to the other instances in the poem where characters compare themselves or one another to Theban figures, we find the same pattern: Theban figures are

evoked under circumstances of duress, usually for purposes of persuasion, are noted for the final result of their actions, and are seen exclusively as victims. For example, in Book I (l. 547ff.), Pandarus first comes upon the love-sick Troilus and attempts to find out the object of his friend's affection. In plying Troilus for information, Pandarus constructs an argument, replete with examples, for why the reluctant Troilus should confide in him. He argues along several points, including their long-standing friendship, his own experience (albeit unsuccessful) in love, his promise of strict confidentiality, and the ineffectuality of hiding one's feelings. In connection with this last point in particular, Pandarus likens Troilus to Queen Niobe of Thebes. Chaucer would have found the story of Niobe, among other places, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* VI (ll.145-312), which tells of how Niobe, wife of Amphion and mother of fourteen children (seven sons and seven daughters), meets her downfall when she interrupts the worship of the goddess Leto by the Theban women and insists on her superiority over the goddess: she boasts exalted lineage (from Tantalus and the sister of Pleiads and Atlas, and as the granddaughter of Jupiter); she boasts superior beauty and wealth to Leto; and she boasts of her greater progeny (Leto mothered only two children). In revenge for this irreverence, Leto's children, Apollo and Diana, kill all of Niobe's children, first the sons and then the daughters as they mourn their brothers. This prompts Amphion to kill himself. As she lays weeping amidst the heap of bodies, Niobe turns to stone. Pandarus conjures this Theban figure as part of his strategy to get information out of Troilus, insisting that "to walwe and wepe as Nyobe the queene,/Whos teres yet in marble ben yseene" (I.699-700) is no way to "wynnen love" (I.698). The story of Niobe becomes yet another of Pandarus' *auctoritees* used to further his argument that Troilus confide in him. As in the case of Troilus' comparison of himself to Oedipus, this scene shows Pandarus using history for present aims, that is, appropriating and reshaping events of history to help make sense of the present, not the past.<sup>46</sup> It leads, therefore, to the same type of distortion of history that we saw in Troilus' lament.

As in the case of the Troilus/Oedipus comparison, this comparison to Niobe focuses exclusively on her final state: her weeping and transformation into stone. The details of her life leading up to this state make the comparison highly implausible, for none of the literal details of her life correspond to Troilus': Troilus is not a woman or a queen; he is not guilty of any overt act of blasphemy; he is not a parent; and he weeps over a potential lover not over dead children. Most importantly, Niobe weeps not to "wynnen love," but out of remorse over her dead family. The only concrete parallel between the two could be that they are both victims of the gods (Troilus of Cupid, and Niobe of Leto). This, however, hardly qualifies as a truly distinctive characteristic when we consider that all of the characters of the legends of both Thebes and Troy are, in some way, victims (direct or indirect) of the gods. Some have argued that this character comparison reflects upon internal qualities in the Trojan

hero: Troilus, like Niobe, is proud; he has offended the god of Love in his earlier disdain for lovers the way Niobe offends the goddess Leto; he has become feminized by love, hence his comparison to a female figure; and Niobe's literal transformation into stone reflects upon Troilus' increasing immobility in his pursuit of love.<sup>47</sup> These parallels require, however, rather sophisticated interpretation in order to make up for the remoteness of the allusion. A more valid response comes from Troilus himself, whose growing impatience with Pandarus' intrusiveness, leads him to exclaim "What knowe I of the queene Nyobe?/Lat be thyne olde ensamples, I the preye" (I.759-60). Of course, while this may offer yet another example of the perceived irrelevance of Theban history among Trojan nobility, Troilus' dismissal of the Niobe comparison foregrounds it as, above all, a rhetorical tactic to get him to talk (which is not working), not a legitimate or especially fruitful historical example.

Finally, Pandarus evokes Niobe first and foremost as a victim, just as Troilus sees Oedipus as a victim of fate. Again, by focusing exclusively on the final result of Niobe's actions, Pandarus recalls only the weakened, defeated and suffering side of the Theban queen, not the proud, disdainful side that brought about her tragedy. By excluding the story of Niobe's own contribution to her demise, Pandarus renders her unaccountable for her actions. She becomes one among the army of victims of Fortune. Pandarus evokes the image of a victim by way of expressing sympathy for Troilus' suffering, but in doing so he reveals the habit of editing out those aspects of history that fail to serve present purposes, the process of deliberately distorting the past. If Pandarus knows as much about Theban history as he says he does in Book II, then we can assume that his distorted version of the story of Niobe results not from a partial knowledge of Theban history but rather from a conscious selection process in which he uses some portions of the story but not others, depending on the demands of the moment.

The last such character comparison in the *Troilus* occurs at the end of Book IV, when Criseyde compares herself to "Athamante," or Athamas (IV.1539). According to legend, Athamas married into the house of Cadmus when he wed his second wife, Cadmus' daughter Ino.<sup>48</sup> Together, Athamas and Ino had two children, Laerchus and Melicerta. In an act of jealousy and revenge against Ino and her husband, Juno infected both of them with madness, which caused Athamas to mistake Ino and his sons for a lioness and two cubs, whom he attacked. After witnessing the murder of Laerchus, Ino took the other infant, Melicerta, and jumped off a cliff. Criseyde mentions Athamas during her meeting with Troilus as they try to work out of plan of action that will enable them to circumvent the terms of the prisoner exchange and remain together. She insists that she will remain faithful to him regardless of her father, or position, or pleasure or marriage, and if she fails, may Juno cause her to remain "as wood as Athamante" who dwells "Eternalich in Stix, the put of helle!" (IV.1539-40).

The same principles apply to this character comparison that we observed in the comparisons of Troilus to Oedipus, and Troilus to Niobe. As in those earlier instances, Criseyde makes the comparison during a moment of crisis and for purposes of persuasion. From the outset of the meeting, Criseyde takes charge, and she lays out a detailed plan of action that she has clearly conceived of prior to the meeting. She proposes that she go through with the exchange and then, once in the Greek camp, concoct an excuse for returning to Troy to gather her belongings. This will enable her to defect back to Troy. She provides several points to advance her argument: both sides of the conflict are currently under a truce, making travel between the camps easier; she will not be far away (only half a morning's journey); the war appears to be coming to an end since there is talk of peace and of returning Helen to the Greeks; her father will certainly agree to her plan, and if he does not she can easily persuade him otherwise; being apart for a short while will only strengthen their love. To each of these points, Troilus presents a counterpoint, and his answers foreshadow precisely what will happen. He proposes, instead, that they flee Troy secretly and live with his friends or family elsewhere. Insisting that such a move would sully their reputations (particularly hers), Criseyde presses on with her plan and swears her fidelity to him, at which point she likens herself to Athamas. As in the earlier instances, Criseyde's character comparison represents history put in the service of present aims. Her goal is not to understand Theban history or Athamas, but to advance her argument with Troilus now.

Also like the earlier character comparisons, Criseyde's comparison of herself to Athamas focuses on the end of his life, not on the events and actions leading up to that end, details that would disqualify Athamas as a meaningful historical precedent for Criseyde. On the obvious level, Criseyde is not a husband, father or king. And even if we focus, as some critics do, on the theme of infidelity, which Criseyde argues against in this passage, though ultimately commits, and which surrounds Athamas' reputation, we still run into problems.<sup>49</sup> First, Athamas never betrayed Ino for another woman, as Criseyde will betray Troilus with Diomedes. Second, Juno does not punish Athamas *for* committing disloyalty; her punishment *is* disloyalty as Athamas, in his madness, slays his wife because he does not recognize her. Interestingly, Criseyde's allusion to Theban history works somewhat differently from the previous two character comparisons: Troilus claims that he is like Oedipus (though he is not), and Pandarus claims that Troilus is like Niobe (though he is not). Criseyde, however, claims that she will *not* be like Athamas, and yet in trying to avoid Athamas' crime, she ends up committing it in a different form.

Thus, compounding the problem of competing source evidence (as in multiple versions of the same story), and lack of source evidence (as illustrated in the case of Criseyde's family history), we have the additional problem of misuse of source evidence due to readerly bias. These biases result from a host of circumstances including

the restrictions of gender, the vagaries of private emotional pressures and crises, and the social demands of the moment. All of these factors, and more, determine how and why history surfaces in the lives of Chaucer's characters. While each character employs the well-established medieval practice of marshalling history for didactic purposes, as so many examples of good or bad fortune or conduct, they invariably distort (and therefore invalidate) historical example as a useful guide to present predicaments. Chaucer's lesson of history in these character comparisons lies not in their content (which lacks validity) but in their contexts, which again and again show historical understanding to be a highly subjective affair.

### CASSANDRE: HISTORY IN THE MAKING

In Book V of the *Troilus*, Chaucer illustrates the dilemma of failed Theban prophecy with the figure of Cassandre, the Trojan prophetess and sister of Troilus, who has summoned her to help him interpret a disturbing dream. Chaucer dramatizes yet another aspect of the reception process, in this case the issues governing authorship, that is, the circumstances that determine how history is constructed in the first place. In Book V, Cassandre comes to Troilus' bedchamber, at his request, and proceeds to shed light on a dream he had the previous night in which he witnessed Criseyde kissing a boar. While Cassandre's prophetic skills enable her to see into the future, her explanation of the dream takes her back into the past, into the histories of the Caledonian Boar Hunt and the Theban War.<sup>50</sup> Scholars have tended to view Cassandre's foray into the past as a "summary" of ancient history, as more or less a list of past events that may have some bearing on the present.<sup>51</sup> To be sure, for the Theban portion of her account, Chaucer's Cassandre relies on a Latin verse-argument beginning that appeared in medieval codices of the *Thebaid* which itemizes the major events of the Theban war, and while Chaucer tells us that Cassandre recounts the legend "al by lengthe" (V.1491) for Troilus, we the reader get only the list. However, Chaucer's Cassandre goes well beyond summarizing ancient history in this scene. Barbara Nolan has pointed out that Cassandre becomes a composer of "serious literary narrative in the vernacular" unified by a moral theme in her handling of the past.<sup>52</sup> While I agree that Cassandre shapes the story rather than simply reporting it, I believe that Chaucer uses Cassandre to interrogate the very notion of "serious" versions of history.<sup>53</sup> We watch Cassandre pick and choose and adapt historical material based upon the needs of the moment, and her handling of history in the two segments of ancient history contained in her account, that of the Caledonian Boar Hunt and that of the Theban war, reveal two quite different medieval approaches to the past. While she relies on ancient authorities for her material, her approach to them is adaptive and utilitarian rather than simply transmissive. Indeed, Cassandre enacts the very process of adaptation and revision employed by medieval historians that gave ancient history new (and

distorted) meanings. The result is an entirely new version of this chapter in ancient history made “while you wait,” so to speak.

Like the medieval historian, Cassandre works under certain constraints that shape how she will tell the story of the ancient past. First, there is the matter of her client, Troilus, who is also her brother. She has been called upon as an expert to advise her brother on a personal matter that has been causing him distress.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, Troilus has a personal stake in her work that has nothing to do with Thebes or with the past, for that matter. Her work must, nevertheless, answer to this timely need, to the concerns of the present. Second, Chaucer has transformed Cassandra from the condescending and rather brusque older sister of the *Filostrato* to a more compassionate and thoughtful figure, and therefore her own sisterly feelings for Troilus factor into the story she is about to tell.<sup>55</sup> Third, there is the issue of content. Troilus’ dream involves a boar, and if she is to enlighten our understanding of the boar in Troilus’ dream, she must locate a historical precedent of a boar, the most famous of which was sent down by Diana to punish the citizens of Calydon because its king, Oeneus, neglected to make offerings of incense to her. Fourth, there is the matter of procedure, and here Cassandre faces a considerable task. There is no medieval (or ancient) tradition of linking Troy and Calydon in a prophetic relationship. According to medieval historiography, beginning with Augustine, the genealogy of ancient kingdoms is Babylon, Thebes, Troy, and Rome.<sup>56</sup> While the Caledonian Boar Hunt falls chronologically just prior to the Theban war, the city of Calydon does not belong to the genealogy of great destroyed cities. Thus, Cassandre must create a prophetic relationship between Calydon and Troy that did not exist before. She must create a meaningful connection between the boar of Calydon and the boar (albeit imaginary) of Troy. She will do this by enlisting the long tradition of joining Thebes and Troy together in a prophetic way in the hopes of creating a similar relationship between Calydon and Troy. Finally, there is the question of form, which encompasses genre and theme. Given that she is a prophetess whose traditional role it is to warn people of coming doom and destruction, Cassandre chooses the genre of the Fall of Princes, “how that Fortune overthrowe/Hath lordes olde” (1460-61), whose tragic theme carries a warning for the present. In sum, Cassandre needs the following: a historical precedent for a boar, a means of joining that boar with the boar of the present, and tragedy. Cassandre must, therefore, contend with rather formidable literary constraints, and in order to satisfy each requirement, she must bend the facts of each episode in ancient history, selecting some details (and versions) over others, and shifting emphases, without completely compromising historical accuracy.

Given this constellation of authorial constraints, Cassandre begins with the story of the Caledonian Boar Hunt, the best historical source for a boar. Chaucer would have found this story (and its aftermath) in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* VIII (ll.260-546). According to Ovid, King Oeneus of Calydon makes offerings to Ceres, Bacchus and

Minerva, but neglects to make offerings to the goddess Diana. Incensed, she sends down a giant boar who ravages the crops and herds of animals. While the people of the region find refuge in the walls of the city of Calydon, Oeneus' son, Meleager, bands together with a number of other warriors and forms a hunting party to stop the boar. Among the band of hunters is Atalanta, the female warrior, with whom Meleager falls in love. Given the immediate threat of the boar, Meleager sets aside the love interest and focuses on hunting the boar. Each member of the party makes an attempt to wound the boar, but Atalanta becomes the first warrior to draw blood. After several other unsuccessful attempts made by the hunters to wound the boar further, Meleager sinks a spear into the boar's back, and, while it thrashes in distress, he deals the final blow by burying another spear in the boar's shoulder. Though Meleager stands as the victor, he grants the prize of the boar's head and hide to Atalanta, since she was the first to stop the beast in its tracks. Viewing this as an insult to their masculinity, the fellow hunters contest Meleager's choice and a conflict breaks out in which several men, including Meleager's own uncles, die. Chaucer's Cassandre begins her interpretation of Troilus' dream with this story. However, while her version of the story of the Caledonian Boar Hunt is Ovidian, with its characteristic theme of desire as the root of historical event, the account she tells does not adhere to Ovid's version of the story.<sup>57</sup>

Instead, Cassandre gives a medievalized version of the Caledonian Boar Hunt very much on the order of the adaptations of ancient tales that we find in *The Legend of Good Women*.<sup>58</sup> Just as Chaucer limits female agency in the *Legend of Good Women* by transforming some of the most famous, and active, classical female figures (including Dido and Medea) into passive courtly ladies, so too Chaucer's Cassandre transforms the female warrior, Atalanta, into a mere love object, into a "mayde, oon of this world the beste ypresed" (V.1473). Cassandre reduces Atalanta's agency by, first, failing to mention her proper name, second, by dropping her status as a warrior, and, third, by omitting the fact that she inflicted the first wound to the boar. In fact, Cassandre identifies Meleager, not Atalanta, as the one who "made the boor to blede" (V.1515). She also suggests that Atalanta came to Calydon in the first place only "to se" (V.1472) this boar, not to hunt it. Furthermore, Cassandre suggests that Meleager killed the boar solely because "he loved so this fresshe mayden free" (V.1475). In Ovid, Meleager decides to hunt the boar for fame and glory well before Atalanta enters the scene. He then sets aside his feelings for Atalanta during the hunt itself in order to focus on the threat. His feelings reemerge once the boar is dead. Therefore, though the hunt provides an occasion in which Meleager can express his feelings for Atalanta, he does not kill the boar because he loves her. Chaucer was certainly familiar with Ovid's version of the story, for he summarizes it accurately in the *Knights' Tale*, where we find in Diana's temple a depiction of "How Atthalante hunted the wilde boor,/And Meleagre, and many another mo,/For which Dyane wroghte hym care and wo" (2070-2).

Here, Atalanta is named, identified as the huntress of the boar, and she and Meleager are placed as more or less equals within the larger hunting party. Clearly, then, Chaucer consciously alters the story for the scene involving Cassandre.

Why, however, would Cassandre shape the story in this way? Why not just recount Ovid's version of the Hunt, or that of the *Ovide Moralisé*? The reason, I believe, is two-fold: first, she must emphasize the theme of masculine desire as a prelude for disaster. Troilus has already made the link between the amorous boar and Diomedes, his rival in love, and Cassandre confirms this interpretation when she tells the story of Meleager's fatal desire for a woman as a prelude to Diomedes's fatal desire for Criseyde (fatal for Troilus, that is). The Hunt and its disastrous outcome become rooted in desire. Second, Cassandre attempts to implicate Diomedes on the basis of his descent from Meleager. She must, therefore, single out Meleager and his conduct. Her revision of the story of the Hunt enables her to place Meleager at center stage in the attack on the boar. His relation to the boar forms the basis for her interpretation of the boar as a symbol of Diomedes in Troilus' dream. In Ovid's account, the hunt is a collective venture involving a host of other men, and Atalanta, as well as Meleager. In Cassandre's version, Meleager kills the boar as a lone warrior fighting for his lady. While she mentions that "al the contre" united in an effort to slay the boar, Meleager's companions and their role in the hunt are not mentioned. Spotlighting Meleager in this way distinguishes him as a member of the bloodline involving boars that Cassandre will trace up to Diomedes. This pairing of Meleager and Diomedes constitutes one of Cassandre's inventions. Throughout classical and medieval accounts of ancient history, including the *Troilus*, Diomedes is known chiefly as the "son of Tydeus," not as the grandson of Meleager.<sup>59</sup> Cassandre emphasizes Diomedes's grandpaternal descent over the more traditional paternal descent because Tydeus' story does not include a boar, and Meleager's does. Authorial constraints determine the choice. Thus Cassandre does not give *the* version of the Caledonian Boar Hunt, but rather *a* version that best accommodates her authorial circumstances.

Cassandre exercises similar selectivity in her handling of the story of Thebes. Chronologically, Thebes is the next major event following the Caledonian Boar Hunt and preceding the Trojan War. However, one begins to speculate why Chaucer would include Thebes in Cassandre's account in the first place, given that there is no boar in the Theban legend. After all, Cassandre seems chiefly interested in connecting Diomedes (the boar in Troilus' dream) with Meleager, who hunted the famous boar, and for this reason the story of Thebes seems almost irrelevant to her purpose.<sup>60</sup> Several scholars have noted that Chaucer includes the story of Thebes in this Trojan scene in order to evoke the prophetic connection between the fates of those two cities, and this is no doubt true.<sup>61</sup> But why, then, include Calydon at all, since Calydon does not belong to the ranks of famous destroyed cities. Her purpose of connecting the boar in Troilus' dream with the Caledonian Boar would be served perfectly well if she had left

Thebes out altogether; likewise, her purpose of linking Thebes and Troy as two destroyed cities would be served perfectly well by omitting Calydon. Why, therefore, include both ancient cities?

Cassandre enlists Thebes, with its proleptic function with respect to Troy, into her account of the ancient past not primarily for how Theban history comes to bear on Trojan history (something that had already been done before), but rather for how it can be made to come to bear on Caledonian history, for her task involves linking the boar of Calydon with the imaginary boar of the prince of Troy. David Anderson has argued that Cassandre draws a parallel between the rivalry over the Caledonian boar and the rivalry over the Theban throne as a prelude to the rivalry between Troilus and Diomedes over Criseyde.<sup>62</sup> While I agree that Cassandre wishes to align Calydon and Troy on the level of fatal desire, we have seen that Cassandre, in fact, alters the story of the Caledonian Boar Hunt in such a way as to eliminate rivalry over the boar; rivalry features prominently in Ovid's version of the Hunt, but not in Cassandre's. In Cassandre's version, the plot revolves, instead, around a woman, the unnamed Atalanta and the pursuit of her, not around a boar. Therefore, it seems more likely that Cassandre uses Meleager's pursuit of Atalanta as a precedent for Troilus' and Diomedes' pursuit of Criseyde (which itself echoes the pursuit of Helen by Paris and Menelaus). (Of course, Meleager does not have to challenge anyone for Atalanta, so there is no rivalry involved. But Cassandre makes the boar a means to an end, the end being Atalanta, not an end in itself, as it is in Ovid.) More than that, however, the consequences of Meleager's desire is a civil war, and Cassandre preserves that aspect of the story in her version when she alludes to how "this Meleagre gan to dye/Thorough his moder" (V.1482-3). According to Ovid, after Meleager grants the prize to Atalanta, his mother sends his uncles to seize the prize away from her, and in the process of defending Atalanta, Meleager kills his own uncles. When his mother finds out that Meleager has killed her brothers, she takes out a magical brand and brings about Meleager's death. This theme of familial strife is where Thebes comes in: as Cassandre shapes the story, the internecine warfare at Thebes becomes a later incarnation of the civil strife at Calydon, this time over a city rather than a woman. Interestingly, Chaucer accomplishes on a very small scale in this scene what Boccaccio had done on a grand scale in the *Teseida*: just as Boccaccio combines the mode of conflict at Thebes (civil war) with the source of conflict at Troy (a woman) in his Athenian conflict, so Chaucer combines the mode of conflict at Thebes and the source of conflict at Troy in this account of the Caledonian Boar Hunt. Of course, Cassandre does not invent this story anew (as Boccaccio did with his story of Palemone and Arcita), but she achieves this combination of elements simply by shifting emphases, by all but eliminating the rivalry over the boar in order to focus on the pursuit for Atalanta, and making desire for Atalanta the origin of the ensuing civil war. By this formula, Cassandre joins Calydon with Thebes, and, by extension, Calydon with Troy itself.

Cassandre's need to link the affairs and fates of these three cities determines the version of the story of Thebes she chooses as her source. She would certainly have available to her the OF *Roman de Thèbes*, the version Criseyde herself consults in Book II. Moreover, the medieval *Thèbes* would seem to provide a more suitable companion piece to her medieval version of the Caledonian Boar Hunt. However, she chooses, instead, the ancient account of Statius' *Thebaid*, and she does so because the OF *Thèbes* would not have served her purposes for several reasons.<sup>63</sup> First, the war recounted in the *Thèbes*, as noted earlier in this chapter, is not a civil war but rather a war between two foreign powers. Thus, Cassandre would lose an important link between the tragedy at Calydon and that which befalls Thebes. Second, the OF *Thèbes* does not convey nearly the same degree of tragedy that Statius' poem does. As a corrupt, eastern despot closely allied with numerous tribes of infidels, Ethioclés and his city deserve the destruction that comes to them. While the side of Polynices and Adrastus suffer the tragic loss of their seven commanders, in the end the good guys triumph and the bad guys pay. For Statius, both sides lose continually and no one seems to gain. The tragedy of the *Thebaid* is crushing. Third, Cassandre wishes to implicate Diomedes on the level of lineage. When she claims that Diomedes "down descended is/From Meleagre" (V.1514-15), she suggests that his intervention in Troilus's life via Criseyde will lead to Troilus' downfall, just as Meleager's involvement with a woman led to his own downfall.<sup>64</sup> Diomedes's lineage, however, also includes Tydeus, ally of Polynices during the Theban war (and with whom Diomedes is traditionally identified). In order to maintain a troublesome line of descent, Cassandre must choose the ancient version of the Theban legend over the medieval one. In the OF *Thèbes*, Tydeus stands as the undisputed hero, the knight whose sword hilt contains holy relics like Roland's. Chaucer alludes to this medieval portrait of Tydeus when he describes Diomedes as "Hardy, testif, strong, and chivalrous/Of dedes, lik his fader Tيدهوس" (V.802-3), and again later when Diomedes brags to Criseyde of his exalted lineage (V.932-38). In Statius, however, Tydeus achieves his greatest fame for the grotesque and unheroic act of chewing on the severed head of Menalippus. While Cassandre does not mention this memorable scene, the version of the legend from which she works certainly provides corroborating evidence for problematic lineage for Diomedes via Tydeus. Thus, just as Cassandre's authorial project requires her to present a medievalized version of the Caledonian Boar Hunt, so her project requires her to choose Statius' ancient version of the Theban legend over the medieval one.

I should add, however, that while Cassandre adheres to the classical version of the Theban war, she also takes one important liberty with it, again to serve her authorial purposes. Cassandre closes her classical account of the Theban war with the medieval ending to the story, namely the destruction of the city of Thebes at the end of the war. Statius does not indicate that the city itself suffered destruction. However, the destruction of Thebes as an emblem of its civilization became the *telos* of the

medieval legend of Thebes, and the chief means by which medieval poets and audiences linked the histories of Thebes and Troy.<sup>65</sup> Attaching this medieval ending onto her account enables Cassandre to fulfill her traditional role as prophetess by foretelling the eventual fate that Troy will share with Thebes.

Thus Cassandre's interpretation of Troilus' dream results in an entirely new version of ancient history. To be sure, Cassandre relies on authoritative, classical sources and employs long established methods of historiography. However, her account of ancient history does not preserve the stories told in those revered sources, but rather changes them. By combining her material in certain ways, and by exercising selectivity in her use of historical evidence, Cassandre makes two broad innovations: first, she enlists Calydon into the esteemed ranks of famous, ancient war-torn civilizations (even though, technically, Calydon never suffered destruction), and, second, she expands the identity of Diomedes with the figure of Meleager. Diomedes, who is known, in both classical and medieval sources, chiefly as the "son of Tydeus," now emerges as the "grandson of Meleager," killer of the boar. Neither of these two innovations are inaccurate, necessarily; Calydon did face civil war as a result of Meleager's love of Atalanta, and Chaucer had good reason to think that Diomedes was the grandson of Meleager. However, Cassandre puts a new spin on ancient history simply by emphasizing certain, sometimes lesser, events and relationships over other, more famous ones.

The final result is awkward in many respects. The theme of fatal desire for a woman dominant in the Calydon segment, recedes in the Thebes segment since Cassandre's source for that segment does not emphasize (or even include) the love interests of either Eteocles or Polynices (which feature in the OF *Roman de Thèbes*). Her handling of characterization proves equally inconsistent: while she simplifies the story of the Caledonian Boar Hunt by singling out Meleager and de-emphasizing the other actors in the drama, Cassandre does the opposite in the Theban segment, where Eteocles and Polynices become lost in the vast panorama of events and personages of the Theban conflict. Likewise, despite her efforts to alter the profile of Calydon as an ancient war-torn city, it cannot join the ranks of Thebes and Troy because it did not suffer true destruction. In this respect, her interpretation of Caledonian history seems somewhat forced. The same holds true for Cassandre's handling of genealogy. Cassandre's careful linking of the boar in Troilus' dream with the boar of Calydon connects Diomedes not with Meleager but with the Caledonian Boar itself, resulting in a confusing situation, as Monica McAlpine points out, where "boars and boar-killers both belong to the same race."<sup>66</sup> Contingent with her genealogy, Cassandre's application of the mirror for princes genre proves similarly confusing in that if Diomedes is to suffer downfall like Meleager, then that would hardly be a bad thing for Troilus. The tragedy of the situation is lost. Nor does the pattern of tragedy apply clearly to Troilus himself. Her rendition of the past does not make it clear whether Troilus is to suffer downfall *like* Diomedes (with whom he shares Meleager's fatal desire for a woman), or *because of*

Diomede (who now woos Criseyde), or both. And, of course, Cassandre's flippancy closing remark that "This Diomede is inne, and thow art oute" (V.1519) strikes many as a superficial, not to mention heartless, assessment of the entire historical process. Therefore, while Cassandre makes numerous subtle interpretive moves in her work of ancient history, its very craftedness creates its own set of chronological, moral and stylistic inconsistencies. It is story, not history.

Through Cassandre, Chaucer explores the kinds of pre-existing conditions that dictate how history is both read and composed. He allows us inside of the decision-making process of the professional medieval historian, the person who determines which history gets told, how and why. Cassandre's cool detachment in this scene results not, as Wetherbee suggests, from a fatalistic view of human history, but rather, I believe, from a certain professionalism necessitated by having to satisfy a complex set of variables in her composition.<sup>67</sup> As she composes her narrative, she must bear in mind her relationship with Troilus, the nature of his dream, the reason her services have been requested in the first place, her own feelings towards her brother, and she must sort through a variety of competing versions of the story of the past in order to construct her own. (In this sense, Cassandre mirrors Chaucer himself, who had before him a variety of Troy narratives each of which differ in their rendition of the "truth").<sup>68</sup> The stories themselves would be familiar to Chaucer's audience; her particular use of them is what is new. Far from being, as Wetherbee suggests, "wholly absent from the story she tells," Cassandre's immediate situation as a historian *becomes* the story she tells.<sup>69</sup> By allowing us "behind the curtain," so to speak, Chaucer casts suspicion on historical knowledge, on the degree to which we can have an accurate understanding of the past given the highly subjective nature of historical composition.

Troilus' dismissal of Cassandre's interpretation of his dream towards the end of this scene corroborates the reading that this scene concerns not so much the content of history as much as its form, that is, the particular spin that Cassandre gives the story. Cassandre, of course, bears the curse of never being believed by those who hear her prophecy, and, therefore, Troilus must dismiss her. Moreover, his present emotional fragility makes him especially resistant to hearing any evidence that might prove the end of his love affair with Criseyde. However, Troilus does not reject the basic content of Cassandre's message; he does not dispute any of the particulars of ancient history. Indeed, earlier in this same Book, Troilus himself makes the connection between the past disaster at Thebes and the possible ruinous outcome of the present conflict at Troy when he says to Cupid "Now blisful lord, so cruel thow ne be/Unto the blood of Troie, I preyre the,/As Juno was unto the blood Thebane,/For which the folk of Thebes caughte hire bane" (V.599-602). Cassandre does not tell Troilus anything he does not already know (including the fact of Criseyde's betrayal (V.1247-8)). Therefore, we must assume that Troilus dismisses Cassandre's Theban prophecy not for its content but for its spin. He accuses her not of changing facts,

but of distorting them for certain aims, namely “on lads for to lye” (V.1524). He suggests that Cassandre uses history to sully reputations, and proposes other historical figures who might also fall prey to her talents: she might just as well tell lies about Alcestis, “the kyndest and the beste... as us the bokes telle” (V.1529-33), calling attention to her deviation from the “bokes,” to her manipulation of the sources of historical knowledge, sources which he knows. It is true that Troilus seems to momentarily forget the reason for Cassandre’s presence in his room. Cassandre delves into ancient history not for its own sake, but in order to interpret Troilus’s dream, a demand that necessarily shapes what she says and how. Nevertheless, given the clear and sometimes unique deviations she brings to ancient history, Troilus’ dismissal of his prophetic sister transcends the formulaic. Troilus, it would seem, is not altogether obtuse in rejecting his sister’s advice.

## CONCLUSION

From what we know about the schedule of Chaucer’s works, it would appear that Chaucer was working on *Troilus and Criseyde* during the early to mid-1380s, roughly the same time that he was also adapting Boccaccio’s *Teseida* into the *Knights Tale*.<sup>70</sup> While the stylistic and thematic similarities between Chaucer’s *Troilus* and Boccaccio’s *Teseida* have been known for some time now, the *Teseida*’s impact on the *Troilus* generally becomes sidelined in discussions of source influence.<sup>71</sup> Robert A. Pratt first argued the case for the *Teseida* as a significant source for the design of the *Troilus* over fifty years ago, and he based his argument on several important features common to both poems: a sober and stately tone, a mood of fatalism, heightened descriptions of time, a refined and high-born heroine who is fully characterized, a love affair “presented by means of highly developed amorous psychology,” the description of the hero’s funeral and the flight of his soul, and the closing *envoi* “Go, litel book” (V.1786), none of which are present in the *Filostrato*, Chaucer’s main source for the *Troilus*.<sup>72</sup> Piero Boitani developed Pratt’s argument further, arguing that Chaucer combined the “canvas of the *Filostrato* [and] the framework, method and language of the *Teseida*.”<sup>73</sup> Boitani focuses specifically on the similarities between Chaucer’s Troilus and Boccaccio’s Arcita as “gentle, suffering, and pensive” heroes, on the shared propensity for mythological allusion, on the common ending with respect to the hero’s death, and on the issue of philosophical depth, which we find in the *Teseida* but not in the *Filostrato*.<sup>74</sup> As Boitani and Pratt both show, the *Teseida* lies at the heart of the entire conception of the *Troilus*, affecting matters of style, characterization and philosophical scope.

On the specific question of the relationship between Thebes and Troy, I would suggest that the *Knights Tale* and the *Troilus* represent complementary responses to the *Teseida* that Chaucer was formulating during this period. This response concerns

Boccaccio's experiment of reforming the Theban character, with its propensity for family feuding and, consequently, removing the catalyst for Theban tragedy. For Boccaccio, that reform comes about in two stages: first, through the ennobling effects of the love experience and, second, through an accompanying and growing historical awareness. The one leads to the other. In the *Knigh't's Tale*, Chaucer addresses the first stage of the reform: the love experience, and in it he explicitly denies his heroes the ennobling experience of love that so transforms Boccaccio's Theban kinsmen. In the *Knigh't's Tale*, Emelye becomes the latest excuse for Theban civil strife rather than the vehicle for Theban reconciliation that she is in the *Teseida*, and Chaucer appropriates all of Boccaccio's key scenes which track that process of reconciliation to sow the seeds of further conflict.

In the *Troilus*, Chaucer addresses the second stage of Boccaccio's reform program: historical consciousness.<sup>75</sup> Of course, in the *Troilus*, we are no longer dealing with the Theban character since none of its characters are of Theban descent. Nevertheless, Chaucer uses Theban history specifically to explore historical consciousness as a tool for change, as a way that people might empower themselves to direct the course of their own history, as they do in the *Teseida*. Chaucer resurrects Boccaccio's historical experiment by modeling his hero, Troilus, rather closely on Boccaccio's Arcita, by allowing him to fall in love, like Arcita, and by allowing him to become ennobled by that love, as Troilus himself says time and again. He then expands the experiment by making the tools for historical consciousness, namely historical accounts of the past (notably the Theban past), available to not one character (as Boccaccio initially does with Arcita) but to all the characters, major and minor, right from the beginning. Furthermore, he makes the story of Thebes available in every possible version of which he knew, in both oral and written forms. Chaucer, therefore, guarantees all of his characters the ability to form and develop an awareness of the course of history that might help them avert the disaster that awaits them. He guarantees them the tools for change right from the outset. But here, too, the experiment fails.

Whereas Boccaccio dramatizes the transformative effects, both personal and political, of knowledge about the past, of historical consciousness, Chaucer confuses and frustrates the very notion of historical consciousness itself. For Boccaccio's hero, historical consciousness is a relatively simple and straightforward affair: Arcita seems to just "know" about the history of his race, and, more importantly, that knowledge automatically translates into a critical stance towards that history. Arcita knows the facts of Theban crime, condemns those crimes, and moves to distance himself and Palemone from that record. For Chaucer, historical consciousness becomes fraught with complications at every level. Competing versions of past events, which tell essentially different stories, makes it difficult for his characters to share the same picture of the past, particularly the Theban past. Their own pasts, particularly Criseyde's, are probed to expose gaps in historical information that frustrate our attempts to form a coherent

picture of past events. The characters themselves complicate the matter further: they read selectively and for selfish reasons, they turn to the past usually under duress, and they have other things on their minds. Above all, they have relegated Theban history to the realm of pastime, dappling in its local, personal insights while ignoring its broader political implications. Finally, in the figure of Cassandre, Chaucer portrays historical documents as customized, made-to-order productions that more accurately record the circumstances of the present than of the past. The prophetic message of the *Troilus*, therefore, concerns not how past events foreshadow present and future events, but rather how people fail to understand the past, not because of the lifecycle of fallen earthly civilizations but because of the nature and lifecycle of historical writing itself, which Chaucer uses the matter of Thebes to illustrate.

Hence the historical awareness that empowers Boccaccio's Arcita to change the course of Theban history, starting at the personal level, becomes a mark of Troilus' disempowerment, also starting at the personal level. On the one hand, Troilus, of all of the main characters in the poem, possesses the most insight into the future. When arguing with Criseyde over a plan of action once they hear of her immanent departure, it is Troilus' prediction of the likely course of events should Criseyde go through with the exchange that actually transpires later in the poem (IV.1254ff.). Although he summons his famous sister to interpret his dream of the boar for him, he himself has already accurately interpreted the dream as a message of Criseyde's betrayal (V.1247-8). He also anticipates the prophetess' predictions for Troy based on the recent Theban war when, in an earlier scene, he prays to Cupid to spare Troy the same fate that Juno brought to Thebes (V.599-602). He appears to understand how events tend to unfold. On the other hand, Troilus continually struggles with taking action, and Theban allusions enter into his story so often at his most helpless moments: Pandarus likens him to Niobe as he languishes on his bed having just fallen in love with Criseyde (I.699); he compares himself to Oedipus while he flounders from the news of Criseyde's exchange (IV.300); he connects the fates of Thebes and Troy while suffering dejection from Criseyde's absence. Historical consciousness, therefore, does not enable Troilus to lay the foundations for change in either the personal or the political sphere, and this extends to all of the characters of the poem.

What Chaucer seems to have found so compelling about the *Teseida* and its vision of the workings of history is not its short-term, optimistic, experiment in Theban history whereby the right healthy influences can remedy even the most hopelessly lost causes like the Theban race. Rather, he looks to its long-term, rather sober, experiment in joining the histories of Thebes and Troy, which he replicates in the *Troilus*. While Boccaccio's Arcita and Palemone do reverse the pattern of Theban history when they reconcile themselves to one another at the prompting of their love for Emilia, they remain unaware that the rivalry resulting from their love of Emilia, and her reaction to it, in fact, becomes the blueprint for the later rivalry of Paris and

Menelaus over Helen at Troy. Their best intentions and best instincts form the basis for another protracted and ruinous military campaign, and this happens despite their knowledge of the past. Chaucer's *Troilus*, like Boccaccio's *Teseida*, illustrates the beauties and limitations of human free will within historical events that have a life of their own.

## Chapter Five

# John Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes*: Breaking the Theban Curse

John Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* represents the last medieval adaptation of the Theban legend. Written in 1422, midway through Lydgate's literary career, the *Siege* has been viewed as a conservative work: it takes as its source a historical account of the Theban war derived from the very first vernacular Theban narrative, the OF *Roman de Thèbes* of 1155-60; it employs established medieval methods of didactic historiography, in particular the mirror for princes; and it appears to have absorbed little of the proto-humanistic tendencies manifest in its immediate predecessor in the Theban tradition, Chaucer's *Knights Tale*, particularly in how it envisions classical antiquity.<sup>1</sup> However, despite its apparent conventionality, Lydgate's *Siege* breaks with the medieval Theban tradition's most basic assumption: the belief in a pre-existing Theban condition, a genetic predisposition towards familial strife as the root of conflict.<sup>2</sup> All previous medieval Theban narratives exploited, in one way or another, this Theban condition to generate plot. Lydgate, however, eradicates this pre-existing Theban condition from his account of Theban history; he brings an end to the hereditary Theban curse. Thus Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* represents not only the last medieval Theban narrative, but also the terminus of this branch of the Theban tradition.

### THE *SIEGE* AND THE MIRROR FOR PRINCES GENRE

At first, it would seem that Lydgate followed a conservative course in designing his history of the Theban war, for in approaching the Theban legend, Lydgate employed a familiar medieval lens for viewing and interpreting matters of history: the mirror for princes. The term "mirror for princes" refers to medieval books of counsel written predominantly by churchmen for members of the ruling class. Such manuals were designed to guide rulers in their conduct in matters ranging from personal piety to princely education to political policy. The mirror works on the assumption that effective and morally sound government emanates from a morally sound ruler, and thus

it places great emphasis on the character formation of the individual ruler. Typically, they encourage the ruler towards prudence, faith and magnanimity, and entreat him against the sins of avarice, lust, frivolity and abuses of power. Of course, in some sense, the mirror of princes is a risky genre, for the author, the king's subject, presumes to tell the king what to do. However, given the long tradition of the mirror genre by the early fifteenth century, Lydgate's criticisms of the military tyrant were perfectly conservative.

Often referred to by his contemporaries simply as "the monk," Lydgate followed in the footsteps of earlier churchmen who had composed books of counsel for rulers and policymakers.<sup>3</sup> From the age of about fifteen, Lydgate was associated with the great Benedictine monastery of Bury Saint Edmund's, though like many members of the religious orders at the time, he spent considerable time outside of the cloister, including long stays in London.<sup>4</sup> In fact, his monastic career enabled Lydgate to form contacts with many of the most influential people of his day (many of whom became his patrons) and provided him with the security and resources (including access to a library of two thousand volumes) with which to launch his literary career.<sup>5</sup> During the period in which he composed the *Siege of Thebes* (1420-22), Lydgate was closely connected with the royal court of Henry V, at a time when Henry had just achieved his goal, beginning in 1415, of pursuing Edward III's original claim to the throne of France as well as England. However, despite his association with Henry even from the period before his reign as king (Henry commissioned the *Troy Book* from Lydgate, which he completed in 1412, a year before Henry's coronation), Lydgate's early works, including the *Troy Book* and the *Siege*, do not advocate military expansionism as a preferable or sustainable method of governance.<sup>6</sup> Instead, Lydgate uses the *Siege*, in part, to condemn the brutality and waste of warfare and to encourage a policy of peace maintained by vigilant diplomacy. Of course, his bid for peace in the *Siege* may seem hollow given that the Treaty of Troyes, whereby Henry secured his claims with France, had been signed two years prior to his completion of the *Siege*. Nevertheless, the nature of Lydgate's revisions to Theban history in the poem suggest profound misgivings concerning traditional assumptions about the nature of Theban history, misgivings that extend beyond the deeds of Henry V.

Lydgate had a long tradition of advice manuals for princes upon which to draw.<sup>7</sup> The earliest and most influential guides for ruler conduct for medieval thinkers came out of the patristic tradition. In his *City of God* (5.24), St. Augustine gives a portrait of the ideal ruler, followed by the positive examples of Constantine and Theodosius. Gregory the Great, in his *Pastoral Care*, provides detailed guidelines for the proper conduct of bishops, guidelines that soon formed the model for secular rule. With the Carolingian period, we see the first formal medieval mirrors for princes including Martinus Braga's (d.580) *Formula vitae honestae* and Smaragdus of St. Mihiel's *Via regia* (c. 811-14), probably written for Louis I the Pious. In the Scholastic period of the twelfth century, there is John of Salisbury's famous *Policraticus*, written not for

the king, Henry II, but for his chancellor, Thomas à Becket. This period also saw the first Latin translations of the highly influential pseudo-Aristotelian, ninth-century Arabic mirror for princes, the *Kitab sirr al-asrar* (*The Book of the Secret of Secrets*, known in the West as the *Secretum Secretorum*).

The genre continued to thrive up through Lydgate's England. John Gower includes a mirror for princes in book seven of the *Confessio Amantis* of 1390-3, and Thomas Hoccleve composed the *Regement of Princes* of 1412, which he presented to Henry V just ten years before Lydgate composed his *Siege of Thebes*.<sup>8</sup> Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee* has also been described by recent critics as a mirror for princes.<sup>9</sup> Lydgate's own literary career includes examples of the mirror form in addition to the *Siege*: his *Fall of Princes* (1431-9), his longest poem, is an encyclopedia of moralized biographies of men and women of classical, biblical and medieval history, predominantly offering cautionary examples of illustrious men who met misfortune, and intended to teach virtue by demonstrating Fortune's mutability. Finally, late in his career (1445-46), Lydgate undertook a partial translation of the *Secreta Secretorum*. Thus, the form of the mirror for princes continued to enjoy a certain degree of popularity in Lydgate's day, and, in this respect, Lydgate followed established tradition in shaping his history of the Theban war as a mirror of princes, looking to the various leaders of the conflict for examples of either virtuous or misguided leadership.

However, Lydgate's choice of the mirror for princes genre for Theban history in particular was not a conservative move by any means, for with the mirror for princes, Lydgate challenges the historical model that had dominated the medieval understanding of Theban history up to that point. Lydgate inherited a view of Theban history that explicitly denies the role of free will in shaping historical outcome. As we have seen in the previous chapters, for medieval poets and audiences, the medieval legend of Thebes explores and illustrates historical recurrence, a model of history derived from St. Augustine's notion of Providential history in his *City of God*. Secular history tends to follow a pattern of dominion and fall because of the sinful nature of fallen mankind. While individuals can, to some extent, avert disaster by choosing the path of righteousness, the examples of earthly civilizations are a testimony of human frailty and vice. The Theban race, in particular, suffers doubly (and justifiably) due to their propensity for incest and familial strife. In classical etiology, this originates with Cadmus' slaying of a serpent sacred to Mars. When, on the advice of Pallas, he plants its teeth in the area that will become Thebes, the teeth sprout into feuding warriors, whose descendants become "*anguigenae*" ["the serpent's race"] and "*proles Marvortia*" ["children of Mars"] (*Metamorphoses*, III.531).<sup>10</sup> As the cursed race of antiquity, their successive generations seem destined to commit the same crimes and suffer the same consequences into perpetuity. In the span of ancient history, Theban history reproduces at the familial level the same pattern that plagues all of secular history at the social and political level: a series of disasters all resembling one another.

Prior to Lydgate, all medieval Theban narratives grapple with this notion of a hereditary Theban condition that lies at the root of Theban history. The poet of the OF *Roman de Thèbes* exploits the legendary cursedness of the Theban race by way of justifying its overthrow. Under the mantle of twelfth-century crusade literature, Theban criminality expands to include all the crimes of the medieval infidel, including idolatry, sexual lasciviousness and political corruption. Their overthrow by the “Greeks,” who bear all the qualifications of Norman crusaders, becomes yet another instance of the triumph of Western Christianity over Eastern corruption, part of God’s plan. The same model of Providential history that dominates the dual traditions of the crusade chronicle and the *chanson de geste* also shapes the OF *Thèbes*. Thus in the hands of the twelfth-century poet, Theban history is appropriated to offer an *apologia* for Norman expansion.<sup>11</sup>

Giovanni Boccaccio picks up this question of an inescapable Theban condition in a slightly different form in his *Teseida*. Rather than upholding a specific political agenda, as the OF poet had done, he concerns himself with the role of the individual within the larger, predetermined historical plan. He explores the possibilities for human agency and happiness despite an inherited predisposition for conflict. Boccaccio creates a window in this historical scheme whereby his Theban heroes briefly transcend their Theban heritage. Through the intervention of medieval chivalric romance, Arcita and Palemone glimpse certain insights into the destructive pattern of Theban history that threatens to consume their lives. For a time, their future looks promising, but their new insights cannot alter the historical plan. The tragedy of the *Teseida* lies not in how Arcita and Palemone perpetuate the Theban pattern of history (since they manage to break this cycle), but in how their new insights fail to inform and avert the upcoming disaster at Troy. Indeed, the conflict in Theseus’ Athens becomes a rehearsal for Troy.

Chaucer follows Boccaccio in his interest in the role of the individual within the larger predetermined historical plan. But unlike Boccaccio, who seeks to liberate his Thebans from their cursed ancestry, Chaucer perpetuates it within a new generation. His project in the *Knight’s Tale* involves exploring how members of a criminal race conduct themselves on a daily basis in the privacy of their own lives. What form does their decision-making take? What motivates them? How does Theban criminality reveal itself in a non-Theban setting? The *Knight’s Tale* presents a static view of Theban history. The latest generation of Thebans, Arcite and Palaemon remain, like their ancestors, impervious to insight and change because Chaucer denies them the Christian foundation for change. Thus the transformative power of romance which Boccaccio employs to end Theban fraternal strife falls into inept hands with Chaucer’s two heroes. Theban strife prevails and the only consolation is resignation, and the poem ends with a politically motivated forced marriage. Thus Chaucer, Boccaccio and the OF poet all struggle in one way or another with Thebanness as a historical

life-sentence. Such a model of historical stasis, however, proved incompatible with the vision of history that Lydgate sought to expound in the *Siege*.

With the mirror for princes, Lydgate replaces the historical model predicated on man's lack of control in shaping historical outcome, with a historical model that presumes man's control in directing the course of history. As a guide for conduct and decision-making for magnates, the mirror for princes is predicated on the notion that rulers have a choice. The question of control over historical outcome in the mirror genre revolves around the notion of Fortune, perhaps the most complex idea with which the mirror genre contends. To be sure, one view of Fortune that comes across in the mirror suggests that the workings of Fortune are arbitrary and often bring misfortune to otherwise virtuous people, as in the case, I will argue, of Edippus. On the other hand, Fortune acts as the right arm of God who "hath the sovereynte,/And of Fortune the power may restreyne,/To save and spille lik as folk disserve," as Lydgate indicates in the *Fall of Princes* (I, 4979-9).<sup>12</sup> Fortune dispenses punishment on the wicked and rewards the virtuous. Men, therefore, through good conduct, can incur good Fortune and avoid misfortune. The mirror for princes provides guidelines for influencing Fortune in this way, and operates on the assumption that rulers have a moral responsibility to do so. While Lydgate is by no means consistent in his treatment of Fortune in either the *Fall of Princes* or the *Siege*, the mirror for princes form, with its presumption of an indeterminate historical plan open to human intervention, enables him to view Theban history in an entirely new light.<sup>13</sup>

However, in choosing the mirror for princes as the historical model for his adaptation of Theban history, Lydgate faced a conceptual dilemma. How could he use the history of a cursed race, deprived of the opportunity of wise decision-making by virtue of their ancestral stock, to illustrate the importance of wise decision-making in directing the course of history? How could he promote a vision of historical empowerment to rulers by means of a legend about historical *disempowerment*? How was he to contend with the Theban criminal record, a record partly inherited and partly earned? If he intended to attribute Theban misfortune to poor choices on their part, then he would have to grant them the power of choice to begin with. This would entail overcoming the genealogical obstacle of Theban ancestry, which means re-writing Theban history, and this is precisely what Lydgate does in the *Siege of Thebes*. He turns, therefore, to the most comprehensive version of Theban history available to him.

### **THE *SIEGE* AND THE PROSE REDACTIONS OF THE OF *ROMAN DE THÈBES***

In retelling the story of the Theban conflict, John Lydgate looked not to the Latinate tradition, to Statius, for his main source material, but to the vernacular tradition, to a French prose redaction of the OF *Roman de Thèbes*.<sup>14</sup> Scholars have identified four

prose redactions of the OF poem: the First Redaction dating to c.1223-30;<sup>15</sup> the Second Redaction dating to the mid-thirteenth century;<sup>16</sup> a Third Redaction preserved only in two fifteenth-century manuscripts,<sup>17</sup> and a recently discovered Fourth Redaction dating to c.1475-80.<sup>18</sup> All four redactions were incorporated into a larger universal history entitled the *Histoire Ancienne Jusqu'à César*, generally believed to be a French prose translation of the *Seven Books against the Pagans* by Paulus Orosius. Combining biblical and ancient history, the *Histoire* contains the stories of the Theban and Trojan Wars, the adventures of Aeneas, and the story of the founding of Rome.<sup>19</sup> The authorship of the *Histoire*, at least for the First Redaction, may be ascribed to Wachier de Denain, who dedicates his work to Roger IV (1208-30), Châtelain de Lille.<sup>20</sup> Based on the occurrence of an episode in the *Siege* that appears only in the First Redaction of the prose *Thèbes* and not in subsequent redactions, I agree with Constans that Lydgate consulted a copy of the First Redaction of the *Thèbes* for his *Siege*,<sup>21</sup> and, therefore, I have based my comparisons between Lydgate's *Siege* and his source text on a copy of the First Redaction as found in the *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*, MS B.N.F.fr. 20125, recently edited by Molly Lynde-Recchia (though precisely which manuscript of the prose *Thèbes* Lydgate used remains unknown).<sup>22</sup>

Before turning to Lydgate's *Siege*, I will first provide a brief overview of the prose *Thèbes* and how it compares with the OF *Roman de Thèbes*. Like the OF poem, the prose *Thèbes* champions the Greek side of the Theban conflict, the side of Adrastus and Polynices (who, in the OF poem are configured as crusaders). Hence, despite the fact that all of the characters in the story are pagan, there are many virtuous pagans in the prose *Thèbes* as well as in the *Siege* (e.g. King Adrastus and Tydeus). As in the OF *Thèbes*, Tydeus is the undisputed hero of the prose *Thèbes*, as he is in Lydgate's poem as well. Lydgate does not enhance Tydeus as a model of chivalry; he inherits him that way. The prose *Thèbes* also follows the OF poem in starting with a much more extensive rendition of the story of Oedipus than we find in Statius. (As we shall see, Lydgate expands coverage of Oedipus even further in the *Siege*.) Unlike the OF *Thèbes*, however, the prose *Thèbes* reduces the martial element of the story of the Theban War down to the barest minimum; the redactor lists warriors and reports battles telegraphically, never dwelling on details of armor, horses or tactic. In place of this, we get extensive coverage of the diplomatic relations of the Theban war, a series of councils and embassies to the opposing sides.

More importantly, however, the prose *Thèbes* contains none of the Oriental aspect that characterizes the OF *Roman de Thèbes*. The redactor has removed the crusading element from the OF poem including all of the eastern mercenaries (Turks, Azopars, Petchenegs, among others) from Ethioclés' army, as well as the enlisted crusaders from Adrastus' army. The city of Thebes itself no longer lies within an eastern political landscape as in the OF poem, but rather in a more generic landscape of antiquity. Similarly, the redactor has edited out all three scenes which the OF poet had imported from the

crusade chronicles (Montflor, famine and foraging, and Daire le Roux).<sup>23</sup> Hence Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* contains none of the crusading ethos of OF *Thèbes* and none of the three scenes derived from the chronicle accounts of the First Crusade.

Any analysis of Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* must begin by asking why Lydgate would have chosen a French prose redaction of the OF *Thèbes* as the primary source for his Theban narrative. If he wanted to revisit the terrain of the Theban war as fought by Eteocles and Polynices, why not rely on the more authoritative, Latinate tradition of Statius? From M. R. James' study of the manuscript collection at the monastery of Bury St. Edmund's, where Lydgate spent his career, we know that the poet had access to Statius' *Thebaid*.<sup>24</sup> Yet he chose to work from a vernacular prose account of the Theban war. What about the prose *Thèbes* appealed to Lydgate?

Several possible reasons arise for Lydgate's interest in the particular form of Theban history found in the prose *Thèbes*. First, Lydgate seems chiefly concerned with matters of peace, not war. For instance, perhaps the best-known addition that Lydgate brings to the story of the Theban war occurs in the closing lines of the *Siege* where he appropriates the language of the Treaty of Troyes of 1420 (4703), and throughout the poem he pays very careful attention to scenes of negotiation between the opposing sides. Unlike Statius' *Thebaid*, which gives enormous coverage of combat, the prose *Thèbes* contains virtually no martial element. In its place, the redactor presents scene after scene of the diplomatic process at work (councils, speeches, debates), most of which derive from the OF *Thèbes*. Such a narrative provided Lydgate with precisely the raw material he needed to develop his own narrative on strategies of good governance: the prose *Thèbes* offered a model for the peace process in a way that Statius did not.

Second, Lydgate may have chosen the prose *Thèbes* as his primary source for its greater chronological coverage of Theban history than Statius' *Thebaid*. The prose *Thèbes* begins with the story of Laius, the father of Oedipus, and ends with the destruction of Thebes. This sweeping span of Theban history beyond the confines of the Theban war itself appealed to Lydgate for, as we shall see, he wanted to engage the entire race of Thebans and their history rather than a single generation. (This also explains why he chose not to model his Theban narrative on the more recent models of Chaucer's *Knights Tale* and Boccaccio's *Teseida*.) In fact, Lydgate stretches the story's chronology even further back by beginning with the generations preceding Laius, at the very foundation of Theban civilization.<sup>25</sup>

Third, as a work in prose incorporated into the larger *Histoire Ancienne*, the prose *Thèbes* belonged, for Lydgate, squarely in the domain of history. We know from his earlier *Troy Book* of 1412 that Lydgate regarded what he believed to be historical sources (e.g. Guido delle Colonne's *Historia Destructionis Troiae*) as a more reliable basis for a narrative of antiquity than a work of fiction (e.g. Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*).<sup>26</sup> While late medieval commentators held that the *Thebaid* related events that

were “true,” they nevertheless acknowledged that it employs “*actus mixtus*,” or “mixed action,” which includes both “true” and “false” (fictional) elements (e.g. acts of the pagan gods).<sup>27</sup> It comes as no surprise, then, that Lydgate would have based his Theban narrative on what he believed to be a factual account of ancient historical figures, the prose *Thèbes* contained within the *Histoire Ancienne*. Indeed, while Lydgate himself writes in verse, he identifies his purpose in writing the *Siege*, as Robert Ayers has shown, with the aims of medieval historical narrative, that is, of teaching a moral lesson through historical example, a quality shared by medieval historical writings as a whole, including the mirror for princes.<sup>28</sup> His timely allusion to the Treaty of Troyes at the end of the poem, for instance, suggests that he attempts to influence the current course of history using the example of ancient history in a way that Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale*, for example, never presumes to do.<sup>29</sup> Thus Lydgate seems to have chosen the prose *Thèbes* over the *Thebaid* as his main source for the *Siege* for its status as a historical document, its wider chronological span than the *Thebaid*, and for its emphasis on peaceful negotiation over armed confrontation. For these purposes, the *Thèbes* provided Lydgate with better raw material for addressing the problems of Theban history in its entirety.

### LYDGATE’S REVISION OF THEBAN GENEALOGY

At first it would seem that John Lydgate, like his predecessors, simply perpetuates the “bad-gene” theory of Theban history.<sup>30</sup> In his *Siege of Thebes*, Ethiocles and Polymyte appear to be the latest reincarnations of Theban criminality in the generation following Edippus. Towards the end of Part I of the *Siege of Thebes*, just as we move from the Edippus portion of the narrative into the story of the feuding brothers, Lydgate seems to restate the bad-gene theory unequivocally:

*Of Cursid stok cometh vnkynde blood,  
As in story ye may rede her to-forn.* (ll.1014-15)<sup>31</sup>

Ethiocles and Polymyte have just tossed the corpse of their father into a pit, acting “wers than serpent or eny tigre wood” (1013). He attributes their cruelty to their “cursid stok,” apparently an echo of the well-known charge of polluted Theban ancestry. But is this what Lydgate means here? If we look back into Part I of the *Siege*, the account of Theban history leading up to the Theban war, and up to the juncture in the narrative noted above, we find that Lydgate overturns the entire argument for an irredeemable Theban ancestry.

He begins this revision of Theban history by redesigning Theban genealogy itself. Departing from his source in the prose *Thèbes* (which begins with Laius), Lydgate goes back to the very beginnings of Theban history, to the very founding of Thebes. He tells the story of king Amphion and his building of the walls of Thebes.

He then places Amphion at the head of the Theban family tree. However, Amphion is not the progenitor of the house of Thebes according to the medieval (or classical) Theban tradition. Cadmus occupies that position. According to legend, Cadmus, having given up the search for his abducted sister, Europa, settles in the area that will become Thebes. When a dragon, sacred to Mars, devours his men, he slays the dragon and sows its teeth in the ground, on the advice of Pallas. The seeds sprout into warriors who erupt into fighting until only five remain, the *Spartoi*, the mythical ancestors of prominent Theban families. The tale of Cadmus' dragon-warriors establishes the seeds, quite literally, for recurring Theban civil war, a lesson fully grasped by Lydgate's predecessors.

Many of Lydgate's sources preserve the story of Cadmus' founding of the Theban line. Statius gives this account of Theban origins in the opening lines of his *Thebaid* (l.6ff.), the source of the idea of the "disastrous race" for the medieval West. Although the OF *Thebes* poet and the prose redactor mention nothing about Cadmus, Boccaccio's Arcita and Palemone are, as they tell Teseo, descended from Cadmus: "*In casa sua nati e cresciuti/fummo, e de' suo' nepoti semo*" (*Teseida*, II.88) ["We were born and grew up in his house. We are of his grandchildren"].<sup>32</sup> Moreover, Arcita explicitly traces the pattern of Theban civil war to the story of the dragon-warriors, who "*sanza riguardar fraterno amore/fra lor succisero*" (*Teseida*, V.57) ["killed one another without regard for brotherly love"]. Chaucer, too, traces his Theban heroes to Cadmus and not to Amphion: Arcite identifies Cadmus as "the firste man/That Thebes bulte, or first the toun bigan,/And of the citee first was crowned kyng./Of his lynage am I and his ofspryng/Be verray ligne, as of the stok roial" (*Knight's Tale*, l.1547-51).<sup>33</sup> John Gower identifies Cadmus as "him that Thebes ferst on hyg/Up sette" (*Confessio Amantis*, l.339-49).<sup>34</sup> Thus, we see in just a few of Lydgate's sources that Cadmus, not Amphion, holds the rank of founder of Thebes and Theban ancestry.

We find the clearest statement of Cadmean descent in Boccaccio's *Genealogia deorum gentilium*, perhaps Lydgate's chief source for ancient mythography.<sup>35</sup> According to Boccaccio, Oedipus is descended from Labdacus, the brother of Cadmus. Labdacus begot Laius, who begot Oedipus, who begot Eteocles and Polynices. Polynices begot Thessadro with Argia, the daughter of Adrastus.<sup>36</sup> Thus, while Oedipus, according to Boccaccio, does not descend directly from Cadmus but from Cadmus' brother, Labdacus, he nevertheless belongs to the family of Cadmus.<sup>37</sup> Of course, this leaves the precise descent of Boccaccio's Arcita and Palemone unclear, but in both the *Teseida* and the *Genealogiae* the house of Oedipus descends from Cadmus, not Amphion.

Lydgate, however, erases Cadmus from the Theban family tree. In fact, he has Amphion exile Cadmus from Thebes "Neuer after to dwellen in this toun" (l.308-9), before he has had a chance to bear offspring. We hear nothing about Cadmus' marriage to Harmonia or of his daughters (Semele, Ino, Agave, and Autonoe), all of whose tragic stories of rape, incest and murder contribute to the dark

landscape of Theban history. Their stories are recorded in many of Lydgate's sources, even if we exclude ancient sources. For example, Chaucer gives a brief synopsis of the story of the brooch of Thebes, a wedding gift from Vulcan to Harmonia, in his *Complaint of Mars* (l.245). (One of the manuscript witnesses of this poem (MS Harley 7333) entitles the work "*The Broche of Thebes.*")<sup>38</sup> Lydgate includes this poem under the title "the broche which that Vulcanus/At Thebes wrouhte" in his list of Chaucer's works in the Prologue to the *Fall of Princes* (ll.322-23). In his *Teseida*, Boccaccio mentions Agave three times (V.58 and gloss, and X.96 gloss), Ino twice (I.41 gloss, and V.57 gloss), and Semele seven times (II.7 gloss, III.1 gloss, IV.14 and gloss, V.58 and gloss, and X.97) as the daughters of Cadmus who met tragic ends. He also tells their stories in *De casibus virorum illustribus* (*The Fates of Illustrious Men*) as well as in his *Genealogiae*.<sup>39</sup> John Gower mentions Yno as the daughter of Cadmus in his *Confessio Amantis* (V. 4271-3). From this survey, it becomes clear, therefore, that in eliminating Cadmus' wife and daughters from his account of Theban origins, Lydgate omits well-known information on Theban history preserved in a variety of medieval sources, sources to which he had access when he composed the *Siege*.<sup>40</sup>

Interestingly, Lydgate does not eliminate Cadmus from Theban history through blank omission. He consciously rewrites Theban history in Part I of the poem by recalling the textual tradition that preserves Cadmus' story:

*But sothly yit Some expositours,  
Groundyng hem vpon olde auctours,  
Seyn that Cadmus the famous olde man,  
Ful longe afor this Citè first began  
And the ground of the bieldyng sette ... (293-97)*

These "olde auctours" include many of the poets Lydgate praises and cites throughout the *Siege* such as Chaucer, whom Lydgate calls the "Floure of Poetes" (l.40), Boccaccio and Gower. But Lydgate promptly dismisses their version of Theban history:

*But Cadmus ther hath longe not soiourned,  
like in Story as it is compyled;  
For shortly he from thennys was exiled ... (306-8)*

Lydgate banishes Cadmus from the Theban scene before he can leave an imprint on the Theban royal line.<sup>41</sup> This means rewriting the accounts of the "expositours" and "olde auctours." It means rewriting history. His departure from these revered sources challenges a long-standing assumption of some critics that Lydgate tends to amplify rather than change his sources.<sup>42</sup> If anything, Lydgate *abbreviates* his sources on the matter of Cadmus, and this is not a case of Lydgate deliberately misreading his source

material, as other critics have observed about Lydgate's reading (or misreading) of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* in the Prologue to the *Siege*.<sup>43</sup> After all, Lydgate openly acknowledges the official status of the Cadmean version of Theban origins. Rather, Lydgate consciously and publicly replaces the official version of Theban genealogy with an alternate version only vaguely suggested by his sources.

In place of Cadmus, Lydgate elevates Amphion as the progenitor of the Theban line. In doing so, Lydgate redesigns Theban genealogy to the utter exclusion of Cadmus. As he segues from the story of Amphion to that of Laius, Lydgate insists on a direct succession from Amphion down:

... the lyne Ran  
From kyng to kyng be successioun,  
Conveying down the stok of Amphyoun  
Cereously be lyneal discent. (330-3)

Of course, in the absence of textual sources for an Amphian royal line, Lydgate leaves blank the specific names constituting this genealogy. Thus he leaps from Amphion to king Laius who, he tells us, "be processe gan succede/To bere the Croune" (ll.336-7). He does not, and cannot, supply the details of this process. Nevertheless, in this passage Lydgate insists not only on a Theban bloodline derived from "the stok of Amphyoun," but also on an unbroken line of kingly succession. The fact is that Theban genealogy is anything but straightforward on either the biological or the political level. Even Boccaccio, who provides perhaps the clearest chart of Theban genealogy, sidesteps the political details between the exile of Cadmus and the reign of Laius. (At some point during this period, the crown of Thebes was again usurped by a figure named Lycus, who was eventually killed by Hercules; Boccaccio mentions the slaying without providing any further detail about how this fits into Theban history.<sup>44</sup>) Despite this history of political insurrection and displaced bloodlines, however, Lydgate insists on a biologically and politically unified Theban genealogy originating with Amphion. In the process, he supplies a much more elaborate and laudatory portrait of Amphion than any found in his sources.

Without exception, critics have taken at face value Lydgate's claim for Amphion as "the legendary founder of Thebes," and reproduced this tag again and again without further investigation. At Lydgate's prompting, they have confused Amphion's artistic importance in Theban history with a biological importance. Therefore, Lydgate's revision of Theban genealogy has gone unnoticed by Lydgate scholars. Even Lee Patterson, who provides the most insightful interpretation of the contrast between Amphion and Cadmus in the *Siege*, presents the stories of these two figures as two competing accounts of Theban origins when, in fact, Amphion has never rivaled Cadmus as the progenitor of the Theban line.<sup>45</sup> He has no history as the biological

founder of the Theban race, and he arrives in Thebes to build the walls only after the site has been settled by Cadmus.

In medieval textual tradition, Amphion was an important, but temporary, figure in Theban history. By ancient accounts, Amphion, the son of Jupiter and Antiope and the twin brother of Zethus, had been raised by a shepherd and instructed in music by Mercury.<sup>46</sup> Upon reaching maturity, he and Zethus usurped the throne of Thebes from Lycus (who himself had usurped it previously) and the two became joint rulers of the city. (In Homer's *Odyssey*, the twin brothers are presented as the founders of Thebes, but this is not the story preserved in the medieval West.) While some of his early history was known to medieval readers, Amphion's most celebrated contribution to Theban history involves building the walls of Thebes. Playing a lyre which Mercury had given him, Amphion prompts the stones to move into formation of their own accord. Thus, Amphion is the founder of the fabric of the city of Thebes, but not the progenitor of the Theban line.

Lydgate's medieval sources preserve this artisan portrait of Amphion. In Martianus Capella's *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, one of Lydgate's chief sources for mythography in the *Siege*, Amphion appears with Orpheus and Arion as a skillful musician of ancient legend.<sup>47</sup> In both Boccaccio's *Teseida* and Chaucer's *Knights Tale*, Amphion appears as simply the builder of the walls of Thebes, an artist rendering a service.<sup>48</sup> (Chaucer's knight-narrator does not explicitly credit Amphion with this feat, though l. 1547 seems to imply that Amphion, not Cadmus, built the walls of Thebes). Chaucer also mentions Amphion in the *Manciple's Tale* as he who "with his syngyng walled that citee [Thebes]" (117). The same holds true for Boccaccio's portrait of Amphion in the *Genealogiae* (V, Chapter 30). Boccaccio also relates this story of Amphion in his retelling of the legend of Niobe, the wife of Amphion, in *De Claris Mulieribus* (*Famous Women*).<sup>49</sup> In his *De Casibus*, Boccaccio tells of Amphion's banishment of Cadmus, but he says nothing about Amphion's progeny.<sup>50</sup> In the *De Claris Mulieribus*, Boccaccio's story of Niobe (adapted from Ovid) relates how all fourteen of her children with Amphion died of a fatal plague, leaving Amphion childless.<sup>51</sup> Out of overwhelming grief, Amphion stabs himself to death. Moreover, the Thebans find the misfortune of Amphion's family just punishment for the prideful insult issued by Niobe to the goddess Latona. In his *Genealogiae* (V, 31), Boccaccio lists the names of Amphion's children, but they meet the same end.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, Boccaccio's genealogical chart for Amphion indicates no second generation of Amphion's offspring. For Boccaccio, Amphion cannot possibly be the founder of the Theban line because all of this children died prematurely while Amphion himself kills himself before he can bear further offspring. Chaucer remains silent on the question of Amphion's offspring, and, in fact, none of Lydgate's other sources identify Amphion as the founder of Thebes in any biological sense.<sup>53</sup> Yet Lydgate, citing the authority of "myn auctour and bochas both two" where "ye shal fynde it so," (ll.199-200) claims

Amphion as the founder of the Theban line despite the lack of evidence in those texts.<sup>54</sup> The question now before us is why Amphion?

I suggest that Lydgate chose Amphion as the founder of Thebes in an effort to cleanse Theban history of its monolithically violent past. Lydgate found in the story of Amphion a rare, innocuous episode in Theban history, for Amphion occupies a unique place in the legend of Thebes as perhaps its most blameless figure. His single contribution to Thebes is an act of beauty and grace, of employing art for the benefit of civilization. Lydgate saw in Amphion an artist in service to the state and builds upon the artistic and political implications of this image with details not found in his sources. He adds to Amphion's talents the "craft of Rethorik" (l.219), granted to him by Mercury, "god of Eloquence" (l.215), at his birth (l.217). Amphion uses "wordes swete" (l.229) in service to the state "lich as Poetys feyne in her writyng" (l.242). He adds physical charm and a kind disposition ("His cheer his port was outward so benygne" (l.234)). In the end, Amphion becomes not merely a talented artist, but also a talented leader.<sup>55</sup> In Amphion, Lydgate creates the model ruler that Thebes never had.<sup>56</sup>

By means of this new portrait of Amphion, Lydgate creates a myth of a golden age in Theban history, a chapter entirely missing in earlier Theban narratives.<sup>57</sup> Lydgate sees in Amphion's effectiveness with the stones a metaphor for the effective rule of people. He drew the germ for this idea from Boccaccio's *Genalogiae* (V, 30), though it also appears in the commentary tradition on the *Thebaid*.<sup>58</sup> Boccaccio likens the rocks to stubborn people who need a visionary ruler to mobilize them. Boccaccio writes: "*atq(ue) rudibus & duris ho(min)ibus & sparsim dege(neren)tibus: ut in unu(m) co(n)uenirent: & ciuilitate uiuere(n)t:*" (V, 30) ["so, too, rude and thick, and more or less degenerate people might come together in unity and live in a civilized manner"]. While Boccaccio makes the same connection that Lydgate later does between Amphion's artistry and civic unity, he leaves this image in the subjunctive, as something that *might* be.

Lydgate, however, makes this metaphor of rocks/citizens found in Boccaccio a historical reality the *Siege*. Thus, after raising the walls of Thebes "With-oute craft of eny mannys hond" (l.209), Amphion begins uniting the citizenry of Thebes using the same technique:

... thorgh his stiring and exortacioun  
With hym they went to bylde first this toun,  
And forsook ecch man his contrè,  
Be on assent to make this Cytè  
Royal and riche that lich was nowher noon. (ll.235-39)

Lydgate takes what is figurative in Boccaccio and makes it literal; Amphion literally mobilizes the citizens of Thebes into a harmonious community. With this scene,

Lydgate presents an example of civic unity and pride, where citizens come together for the common good of the state under the guidance of a wise ruler who “can aduerte,/Grete hatred in the puples herte” (ll.251-2). Such civic harmony is an anomaly of Theban history, a city wracked by civil war generation after generation. Yet Lydgate brings to Theban history a precedent for civic cooperation.<sup>59</sup> In doing this, Lydgate implies that whatever criminality sullied later generations of Thebans did not originate here in the earliest moments of Theban history, and this holds enormous implications for the rest of the narrative, where faulty leadership, and not heredity, becomes the cornerstone of Theban criminality. Amphion’s people defy the reputation of Thebans as a historically and genetically polluted race.

### REDEEMING EDIPPUS

If we turn to Lydgate’s portrait of Edippus, who occupies most of Part I of the *Siege*, we find a similar reluctance to implicate the Thebans on racial grounds. Many critics tend to view Edippus as a dark contrast to Amphion, the model ruler.<sup>60</sup> But if we compare Lydgate’s version of the Edippus story with that of his sources, especially the prose *Thèbes*, we find that Lydgate affords Edippus greater sympathy than his predecessors. First of all, Lydgate makes Edippus a direct descendant of king Amphion “by lyneal discent” (l.333). He tells us that Layus, Edippus’ father, “be processe gan succede/to bere the Croune” (ll.336-7) (though, as we have seen, Lydgate leaves out the details of this process). Lydgate does not derive this detail from his immediate source, the prose *Thèbes*, which begins with “*Uns rois estoit adonques en Thebes, riches e poissans. Laius estoit apelés*” (Chapter 1).<sup>61</sup> The prose *Thèbes* makes no mention of Laius’ ancestry. Nor do we find this detail in Lydgate’s other sources, which trace Theban descent back to the more dubious figure of Cadmus, when they mention it at all. Lydgate alone makes Edippus a direct descendant of Amphion, a model ruler. Thus Edippus’ crimes of parricide and incest originate with him, with his own pride (l.467), not with his ancestors.

Second, Lydgate repeatedly stresses Edippus’ unawareness of the transgressions he commits, particularly towards the end of Edippus’ life. Though he adheres to his immediate source in the prose *Thèbes* in admitting Edippus’ youthful pride and melancholy (ll.467 and 472; cf. prose *Thèbes*, Chapters 5, 6, and 7), he departs from his source in stressing Edippus’ ignorance of the traps into which he falls. He tells us, for instance, at the beginning and again at the end of the wedding scene, that in marrying his mother, Jocasta, Edippus, was “derk and blynde of his woful chaunce” (l.810) and “vnwist he of Innocence” (l.811). The prose *Thèbes* does not allow for Edippus’ innocence; in fact, the author claims that at this point devils had possession of mankind (and by extension Edippus) (Chapter 17). Lydgate mentions no devils. Instead, Lydgate buffers the portrait of Edippus with professions of his innocence and offers alternate *foci* of blame.

Throughout the Edippus segment, Lydgate tends to place blame on the surrounding circumstances of Edippus' crimes rather than on Edippus himself. For instance, Lydgate adheres to the prose *Thèbes* in treating Edippus' slaying of Layus with brevity and neutrality (*Siege*, ll.580-87; prose *Thèbes* Chapter 10). Edippus enters the tournament, slays his father, and retreats from the scene, and Lydgate adds no further details or commentary to the murder, since "the story writ not the maner howh" (l.582). He does, however, criticize the tournament setting of the crime as "Rather a pley of werre than of pees" (l.575), an aside not derived from the prose *Thèbes* (Chapter 10). Circumstances, rather than innate wickedness, seem to have led Edippus to slay Layus.

Similarly, in his description of the wedding of Edippus and Jocasta, Lydgate blames the coming destruction of Thebes on the hideous wedding guests rather than on Edippus. Lydgate departs from his source markedly by providing a guest-list for the wedding (853ff.).<sup>62</sup> The list includes some gods and mythological figures (e.g. Cerberus, Mars, Tesiphone), but mainly allegorical figures (*Drede, Fraude, Trecherie, Tresoun, Pouerte*). The wedding becomes a *danse macabre*, a masque of misery, and Lydgate holds these same figures accountable for the destruction of this "Royal toun":

*All thise folk weren at this weddyng newe,  
To make the towne desolat and bare,  
As the story after shal declare. (ll.872-4)*

These uninvited guests who seem to operate beyond Edippus' control are responsible for Thebes' demise. Edippus' ancestors receive no mention, and Edippus himself remains offstage for the entire scene. While these figures may well constitute allegorical representations of Edippus' conduct, Lydgate has separated the person of Edippus from his behavior by including them as separate individuals. In the meantime, the two guests who might have allayed the impending "grete aduersite" (l.847), namely "sapience" (l.841) and "eloquence," (l.842) could not attend since they were getting married that same day. Again, Edippus is not held responsible.

Lydgate further redirects blame away from Edippus for his incestuous wedding when he intervenes with closing commentary. Lydgate relativizes Edippus' guilt when he points blame at the on-going practice in his own day of marrying blood relations:

*And yif vmwist be of Innocence,  
As ye han herde, fil in such offence,  
For which he was punished and brought lowe,  
What ar they worthy that her errour knowe,  
And fro the knotte list not to abstene  
Of such spousale to god and man vnclene?  
I can not seyn nor mor thereof devise. (ll.811-17)*

Suddenly, the “Prynce, lorde, or kyng” (l.803) to whom he directs his warning, and who customarily intermarried fully cognizant of their crime, seem more culpable in forging unholy bonds than Edippus. Edippus’ crime becomes less of an isolated incident and Edippus himself less of a freak.

A final way that Lydgate mitigates Edippus’ culpability involves the closing moral of the Edippus segment of the *Siege*. After describing how cruelly Ethiocles and Polmyte toss their father’s corpse into a pit, Lydgate moralizes the Edippus story with the familiar commandment to “do honour and due reuerence/To fader and moder” (ll.1022-3). It is difficult not to agree with A. C. Spearing’s assessment of this particular interpretation as an “inept explanation of one of the most haunting myths of Western man.”<sup>63</sup> Indeed, this is just the sort of interpretive move that has won Lydgate the rank of a second-rate poet. However, despite its simplicity, the moral at the end of the Edippus segment indicates an important re-reading of Theban history. First of all, Lydgate again deflects guilt away from Edippus by depicting him as the victim of two irreverent sons. Though Ethiocles and Polmyte would seem justified in their contempt for their father’s crime, Lydgate refuses to forgive them as they “trad hem vnder fote,/Fully devoide both of loue and drede” (ll.1008-9). Second, and more importantly, Lydgate’s moral lesson transforms the misery besetting Thebes from a matter of corrupt ancestry to a matter of voluntary personal conduct. Edippus fell into ruin not because of any in-bred tendency towards evil, but because he failed to honor both his natural and adoptive fathers in the pride of his youth. Ethiocles and Polmyte, too, voluntarily chose to dishonor their father, though they might have chosen to do otherwise. Their action, not their ancestry, incriminates them.

This brings us back to the question of what Lydgate means when he speaks of “cursid stok.” As we have seen, Lydgate’s revised Theban genealogy, which traces the Theban line to Amphion and his golden age of civic unity, eradicates the notion of a polluted race. Such a racial blight belongs to the descendants of Cadmus, whom Lydgate banishes from the Theban scene. Edippus does not inherit any tendency towards parricide and incest from his Amphionan ancestors by Lydgate’s account. Nor do Ethiocles and Polmyte inherit the tendency for fraternal strife from their father; once established as king of Thebes and husband of Jocasta, Edippus leads a life “devoide of werre and strif” (l.885) until Fortune brings about his demise out of “envie of his prosperite” (l.888). Edippus, like Amphion, is a model ruler who suffers from forces beyond his control.

I would suggest that the “cursid stok” to which Lydgate refers is a more localized phenomenon. It is limited to a specific point in Theban history and to Ethiocles and Polmyte themselves. It characterizes specifically the incestuous origins of Edippus’ sons, a single generation of Thebans. We first hear of “vnkynde blood” and “Fraternal hate” (ll.868-9) at Edippus’ wedding to Jocasta, where Lydgate forecasts their incestuous offspring despite his characterization of the marriage as “mery” (l.886). The

phrase does not apply to Edippus here. We hear of “vnkynde blood” again when Lydgate recounts Ethiocles and Polymyte’s mistreatment of their father. Both times, bad or unnatural blood delineates Edippus’ incestuous offspring, never previous generations of Thebans. Moreover, Lydgate qualifies his reference to “cursid stok” two lines later when he says “Al be the Roose grow out of a thorn” (l.1016); Ethiocles and Polymyte may have undeniably corrupt origins, but, on the other hand, roses can, and do, grow out of thorns. Beauty often springs from ugliness. In this way, Lydgate demonstrates flexibility in dealing with Theban affairs even with the inescapable fact of incest, of “vnkynde blood.” As we shall see, this flexibility proves pivotal to Lydgate’s reappraisal of Theban history in the remainder of the *Siege*.

Part I of the *Siege of Thebes* has often been seen as a protracted, largely unnecessary preamble to the story of the Theban war as conducted by Ethiocles and Polymyte. Derek Pearsall speaks of the “colossal irrelevance” of the Edippus story in the poem, attributing it to the “gratuitous accumulative nature of medieval poetry,” and, in all fairness, Lydgate all too often does pad his works with gratuitous detail.<sup>64</sup> Other critics have stressed the historiographic character of the *Siege*, so that we might argue that Lydgate simply adheres in Part I to the *ordo naturalis* of historical narrative by beginning at the beginning.<sup>65</sup>

However, Part I of the *Siege* constitutes the most important portion of the entire poem in terms of the medieval tradition of Thebes. Lydgate uses the preamble to the story of Ethiocles and Polymyte to redress the whole question of Theban racial culpability, the very foundation of the Theban legend. In revising Theban genealogy, he redesigns a Theban race that boasts noble, admirable origins, a race freed from the life sentence of polluted ancestry. He cleanses Theban history of its hopeless reputation. This entails putting the respectable figure of Amphion forth as the founder of the Theban line, and it entails shielding Edippus from the blame historically directed at him. It also means relocating culpability in the mind rather than in the bloodstream. Faulty reasoning and guidance, not faulty ancestry, become the culprits in historical disaster.

However the matter of bad blood does not end here in the *Siege of Thebes*. It resurfaces at the beginning of Part III on the heels of the invocation to Mars where he attributes the destruction of the city of Thebes to “blood corrupt and vnkynde,” the “ynfeccioun called Orygynal,” (ll.2565-6) which constitutes the “oonly” cause of the ensuing conflict, and he backs up this claim, as earlier ones, with “bookes olde” (l.2561). So again we must ask whether we can take Lydgate’s statement here at the opening of Part III at face value. Does Lydgate perpetuate the myth of Theban racial impurity when he cites other authorities? Does he attribute Theban strife “oonly” to “blood corrupt?” What does he accomplish by introducing the Christian concept of Original Sin into the discussion of Theban history? If we look at what comes before and after this passage, we see that Lydgate does not subscribe to the bad gene theory

of Theban history, that, in fact, his own re-working of Theban material disproves it. We see, too, that he ascribes Theban misfortune “oonly” to something else entirely, and not to “blood corrupt.” Moreover, we see that this “ynfeccioun called Orygynal” affects both sides of the conflict, not the Thebans alone.

## REASSESSING THEBAN SIN

Broadly speaking, Lydgate’s *Siege* contrasts the governing styles of Ethiocles and Adrastus, the Theban and “Greek” kings respectively, in keeping with the mirror for princes form. Part I recounts the events precipitating the war between the Thebans and the Greeks. We see Polymyte leave Thebes for Argos, marry Adrastus’ daughter and garner support for his claim to the Theban throne. At this point, Adrastus and Tydeus, working in unison to assemble an army, eclipse Polymyte in the narrative (as they also do in the prose *Thèbes* and in the OF poem). Towards the end of Part I, and for most of Part II, we spend time in the court of Ethiocles, observing his interactions with his advisors and tracking his decision-making. In Part III, we visit the court of Adrastus in Argos and observe the same processes at work. What emerges from this exercise are two portraits of leadership, but the portraits include more than the two respective leaders alone; they include the network of advisors, nobles and citizens in both cities.

The degree to which each leader manages and respects the needs and wishes of his advisory body determines his success or failure in Lydgate’s estimation. Questions of lineage or biological disposition are not determinate in the assessment of each leader’s performance. Instead, skills in stately procedure become the deciding criteria for admiration. Of course, one could suppose that such leadership skill is biologically determined, but Lydgate edits out the vocabulary of heredity in his assessment of Theban politics. In altering the criteria for success in this way, Lydgate effectively redefines the causes for Theban misfortune from the racially-specific and insurmountable question of bad blood, to failure in attainable and universal goals of statecraft. We can no longer use the excuse of cursed ancestry to explain and justify Theban misfortune. Nor can we claim any innate righteousness as the foundation for Greek success, or any political success for that matter.

Turning to Ethiocles, Lydgate indicts the Theban king not on racial grounds but on grounds of poor statesmanship based on poor judgment. Repeatedly, Lydgate presents Ethiocles with a choice between the path of wisdom and the path of folly, and repeatedly, Ethiocles chooses folly. One such scene comes after his court has just received news of Polymyte’s wedding in Argos. Ethiocles convenes a council, the first Theban council scene in the *Siege*. His council includes three types (“thre folkes” (l.1716)) of advisors: the first group, who receive the most coverage, advise him to follow “trouthe” and to honor his agreement of alternate rule with Polymyte. The other councilors (Lydgate does not clearly distinguish groups two and three) pander to Ethiocles’ desire for power; they advise him to retain a firm hold on the throne

regardless of “bond nor heestes mad tofor[n]” (l.1789). Unable to distinguish “feithful” and “trewe” (l.1717) advisors from flatterers, Ethiocles chooses flattery, which Lydgate marks as the “oonly” cause for the ensuing destruction:

*Only for [Ethiocles] nat by counsell wrought  
Of hem that wern bothe trewe and wis:  
hym lyst nat worchen after her devys;  
But lefte trouthe and sette his fantasye  
To be gouerned by fals flaterye.”* (ll.1780-4)

Ethiocles' “doublenesse” (l.1778) emanates directly from his vanity and poor judgment, not from any hereditary predisposition toward treachery. Interestingly, Lydgate invents this “judgment of Ethiocles,” for we do not find quite the same situation in the parallel scene in the prose *Thèbes*.

In the prose *Thèbes*, Ethiocles' advisors are chiefly military tacticians. They do not present him with any such choice, and there is no ethical dilemma. They simply “*entendirent bien as paroles que li rois lor monstroit qu'il a son frere n'avoit telant de tenir la convenance qui entreaus.ij. estoit devisee*” (Chapter 36) [“understood well from the discussion that the king showed them that, towards his brother, he did not have the skill to hold the agreement that had been devised between the two of them”]. With that in mind, they advise him on military strategy: he must secure the support of his friends and neighbors and reinforce the city's defenses. (The prose *Thèbes* follows the OF *Thèbes* closely in this regard.)<sup>66</sup> Lydgate adds the ethical dimension to this scene first by opening up for debate the whole question of Ethiocles' right to the throne, and second by having Ethiocles choose among competing advice, some of which is sound.<sup>67</sup> By multiplying the courses of action for Ethiocles, Lydgate introduces the possibility for virtuous action, a possibility denied Eteocles in Lydgate's sources.

Lydgate's greater focus on the king's advisors also serves to diffuse the blame for Theban misfortune. Since Ethiocles operates as part of a network of decision-makers, he cannot be held solely accountable for the conflict at Thebes. We find this focus on the king's advisors also in the scene of Tydeus' embassy to Thebes. Tydeus reiterates the injunction of Ethiocles' “feithful” advisors to follow “trouthe” (l.1941). (In this sense, Lydgate gives Ethiocles a second chance to follow good council.) When Tydeus realizes that Ethiocles has no intention of yielding, he criticizes the decision-making apparatus at the king's court:

*'Certes, quod he, I conceve of newe  
Aboute the, thy counsel is vntrewe,  
I dar it seyn and voven at the best,  
Nor thow art not feithful of thy bebest,  
Stable of thy word that thow hast seid to-for[n].'* (ll.2043-47)

He refers specifically to the counselors surrounding the king, to the apparatus of state in Thebes. In the parallel scene in the prose *Thèbes*, Tydeus similarly accuses Ethiocles of not following good counsel (“*tu conseil ne veus croire*,” Chapter 46), but in that scene he means his own (Tydeus’) counsel, not that of the king’s advisors.<sup>68</sup> Thus, in Lydgate, Tydeus implicates much, though not all, of the Theban statebody, not the king alone. In this scene, as in the previous one, we see Ethiocles amidst a network of courtiers who, by virtue of his reliance on them, exercise as much influence on historical outcome as the king himself. Therefore, culpability rests not in the corrupt Theban royal line exclusively, and in Ethiocles as its most recent descendant, but in the weak links within the Theban system of government, in action not in heredity.

Lydgate closes Part II of the *Siege* by restating the role of faulty statecraft (not faulty ancestry) in the demise of Thebes:

*Lo her kalendys of aduersitè,  
Sorowe vpon sorowe and destruccioun,  
First of the kyng and all the Regyoun;  
For lak oonly like as I yow tolde,  
That bihestes trewely wern not holde.* (ll.2544-48) (emphasis mine)

Lydgate does not attribute the coming “sorowe” to Ethiocles’ inherited bent towards treachery (interestingly, he leaves Ethiocles out of this statement altogether), but rather to the more neutral and universal problem of broken promises. To be sure, Ethiocles was involved in these broken pledges, but Lydgate does not pin the blame on him by name. Moreover, he presents this opinion as his own. Unlike the “bookes olde” he cites at the beginning of Part III, which attribute Theban misfortune to “blood corrupt,” Lydgate attributes Theban misfortune “only” to poor statesmanship, and he cites no other authorities to back this claim.

In the same manner that Lydgate attributes Theban misfortune to specific decisions and actions, he attributes Greek success to good statesmanship and virtuous action, rather than to some vague idea of innate righteousness. For instance, Lydgate expands the favorable portrait of King Adrastus in the prose *Thèbes* with specific examples of his good rulership. Adrastus, like Ethiocles, appears among a network of advisors and nobles, but unlike Ethiocles, he manages his circle wisely, listening to the needs of his people, delegating authority, and following established procedure for ensuring fairness to his people at each social stratum. We see this quite vividly when Adrastus begins assembling an army. He first convenes a “parlement” (l.2573) to gather commanders from all over Greece. These commanders (Tydeus being the best example) then convene their own councils to select the most skilled knights under their charge (l.2620ff.). Once assembled, these men arrive at Argos “at terme sette” (l.2595) to receive their payment “in her honde” (2584). Further on, we see Adrastus

providing "Both high and lough and poore soudeoures" (l.2680) with "loggyng" (l.2671), "vitaylle" (l.2677) and whatever else they or their horses might need "lik to her plesaunce" (l.2675). Again, we see Adrastus making sure that "touching her terme-day/that thei to-forn were serued of her pay" (ll.2683-4).<sup>69</sup> All of this detail pertaining to procedure represents Lydgate's addition to his source; by contrast, the prose *Thèbes* simply states that the men were supplied with "*lor barnés e. . . lor armes*" ["their arms and their armor"] (Chapter 66). While Adrastus and the Greek host receive equally favorable treatment in the prose *Thèbes* (and in the OF *Thèbes*) as in the *Siege*, Lydgate attributes Greek success to pragmatic measures of good statecraft. These measures, moreover, have little to do with either race or religion. After all, Adrastus is, technically, a pagan king like Ethiocles.

Thus, Lydgate introduces, for the first time, a certain balance and fairness into Theban history whereby Thebans compete with other ruling powers along the same criteria for success or failure. The same rules of statecraft and governance apply to both sides of the conflict. Of course the Thebans still lose in the *Siege*, but their misfortune can no longer be attributed to some inbred, innate disposition for failure beyond their control. They fail for the same reasons that the Greeks succeed: on the basis of their skills in decision-making and diplomacy. The Thebans lack effective state procedure and fail because of that, while the Greeks have mastered state procedure and consequently succeed. There is no dark, hidden cause for Theban demise and no mysterious secret to Greek success. In a similarly balanced gesture, Lydgate refuses to delineate good and evil along simple national or racial lines, so that throughout the *Siege*, we find instances of wisdom in the Theban camp and instances of folly in the Greek camp.

Throughout the *Siege*, Lydgate presents a varied picture of the Thebans. They are not monolithically wicked.<sup>70</sup> Working closely with the prose *Thèbes*, Lydgate reproduces and expands upon instances that suggest a capacity for good in the Thebans. For example, like the French redactor (and the OF poet and Statius before him), Lydgate gives a highly favorable portrait of Jocasta, who provides a tempering influence on Ethiocles' autocratic tendencies. In fact, Lydgate expands upon his source and assigns her one of the longest speeches in the entire poem (ll.3653-3708) where she argues against "doubleness" in a monarch.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, Lydgate reproduces the parliament of Thebes found in the prose *Thèbes* who try to reconcile the brothers by devising the fateful arrangement of alternate reigns (prose *Thèbes*, Chapter 25; *Siege* 1104ff.). (In both texts they act in good faith and do not foresee the consequences of this arrangement.) As we saw earlier, Lydgate also supplements the advisory body to king Ethiocles with other voices of wisdom who urge Ethiocles to follow "trouthe" rather than falsehood. Lydgate, expanding upon the French redactor, often distinguishes the cautious, pacifist wishes of the Theban parliament from the more reckless, power-hungry motives of the king.

Similarly, he sometimes distinguishes the citizenry of Thebes from the Theban ruler. For example, in both the prose *Thèbes* and the *Siege*, the citizens of Thebes protest Ethiocles' rule when they hear of Tydeus' slaying of fifty Theban soldiers and the suicide of the one survivor who must deliver the bad news to the king (prose *Thèbes*, Chapter 64; *Siege*, 2524ff.). Later in the narrative, Ethiocles suspects pro-Greek sympathies among the Theban citizens as he prepares the city for a siege (prose *Thèbes*, Chapter 70; *Siege*, 3618ff.). Such instances of disjunction between Ethiocles and his advisors, family and subjects expose internal weaknesses within Thebes, of course, as well as Ethiocles' ineffectiveness as a ruler. They also, however, present a certain capacity for wisdom and goodness among the Thebans despite their affiliation with a doomed ruler. Lydgate reproduces (and expands somewhat) these examples of latent Theban virtue found in the source text, encouraging the reader to view the Thebans as citizens first and Thebans second, citizens who are the potential victims of (not collaborators in) Ethiocles' ambitions. Thus the "blood corrupt" that Lydgate speaks of at the beginning of Part III does not run through *all* Thebans.

### REASSESSING "GREEK" VIRTUE

Just as Lydgate allows for wisdom in the Theban camp, he also allows for folly on the Greek side. In several cases, he simply reproduces instances of Greek transgression that already exist in the prose *Thèbes*. For instance, Lydgate, like the French redactor, implicates Polymyte along with Ethiocles in the initial stages of the conflict. Like his brother, Polymyte seems impervious to negotiation, so that "Advertynge nought neither to right ne wronge,/But eche of hem to make her partie stronge,/And his querele proudly to sustene:/From whoos hertes was devoyded clene/Of brotherhode the faithful alliaunce" (ll.1067-71). Later, Lydgate again follows the French redactor in contrasting Polymyte's impetuosity and belligerence unfavorably with Tydeus' unflinching courteousness in their first encounter (prose *Thèbes*, Chapter 30; *Siege* 1300ff.). Thus Lydgate's Polymyte seems unworthy at first of the sympathy and admiration he elicits in Argos.

The Greek side also attracts suspicion in its mistreatment of the seer Amphiorax, the "worthy bisshop" of Thebes (l.2798).<sup>72</sup> Lydgate derives this material, too, from the prose *Thèbes*, but he clearly compounds Greek culpability in his own rendition of the episode. In the source text, Amphiorax prophesies the destruction of Thebes and heavy Greek losses. The Greek commanders simply ignore his warnings and urge Adrastus toward speedy confrontation with the Thebans (prose *Thèbes*, Chapter 74). Lydgate adds a new element to the episode whereby the younger generation of Greek soldiers actively humiliate Amphiorax. They deride him as an "olde Dotard a coward" (l.2928). Lydgate moralizes the episode as an instance of youthful pride and recklessness (2947), reflecting badly on the Greek army. (This same army soon slays the tame Theban tiger, a scene carried over from both French versions, thus triggering the start

of combat.) Of course, Lydgate later attributes Amphiorax's unusual death to his worship of false gods, perhaps justifying the Greek abuse in this scene. However, he uses this scene of public humiliation of an elder by a younger crowd to reveal the same potential for cruelty among the Greeks that we have come to expect of the Thebans. Thus the effects of the "blood corrupt" that Lydgate mentions at the beginning of Part III prior to this episode are not confined to the Thebans after all.

In two other, more subtle, instances, Lydgate casts doubt on the integrity of the Greek cause when he introduces unflattering background material on certain characters. Such material does not appear in the source text, but does belong to the wider body of mythography available to the poet. For example, at the end of the Ipsyphyle episode, Lydgate offers a brief follow-up report on Lycurgus (a character name that appears in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*). After mentioning Lycurgus' future role in Athens in the cause of Palaemon (3524), Lydgate tells of how this same Lycurgus angered Bacchus by destroying his vines, and of how Bacchus took revenge by tearing off his limbs and drowning him in the sea (a story he draws from Boccaccio's *Genealogiae*) (3528-36). Such an instance of irreverence hardly matches the earlier portrait of Lycurgus as the wise ruler able to forgive the woman indirectly responsible for his son's death.

In the same vein, Lydgate includes unsavory background information on Tydeus, the hero of the *Siege* and of both French versions of the story, that recalls his cannibalistic activities in Statius' *Thebaid*. Upon describing the death of this "beste knyght and most manly man" (l.4231), Lydgate adds that, according to Boccaccio, Tydeus requested the head of the enemy soldier who inflicted his final wound, Menolippus (l.4235-9). In perhaps the most memorable scene in the *Thebaid*, Tydeus proceeds to chew on the head of his enemy. This gruesome part of Tydeus' history is excised in the OF *Roman de Thèbes* and, hence, in the prose *Thèbes* for the obvious reason that it does not conform to knightly behavior. Lydgate, however, without mentioning the cannibalism, re-invokes the circumstances of Tydeus' hideous crime. Of course, both of these instances of recuperated background information may simply represent Lydgate's bookishness at work; Lydgate, like the French redactor, frequently aligns two or more version of the same story for comparison (a good example in the *Siege* being the Cadmus-Amphion segment).<sup>73</sup> However, in both of these particular cases, Lydgate departs from his source in offering additional information, and the information he supplies does little to garner sympathy for the Greeks and their allies.

## BAD BLOOD VS. ORIGINAL SIN

Which brings us back to the question of what Lydgate means at the beginning of Part III when he speaks of "blood corrupt" and the "ynfeccioun called Orygynal" (ll.2564, 2566)? On the surface, Lydgate appears to restate the legendary corrupt ancestry of

the house of Thebes and to implicate all Theban citizens and allies by their association with that line. He seems to evoke the familiar notion, underlying all previous Theban narratives, of the Thebans as a cursed race and Thebes, the city, as a cursed place when he says:

... *The Citè brent and was sette a-fyre,*  
*As bookes olde wel reherce konne,*  
*Of Cruel hate rooted and begunne,*  
*And engendred, the story maketh mynde,*  
*Oonly of blood corrupt and vnkynde,*  
*Bynfeccioun called Orygynal....* (ll.2560-66)

Two things about this passage should give us pause, however. First, we have seen already in Part I how Lydgate readily disagrees with his sources on the question of an irredeemably polluted Theban lineage, so his evocation of “bookes olde” here does not necessarily mean he agrees with those texts on the cause of the Theban conflict. He mentions “blood corrupt” as the explanation offered by these “bookes olde,” not as his own. Second, as some critics have noted, the “ynfeccioun called Orygynal” refers doubly to the ancient concept of a “fatal impurity” and to the Christian concept of Original Sin, but the two are not the same.<sup>74</sup> One refers to a specifically Theban problem, endemic to their race; the other refers to a universal human condition. Original Sin is not an exclusively Theban predicament.

This explains why Lydgate does not hold Ethiocles or the Theban nobility and citizenry accountable for their demise for reasons of heredity. Instead, he frames his criticisms of Theban conduct in universal criteria for effective statecraft that apply to all monarchies. Ethiocles is doomed not because he descends from cursed stock, but because he fails to listen to the needs and concerns of his people, because he fails to delegate authority, because he is miserly rather than generous, and because he has overlooked the importance of established procedure in making a state run smoothly. Nor does Lydgate hold the Theban parliament and citizenry guilty by their association with Ethiocles. Instead, he reproduces and enhances the instances of latent Theban virtue that we find in the prose *Thebes* and recruits some voices of conciliation into the Theban parliament, contrasting their patience and wisdom with Ethiocles’ destructive ambition.

Of course the term “vnkynde blood” arises again at the joint deaths of Ethiocles and Polmyte (“Thenvious fyr so her hertys brente/with haate Cankered of vnkynde blood” (ll.4272-3)). But, as in the first instance of this term (l.868), Lydgate speaks here of the incestuous origins of the brothers themselves, not of any ancestral disposition towards treachery (for Lydgate has eradicated all trace of such contamination from Theban genealogy). This “vnkynde blood,” therefore, applies to the generation of Ethiocles and Polmyte alone, not to their ancestors, and certainly not to their

citizens. While corrupt blood, the result of incestuous origins, may have some role in the poor conduct of Ethiocles (and even Polymyte, to some extent), Lydgate restricts its influence to this single generation.

Instead of bad blood, Lydgate attributes the disaster at Thebes to the “ynfeccioun called Orygynal,” to Original Sin. Unlike bad blood, which is racially specific, this “infcecioun” affects all human beings, not Thebans alone. Hence, Lydgate finds the Greeks, the winners of this conflict, guilty of their own misjudgments and injustices. They are prone to the same transgression that the Thebans, and indeed all peoples, are. Thus, after the victory, they too “falle into pouert,/Both of her men and also of her good” (ll.4640-1). When we turn to the ending of the *Siege of Thebes*, we find this universal explanation of the disaster at Thebes stated quite clearly. Lydgate traces the Theban conflict, like all war, back to the first war in Heaven involving Lucifer's rebellion (l.4660ff.). In his anger, Lucifer spread

*Thorgh al erth of envye and debat,  
That vnnethys is ther non estat,  
with-oute stry can lye in Charitè.  
For every man of hegh and lough degrè,  
Envyeth now that other shulde thryve.* (ll.4669-73)

He goes on to trace all conflict back to its “gynnyng” and “Roote” (l.4678) in “covetyse and fals Ambicioun” (l.4675). This ambition moves all people to attempt “domynacioun/Ouer other” and to “trede hym vndyr foote” (ll.4676-7). All people become potential perpetrators of conflict. Lydgate does not single out the Thebans in this explanation of the root cause of the Theban war; he says nothing of Ethiocles, or the Thebans as a cursed race, or Thebes as an unwholesome place. Instead, he speaks of humanity, to which the Thebans and the Greeks alike belong.

### LYDGATE'S *SIEGE* AND CHAUCER'S *KNIGHT'S TALE*

Lydgate conceived his *Siege of Thebes* on two levels: as a Theban narrative within a long tradition of Theban narratives, and as a prequel to Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*. We must ask, then, what does Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* mean for the medieval Theban tradition in the large scheme? As the last medieval re-working of the Theban legend, what new directions does Lydgate chart for Theban history, and to what end? On a more focused level, how does Lydgate's *Siege* function as a prequel to Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*? What is the nature of Lydgate's response to his illustrious predecessor? I would suggest that on both levels, Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* constitutes a more profound literary breakthrough than the scholarly community has suggested.

On the large scale, Lydgate introduces into Theban history a degree of flexibility it never enjoyed before. From Statius to Chaucer, Thebans have remained a marked

people, set apart by chronic dysfunction. The OF poet uses Theban markedness to great advantage as he merges their ancient identity with the medieval portrait of the infidel, another marked people. Boccaccio, and Chaucer after him, creates a new generation of Thebans removed from their place of origin and severed from their forebears. However, this new generation has not completely broken free from their marked ancestry, and the struggle to come to terms with that heritage forms much of the basis for the *Teseida* and the *Knight's Tale* respectively.

Lydgate, however, challenges the whole question of corrupt lineage in the Theban picture by systematically removing it as an obstacle in Theban history. He cleanses Theban genealogy by replacing its historically suspect founder, Cadmus, with a man of integrity and vision, Amphion; Thebans are no longer the victims of an inherited disposition beyond their control. In addition, through the mirror for princes form, Lydgate revises the criteria for assessing Theban misfortune. He replaces the traditional, racially specific, criteria of faulty lineage with new, universal, criteria of proper statesmanship and good governance. In doing so, he grants Thebans more control over their own destiny than they have ever enjoyed. If the same rules apply to them as to their successful opponents, then they, too (theoretically), stand a chance of turning their fortune and achieving political harmony. Moreover, they need only look to their own history for a precedent, for Lydgate provides this precedent in Amphion's glorious unification of the citizens of Thebes. To further maximize the possibility for wise action in Thebes, Lydgate amplifies the voices within Thebes who seek to further such a vision. Of course, Lydgate must face the insurmountable fact of the incestuous origins of Ethiocles and Polymyte, but he contains it as a shaper of history by restricting its influence to the brothers themselves. What is more, he judges them not as illegitimate offspring, but as statesmen, on the basis of their conduct not their parentage, stressing that aspect of their lives over which they might exercise control. The Theban nobility and citizenry may suffer from its effects, but they do not share in the guilt. In effect, Lydgate breaks the legendary Theban curse.

On a more focused level, Lydgate's revisions to Theban history mean that the *Siege* challenges Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* far more than has been previously argued.<sup>75</sup> Scholars who have examined the question of Lydgate's relationship with Chaucer in the *Siege* naturally turn to the Prologue of the poem, for in it Lydgate resurrects the Canterbury pilgrimage and configures his poem as an extension of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* as the first tale on the return journey of the pilgrimage. Part of this task involves depicting himself, the author, among the group of Canterbury pilgrims, as Chaucer himself had done. Thus, an important category within the criticism on Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* has examined Lydgate's posture towards Chaucer as dramatized in the Prologue. Examining this relationship within the framework of Harold Bloom's theory of Anxiety of Influence, A. C. Spearing has argued that Lydgate,

while allegedly deferring to the illustrious "Father Chaucer," in fact takes over the position of father from Chaucer.<sup>76</sup> Chaucer, he notes, is conspicuously absent from the pilgrims Lydgate encounters. Furthermore, Lydgate claims to write a continuation of the *Canterbury Tales*, but the *Siege* treats events that fall chronologically before the events of the *Knights Tale*. Finally, Spearing notes that the nearer the events of the *Siege of Thebes* approach those of the *Knights Tale*, the more of Chaucer's actual words Lydgate appropriates.<sup>77</sup> In this sense, Lydgate "becomes the father whose place he usurps."<sup>78</sup>

Spearing argues that Lydgate misreads the nature of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* in some important ways. For example, where Chaucer sought to imagine the classical world on its own terms in the *Knights Tale*, an achievement that Spearing identifies with Renaissance Humanism, Lydgate reverses this process by moralizing classical antiquity in a characteristically medieval way. Lee Patterson corroborates Spearing's conclusion that Lydgate misreads Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. He, too, sees this gesture as part of "a strategy of self-representation and identity formation."<sup>79</sup> Lydgate, he argues, reduces Chaucer's original complexity in the *Canterbury Tales* by, first, representing the *Tales* as uniformly jocular and frivolous and, second, by representing himself, as poet, as older and more serious than Chaucer the poet/pilgrim.<sup>80</sup> Classifying Chaucer and his work as "miry" (however erroneously) enables Lydgate to distinguish himself as a serious poet with a serious purpose.<sup>81</sup>

My location of Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* within the entire medieval Theban tradition supplements such discussions of Lydgate's relationship to Chaucer. While I cannot agree with Lee Patterson's larger argument that Lydgate uses the antagonism between the Host and Lydgate the Pilgrim in the Prologue as an analogue for his professional relationship with Henry V, both Patterson and Spearing have, rightly, located in this passage signs of poetic defiance on Lydgate's part with respect to Chaucer.<sup>82</sup> My own analysis of Theban genealogy in the *Siege* demonstrates that, indeed, in many important ways Lydgate's revision of Theban history makes the *Knights Tale* impossible. For one, Lydgate's revised Theban genealogy means that Chaucer's heroes, Arcite and Palaemon, cannot be who they say they are. Since Lydgate has replaced Cadmus with Amphion as the founder of the Theban royal line, and since Arcite claims that he and Palaemon descend from Cadmus, not Amphion, then Arcite and Palaemon do not belong to Theban royal stock (*Knights Tale*, l.1546-52). In fact, Lydgate's omission of any mention of Cadmus' offspring leaves a gaping hole in the line of descent between Cadmus and Chaucer's heroes (the same kind of hole, incidentally, that exists in the *Siege* between Amphion and Edippus).

Second, at the end of the *Siege*, Lydgate makes explicit beyond all reasonable doubt that the city of Thebes was completely destroyed in the war. He dwells on this fact lest there be any ambiguity:

*But Theseus, myn Autour writ certeyn,  
 Out of the feld or he fro Thebes wente,  
 He bete it downe and the howsys brente,  
 The puple slough for al her crying loude,  
 Maad her wallys and her towrys proude  
 Rounde aboute, euene vpon a rowe,  
 with the Soyle to be laide ful lowe  
 That nought was left but the soyle al bare. (ll.4554-61)*

*The worthy blood of al grece spilt,  
 And Thebes ek, of Amphion first bylt,  
 With-oute Recur brouht vnto Ruynes  
 And with the soyle made pleyne as a lyne,  
 To wyldernesse turnyd and desert ... (ll.4635-39)*

Not only has the city been leveled, but the entire area has reverted to wilderness. No one can live there anymore. Yet, as we saw in Chapter 3, Chaucer retains Thebes as a living, inhabited city and political power. Arcite returns there first alone and later with Palaemon, and at the end of the *Knight's Tale*, Palaemon rules over Thebes as an ally of Athens. Lydgate's eradication of Thebes seems all the more deliberate because the prose *Thèbes* from which he worked depicts the rebuilding of Thebes at the end of the war. Enough of the citizens survive to reconstruct the city and rename it "*Estives*."<sup>83</sup> For the most part, Lydgate reproduces the structure and events of the prose *Thèbes* and tends not to omit entire scenes. Yet he alters his source material on this rather important historical point. In doing so, he omits a convenient link between the end of his narrative and the beginning of Chaucer's, and makes Chaucer's use of Thebes as a functioning city in the *Knight's Tale* implausible, since, for Lydgate, there is no more Thebes after the war.

Finally, on a conceptual level, Lydgate's eradication of corrupt lineage as a shaper of Theban history robs Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* of much of its *raison d'être*. Chaucer, like his medieval predecessors, approaches Thebanness as an incurable disease that controls its victims unbeknownst to them. We see Palaemon and Arcite fall into the same pattern of fraternal strife that afflicted their forebears. We see Arcite claiming and celebrating his Theban ancestry unaware of its fatal consequences. We see them assist one another in a brotherly fashion only in their preparations for mutual combat. Whatever "improvement" we see in their sentiments towards one another seems too little, too late (not to mention groundless), and we see Palaemon take over the rule of Thebes in the way his father, Polynices, had wanted to in the previous Theban conflict.<sup>84</sup> Theban lineage governs every decision and action of Chaucer's heroes. In his recreation of a pre-Christian past, Chaucer seeks to capture the un-Christianized, un-medievalized, un-redeemed Theban condition. Arcite and Palaemon become a

fresh generation of Theban criminals who, because they act purely on hereditary instinct, cannot be held fully accountable for their crimes.

Lydgate, however, removes the excuse of defective ancestry from the portrait of Theban misfortune. He can (and does) hold Ethiocles and Polymyte accountable for their actions precisely because he alters the terms by which they can be judged. By judging them according to their political decisions rather than according to their lineage, Lydgate introduces free will, free choice, into Theban history for the first time. Ethiocles makes unwise decisions, but he possesses the power to make wise ones. Although Ethiocles and Polymyte do possess "vnkynde blood" by reason of their incestuous origins, Lydgate neatly contains this biological fact within their single generation by downplaying the *history* of incest and other familial dysfunction from the Theban picture. More importantly, Lydgate routinely leaves the fact of "vnkynde blood" out of his assessment of the political events he recounts.

What this means for the *Knight's Tale* as a sequel for the *Siege* is that Chaucer revisits a Theban condition that no longer exists. Lydgate removes the paradigm of Thebanness that Chaucer seeks to explore. The *Knight's Tale*, then, investigates Theban history using now-outmoded beliefs about Thebans, for Lydgate has discredited those beliefs in his prequel to the *Knight's Tale*. Thus while Lydgate may well build upon the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole, as he claims to do, he retrospectively undermines the first of those tales, the *Knight's Tale*.

## CONCLUSION

Despite its reputation as one of Lydgate's best works, Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* has generally been examined in terms of whether it represents a literary regression from, or an advance upon, Chaucer's creative genius in general and the *Knight's Tale* in particular. On a stylistic level, the *Siege* has been criticized (often rightly so) for its clumsy imitation of Chaucer's poetic style.<sup>85</sup> On an intellectual level, it has been criticized, as I have already suggested, for its failure to grasp and expand upon Chaucer's subtle distinction between the antique pagan world and the medieval Christian world. Lydgate resorts to moralizing history while Chaucer attempts to achieve an objective distance from the past. On a formal level, the *Siege* has been criticized for its lack of structure, and for its reversion to familiar medieval, didactic modes of historical narrative, as Robert Ayers has demonstrated.<sup>86</sup> It is difficult to take issue with any of these claims, for Lydgate does not match Chaucer's poetic achievement. Nor does he seem to grasp Chaucer's historicism with respect to the classical past. Lydgate, we must conclude, was simply more artistically and intellectually conservative than Chaucer. He seems to look backwards along the trajectory of the Theban legend while Chaucer looks forward.

However, if we place the *Knight's Tale* and the *Siege of Thebes* within the larger medieval Theban tradition, we see that just the opposite is true. In his recreation of

the classical past, Chaucer takes a backward step towards Statius. While he appropriates Boccaccio's fictional setting and characters, he recuperates a pre-Boccaccian, pre-Angevin, pre-medieval portrait of Thebaness derived from the classical tradition of the *Thebaid*. While this vantage point may reflect a more Renaissance than medieval sensibility, the gesture remains conservative in that it restores an older concept, an earlier way of thinking. In fact, Chaucer undoes Boccaccio's efforts in the *Teseida* to reconfigure and ameliorate Theban identity anew as a reversible disease. He restores Boccaccio's heroes to the ancestry from which Boccaccio had sought to liberate them. He upholds the original prison sentence of the progeny of Thebes and resists reform efforts.

Lydgate, however, picks up where Boccaccio leaves off. Of course he does not use Boccaccio's setting and characters as Chaucer had done, nor can we say that he had the *Teseida* specifically in mind when he designed his Theban characters. Nevertheless, just as Boccaccio tries to envision a future for Thebes beyond the legacy of the likes of Cadmus and Oedipus, Lydgate, too, looks ahead to a less biased, less damning assessment of Theban history. His revision of Theban history fosters a fresh perspective on Thebes, and encourages us to look upon the Thebans as people first and Thebans second. To this end, Lydgate employs an optimistic mode of historiography, the mirror for princes, which insists that the tools of good governance lie within reach for all leaders, including Theban ones. To the extent that it is possible, Lydgate ameliorates the chronic violence of Theban history. Into its shameful distant past, he introduces precedents for inspired leadership and civic harmony. In this way, he allows Thebans a new political and historical status and permanently alters the terms by which they can be judged. Thus, while Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* may remain thoroughly medieval in its form, style and methodologies, its purpose remains dynamic, not static. It redefines Thebaness beginning with its earliest chapters, challenging the most basic assumptions about Theban history that underlie all previous Theban narratives and the accompanying mythographic tradition. In his *Siege of Thebes*, Lydgate lifts the age-old curse of Theban history and lays it to rest once and for all.

# Conclusion

In taking up the question of Theban history, the medieval adaptors of the Theban legend must deal with the issue of Theban cursedness, the Theban reputation as a race of people doomed to misfortune and predisposed to deviant behavior. Unlike modern readers, medieval poets and audiences were well aware that king Oedipus is by no means the only Theban involved in shocking family relations. He belongs to a race who, from their very origin with Cadmus' dragon-warriors, consistently distinguish themselves by self destructive, and mutually destructive, behavior. The intellectual challenge that poets from Statius to Lydgate faced in treating the matter of Thebes involved retelling the story of a race of losers.

In handling the question of Theban cursedness, the medieval Christian adaptors of the Theban legend invariably grapple with the question of Providential history, in particular with Augustine's notion of secular history as a duplicative process due to man's inherent sinfulness. For the ancient Theban scene, this model of history raises the question of individual free will. To what extent are Thebans destined to repeat the sins of their forebears? Do Thebans have any degree of free agency in shaping their own history, or are they, instead, hopelessly driven by the forces of that history? Does their non-Christian status sentence them to perpetual violence, or do pagans have recourse to some form of enlightenment that might liberate them from their own destructive history? This question of historical repetition underlies all of the medieval versions of the Theban legend, and the differences lie in the particular uses each poet makes of it.

The anonymous author of the OF *Roman de Thèbes* capitalizes on the notion of Theban cursedness when he reformulates the story of the Theban war as a crusade. The Thebans under Ethïoclés take on the aspect of eastern infidels, while the "Greek" army of Polynicés resembles a crusading army. Drawing upon the highly popular contemporary chronicle accounts of the First Crusade, the OF poet remodels the events of the Theban war to look more like those of the First Crusade of 1095-99. He also imposes the moral ethos of crusade literature onto his account of the Theban war so that the Thebans, like the infidels, fall at the hands of the conquering army of Pollinicés by the will of God. At the same time, the poet superimposes a second layer of

history onto the Theban war: the circumstances of the Trojan War. The army of Ethïoclés contains in its ranks Trojan names, while the “Greek” army of Pollinicés contains the names of Greeks who appear in the siege of Troy. In configuring the opposing sides in this manner, the poet inverts the pro-Trojan and anti-Greek medieval consensus by enlisting Trojans into the ranks of infidels and having members of the Greek army at Troy fight alongside medieval crusaders. The result is a face-off between crusaders of the medieval west, on the one side, and ancient Trojans on the other, between the recent victors of the twelfth-century Norman kingdom and the legendary ancestral giants of that civilization, the house of Troy. In this way, the OF poet reaffirms and exploits the legendary cursedness of the Theban race as a convenient historical staging ground for testing Norman achievement.

Giovanni Boccaccio is somewhat more troubled by the idea of a recurring historical plan, for such a model of history would appear to rob individuals of any power in shaping their own destiny. Situating his *Teseida* chronologically between the Theban and Trojan wars, Boccaccio explores the role of the individual within a fixed set of historical events. His *Teseida* both challenges and reaffirms the Augustinian model of earthly history, for, on the one hand, Boccaccio brings Theban history into a new era in which the latest generation of Thebans, Palemone and Arcita, manage to break the destructive pattern of familial strife. As they themselves fall into the same pattern of conflict that consumed their ancestors, they become aware of the pattern and forge a new course of reconciliation. Boccaccio achieves this historic turnabout by introducing the ethical system of medieval chivalric romance, which empowers the individual through the transformative power of love, into the epic landscape of ancient history, which limits individual agency. On the other hand, unbeknownst to the Theban heroes, their own conflict has established the precedent for the conflict at Troy: a rivalry of two armies over a woman. Thus Boccaccio champions human potential in the face of marching history, but he also, in the end, exposes its limits. He challenges the notion of a pre-determined historical plan which limits human potential for growth and change by using the Athenian scene as a reformatory for Theban criminality while, at the same time, reaffirming that notion by staging the conflict at Athens as a rehearsal for the Trojan War.

Chaucer shares Boccaccio's interest in the role of the individual in history. However, he narrows his scope of inquiry; rather than exploring history as a process of unfolding events, he explores history as a personal experience from the insider's perspective. He approaches the period just after the Theban war as a time capsule. Unlike Boccaccio, who creates a continuum between the Theban and Trojan conflicts, Chaucer drops all mention of Troy and immerses the reader in the post-Theban war time period irrespective of future events. He borrows his fictional characters directly from Boccaccio, but unlike his Italian predecessor, who uses this new generation of Thebans to reverse the destructive pattern of Theban history, Chaucer uses the

young Thebans as a case study in Theban criminality. We watch them fall into the latest instance of Theban conflict and observe their decision-making at each critical juncture in the narrative. Chaucer reveals how Theban history took its shape by allowing us into the intimate thoughts and conversations of individual Thebans. Thus, the oft-discussed historicism of the *Knight's Tale* comes in direct opposition to earlier medieval treatments of Theban history, which approach Thebanness as a problem to be either exploited (as a justification for attack) or solved.

In the *Troilus*, Chaucer steps back and explores the entire process by which history is transmitted from one generation to the next, using Theban history as his case in point. Working with a small number of characters in intimate settings, he presents this process of transmission as dynamic and, therefore, mistake-prone. First, the competing versions of the Theban legend available to the characters (namely the *Thebaid* and the OF *Roman de Thèbes*) offer quite different pictures and readings of the Theban war. The characters themselves, who draw parallels between the experience of various Theban figures and their own lives, introduce still other interpretations of Theban history. Finally, Cassandra, in interpreting Theban history by way of interpreting Troilus' dream, presents still another slant on Theban history. At every stage, history becomes subjective, prone to shaping according to the needs and biases of the moment. In this way, Chaucer questions the rather common medieval practice of using Theban history to foreshadow Trojan history by exposing the intensely complicated and layered ways that history comes down to us, and is understood by us, in the first place.

Lydgate, too, is interested in the role of the individual in history, but his *Siege of Thebes* concerns itself with individuals as shapers of history rather than victims of it. Envisioning his *Siege* as a mirror for princes, Lydgate attempts to account for the misfortunes of Theban history on the grounds of misjudgment on the part of individual Theban rulers. Ethiocles is presented with a choice between wise and unwise action and repeatedly chooses an unwise course, while corrupt counselors steer his decision-making. Misfortune, Lydgate suggests, is in large measure created not found, and to illustrate this point Lydgate turns, ironically, to the least suitable historical example of this, to the legend of Thebes, the story of a doomed race. Perhaps it is the very unsuitability of the subject matter of Thebes for his exploration of individual responsibility that makes Lydgate's *Siege* such a powerful instructor in political procedure, for if, as he asserts, Thebans might have rectified and redirected the events of their blighted history, then more enlightened political leaders of his own day stand an even better chance of guiding events in productive ways. Similarly, Lydgate suggests that all rulers run the risk of making the same mistakes that Eteocles and his ancestors made. In effect, Lydgate removes the stigma of Thebanness from Theban history, making the Theban scene less of a historical anomaly.

The medieval adaptors of the Theban legend do not, therefore, all share the same vision of Theban history. In fact, each succeeding author tends to reverse the

innovations of the previous one. Boccaccio, for instance, refuses to exploit the legendary cursedness of the Theban race as the OF poet had done and, instead, empowers his young Thebans to break free from their own ancestral legacy. (The tragedy of the *Teseida*, therefore, has to do with the contrast between the hopes of individuals to shape their own lives and the limits of those hopes, not with any exclusively Theban condition.) Chaucer, on the other hand, reverses Boccaccio's innovations to the Theban character when he reinstates the stigma of Theban ancestry for his Theban kinsmen in the *Knights Tale*, even though he borrows these figures from Boccaccio. Lydgate then undercuts the innovations Chaucer makes to the Theban legend by eliminating the very premise for the hereditary cursedness of the Theban race. As a fictional prequel to the *Knights Tale*, Lydgate's *Siege* retroactively throws into question many of the fundamental concepts of antiquity and Thebanness that underlie Chaucer's poem. Thus, there is little consensus among these poets as to what Thebes ought to represent. While Chaucer may agree with the OF poet that Thebans are a uniquely unfortunate race, he does not exploit that idea for contemporary political ends as the *Thèbes* poet had done. And while Lydgate may share with Boccaccio a more charitable approach to the Theban character, he denies the very premise of Thebanness that so preoccupies Boccaccio.

Perhaps one of the most fascinating questions to arise out of this study of the medieval Theban legend, and one which I by no means cover adequately within the scope of this study, is to what extent does Thebes provide a more neutral ground than Troy on which to experiment with notions of antiquity, history, and literary form? The Trojan legend, after all, came with greater restrictions of historical allegiance since the monarchies of the West traced their ancestry back to the ancient Trojans. Bias was necessarily built into medieval treatments of the house of Troy. But this was not the case for Thebes. No medieval monarchy did (or would) proclaim Theban ancestry, nor does the Theban legend offer a fruitful ending to a story of great suffering, as does the Trojan legend with Aeneas' fateful escape from the burning city. Did the absence of family ties between medieval audiences and the house of Thebes grant medieval adaptors of the Theban legend a degree of flexibility that they could not enjoy in handling the matter of Troy? I leave this as a question for future research.

What seems certain is that by the end of the medieval Theban tradition, with Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes*, it becomes increasingly difficult to use the notion of Theban cursedness as an incurable, hereditary disease as a basis for generating narrative. Of course, Thebes as a narrative subject does not end with Lydgate. Less than one hundred years later, William Shakespeare and John Fletcher return to it in their joint dramatic work *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.<sup>1</sup> The play is a dramatization of Chaucer's *Knights Tale*, and in fact, unlike Chaucer, who confines the action of the tale to Athens and its surroundings (despite his preservation of the city after the war), Shakespeare and Fletcher actually set part of the play in Thebes itself.

However, despite its derivation from Chaucer's *Knights' Tale*, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* does not reproduce Chaucer's particular vision of Theban history, that is, his recuperation of the classical model of Theban identity as a insurmountable hereditary violent predisposition. Instead, it brings a more Boccaccian spirit to Theban history, which stresses the greater role of nurture over nature in shaping character, and which expressly denies any hereditary form of corruption in the Theban heroes. The very first time we see Palamon and Arcite, at the court of Creon in Thebes, Arcite defines this principle:

*'Dear Palamon, dearer in love than blood,  
And our prime cousin, yet unhard'ned in  
The crimes of nature — let us leave the city  
Thebes, and the temptings in't, before we further  
Sully our gloss of youth.'* (I.ii.1-5)

Throughout the play, Palamon and Arcite consciously develop their “noble” qualities (as the title suggests) of sentiment and deportment which counteract any inbred tendencies towards criminality, insisting, as Palamon does, that “‘Tis in our power/(Unless we fear that apes can tutor’s) to/Be masters of our manners” (I.ii.42-4). Noble “quality,” or “character,” can triumph over corrupt lineage. The rest of the play drives this lesson home, as the playwrights, like Boccaccio before them, lay the foundation for the heroes’ ultimate reconciliation with repeated signs of their mutual affection, despite their present conflict (e.g. their decision to “live long, and loving” in their prison cell (II.ii.86), and in their jovial reminiscences of youthful love affairs in Thebes (III.iii)). Moreover, the play amplifies, in quantity and quality, the opportunities for Palamon and Arcite to exhibit their “noble” qualities and for other characters to admire them. Thus *The Two Noble Kinsmen* resurrects Theban history but leaves the Theban curse well buried, as Lydgate would have it.



# Notes

## NOTES TO PREFACE

1. Ovid's poetry, namely the *Metamorphoses*, supplemented the narrative of Statius with various segments on Theban history.
2. Two medieval *accessus* on the *Thebaid* have been edited by David Anderson, *Before the Knight's Tale: Imitation of Classical Epic in Boccaccio's Teseida* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 226-250. The one quoted above, which Anderson refers to as "*In principio*," dates to the twelfth century, 231. The second, referred to as "*Scriptum*" dated to the early fifteenth century, also indicates that Statius composed the *Thebaid* "*Thebanam hystoriam . . . ad memoriam revocare*," 242.
3. Huchet, "The Romances of Antiquity," *A New History of French Literature*, ed. Denis Hollier (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 40.
4. The best example of this is Robert Hollander's *Boccaccio's Two Venuses* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977) and its many descendants.

## NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

1. See Gian Biagio Conte, *Latin Literature: A History*, trans. Joseph B. Solodow (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 487.
2. L. D. Reynolds, *Texts and Transmissions: A Survey of Latin Classics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 394.
3. Christopher Baswell discusses this same preservationist quality in textbook commentaries of Vergil's *Aeneid*. See his *Vergil in Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 41-83.
4. Ed. Robert Dale Sweeney (Stuttgart and Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1997). For details about the identity of Lactantius Placidus, see M. C. Howatson, ed., *Oxford Companion to Classical Literature* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) 312; also, *Real-Encyclopädie der Classischen Altertumswissenschaft* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Buchhandlung, 1925), 1925, cols. 356-61. This date hinges on scanty, though compelling, evidence. First, Statius was not elevated to the rank of the *auctores idonei* until around 400, apparently by Servius. Therefore, it is unlikely that the commentary was written prior to the fifth century. Second, from Jerome's *Adversus Rufinum* (I, 16), scholars conclude that there was no extant Statius commentary in the mid-fourth century. Finally, in Book XII, l. 64 of the commentary, Placidus refers

- to a burial, which may be the burial of Attila (provided this is not a later addition), in which case the commentary could not predate 451. (This last bit of evidence, however, remains inconclusive.) For further discussion of the Placidus commentary, see Jane Chance, *Medieval Mythography*, 2 vols. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), vol. 1, 168-70.
5. *Auctores mythographi Latini*, ed. Augustin van Staveren (Leyden and Amsterdam: Amstedaed, 1742).
  6. For a list of manuscripts of the Placidus commentary, see Paul M. Clogan, "The Manuscripts of Lactantius Placidus's Commentary on the *Thebaid*," *Scriptorium* 22 (1968), 87-91.
  7. All citations of the *Thebaid* are from Roger Lesueur, ed., Stace, *Thébaïde*, 3 vols. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1994); trans. A. D. Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). On Statius' derision of the practice of augury, see, for example, book III.553ff.
  8. For a discussion on the popularity of the *florilegia*, see Jacqueline Hamesse, "The Scholastic Model of Reading," in *A History of Reading in the West*, ed. Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier (Amherst: University of Amherst Press, 1999), 103-19, 111-15.
  9. Ed. Stephen Hurlbut (Washington, DC: St. Albans Press, 1932).
  10. Hurlbut, 55.
  11. Birger Munk Olsen lists seven distinct, and four miscellaneous, *florilegia* which preserve excerpts of Statius including *florilegium prosodiacum cum distinctionibus* (6 mss.), *Micon Centulensis opus prosodiacum* (4 mss.), *florilegium duacense* (3 mss.), *florilegium prosodiacum Florentino-Erlangense* (2 mss.), the *Carmina Cantabrigiensia* (1 ms.), *Collectaneum Sedulii Scotti* (1 ms.), *florilegium Gallicum* (4 ms), and four miscellaneous *florilegia*. See his *L'Étude des auteurs classiques latins aux Xie et XIIIe siècles*, 3 vols. (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1982-9), II, 528-67 and III, 128-31.
  12. For a breakdown of these manuscripts, see Munk Olsen, II, 525. I add to this list München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 29212 (which Olsen lists as an addendum in III, 130-1. This manuscript notes the passage of Argia's lament, *Thebaid* 12.327-35.
  13. Munk Olsen lists only one manuscript of Statius' *Achilleid* which contains a marked passage (Wolfenbüttel, Herzog-August Bibliothek, 301, Extrv.-II). The passage is Deidama's lament to Achilles who departs for Troy, another female lament. See Munk Olsen, III, 131.
  14. For a breakdown of these manuscripts, see Munk Olsen, II, 524-5.
  15. See Munk Olsen, II, 531. Olsen, however, lists only one *Thebaid* extract for this manuscript. M. R. James's catalog entry for Peterhouse Library 229-II lists a second extract in a different hand. See his *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts of the Library of Peterhouse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1899), 282-3.
  16. *The Cambridge Songs (Carmina Cantabrigiensia)*, ed. Jan M. Ziolkowski (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994).
  17. It derives its name from the library that currently houses it, but it was produced at St. Augustine's Abbey in Canterbury. See Ziolkowski, xvii.
  18. Ziolkowski, xvii-xviii.
  19. Ziolkowski, 272.

20. Ziolkowski mentions four manuscripts where Argia's lament appears neumed, 273. Munk Olsen lists two of these manuscripts, II, 525, nos. 35 and 37.
21. Cited in Ziolkowski, 277. CC 34, from the *Aeneid*, for instance, is taken from book 2 (ll. 268-83) where Aeneas laments for Hector while in Carthage.
22. See Munk Olsen, II, 533.
23. By way of comparison, the Dido episode from the *Aeneid* was similarly extracted and frequently set to music well into the Renaissance.
24. Paul Maurice Clogan, "The *Planctus* of Oedipus: Text and Comment," *Mediaevalia et Humanistica* 1 (1970): 233-9. The *Planctus Oedipus* survives in four manuscripts, one dating to the twelfth century and three dating to the thirteenth, 234.
25. For a discussion of the influence of Ovid's *Heroides* upon Chaucer's *Anelida*, see Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 69-71; Edgar F. Shannon, *Chaucer and the Roman Poets* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929), 36; Nancy Dean, "Chaucer's *Complaint*, A Genre Descended from the *Heroides*," *Comparative Literature* 19 (1967): 1-27.
26. Ed. David Anderson, *Before the Knight's Tale* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), appendix I, 226-34. Translations are my own.
27. For a description of the manuscripts, see Anderson, 226-8.
28. Anderson, 226.
29. Anderson, 230 and 146. Several of these topics (*vita poetae, titulus operis, qualitas carminis, intentio scribentis*) derive from the Servian prologue and, in fact, the author of "*In principio*" invokes Servius in the very first line ("*ut Servius testatur*") as his model. But to the Servian topics, which pertain chiefly to the poem's intrinsic qualities, the commentator adds terms pertaining to extrinsic criteria for interpreting the *Thebaid* (e.g. *finalis causa, pars philosophie*). This latter set of terms is characteristic of the Scholastic period and frequently replaced the Servian topics altogether in the academic prologues of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (although the Servian topics continued to serve as a basis for prologues to classical epics in particular). For a full discussion of the topics of the medieval *accessus*, see A. J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, second edition (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 17-25 and 28-9; also A. J. Minnis and A. B. Scott, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c.1100-c.1375*, revised edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 12-15.
30. Anderson, 230. Statius was frequently identified from the tenth century onwards by the cognomen "*Sursulus*," though this was not his birth name. It derives from a confusion of Statius with Stadius Ursulus Tolosensis, a first-century rhetorician from Toulouse mentioned by Jerome. This confusion also accounts for why in "*In principio*" and other prologues, Statius comes from Toulouse. See O. A. W. Dilke, ed., *Statius: Achilleid* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), 3.
31. Anderson, 230.
32. Such dissecting of author names for underlying virtue was common from late antiquity on beginning with Vergil's name, Publius Vergilius Maro. In a ninth-century manuscript, *Maro* means *mare*, "for as the sea abounds in water so did he abound in wisdom more than any other man." Cited in Domenico Comparetti, *Vergil in the Middle Ages*, 1885, trans. E. F. M. Benecke (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 147.
33. Minnis, *Authorship*, 112-17.

34. Anderson, 230.
35. Minnis and Scott, 20 and 22.
36. Minnis and Scott, 25 and 29.
37. Comparetti traces the figure of Vergil as magician in popular legend of the Middle Ages (see Comparetti, 147 and 302-24); also J.W. Jones Jr., "Vergil as Magister in Fulgentius," *Classical, Medieval and Renaissance Studies in honor of B.L. Ullman*, ed., Charles Henderson, Jr., 2 vols. (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1964), I, 273-5. 273.
38. Anderson, 231.
39. Anderson, 231.
40. Ed. Anderson, appendix II, 234-50.
41. Anderson, 242.
42. Anderson, 232.
43. We find such moral imperatives assigned to other classical authors in the *accessus* tradition. Ovid, for instance, is said to have written to *Heroides* "to commend lawful marriage and love." Similarly, Homer (or the supposed author of the *Ilias Latina*) composed the *Iliad* "to dissuade anyone from such an illicit union, as a result of which we may incur the wrath of the gods as did Paris." See Minnis and Scott, 21 and 17.
44. E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953) 57-9.
45. For this line, I have used the English translation of J. H. Mozley, ed., *Thebaid*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928 and 1982).
46. Douai, Bibliothèque municipale, 749-II. See Monk Olsen, II, 525.
47. Faral, 115. The full line in the *Thebaid* reads, "*tum plurima versat / pessimus in dubiis augur timor*" (3.5-6).
48. Trans. Galyon, 31. Melville offers the following translation: ". . . fear, the worst / Prophet in time of doubt, took many forms," 54.
49. *Dialogue on the Authors*, ed. Minnis and Scott, 58.
50. Leslie George Whitbread, *Fulgentius the Mythographer* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1977), 235-44.
51. The manuscripts are: Paris, Bibl. Nat., lat. 3012, fols. 60v-64r, late twelfth or early thirteenth century, and Berne, Bibl. Mun., MS 141, 323, c.1600. See Stock, "A Note on *Thebaid* Commentaries: Paris, B.N. lat. 3012," *Traditio* 27 (1971): 468-71, 468 and 471. See also Whitbread, 470.
52. Of the twenty-one glossed *Thebaid* manuscripts listed by Munk Olsen (out of seventy-six full texts or substantial fragments), sixteen contain the Placidus gloss. Olsen also lists fifteen commentaries on the *Thebaid* copied separately from the poem, four of which are witnesses of Placidus while only one is of Pseudo Fulgentius's *Super Thebaiden*. Overall, there are at least forty-two manuscript witnesses of the Placidus commentary, and only two of the Pseudo Fulgentius in Munk Olsen's catalog. See Olsen, II, 563-7; see also Chance, *Medieval Mythography*, vol. 1, 98.
53. By way of comparison, the sixth-century commentary *Exposition on Vergil's Aeneid according to Moral Philosophy* of Fulgentius aligns episodes in the *Aeneid* with moments in the spiritual life (e.g. the shipwreck in Book One represents the birth of the soul).
54. Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 81.

55. This commentary has been edited by R. D. Sweeney, and is included in his edition of the Placidus commentary. Translations are my own. For further discussion of *Super Thebaiden*, see Jane Chance, *Medieval Mythography*, vol. 1, 125-8.
56. This optimistic reading of the poem may have influenced Conrad of Hirsau's twelfth-century *Dialogue on the Authors* (trans. Minnis and Scott, 37-64), the fullest treatise in the *accessus* tradition, for Conrad speaks of the Theban war as "an example of the various virtues." However, evidence for any direct influence of the Pseudo-Fulgencius on Conrad remains uncertain. See Minnis and Scott, 61-2.
57. See Peter Toohey, *Reading Epic* (London: Routledge, 1992), 167; Gordon Williams, *Change and Decline: Roman Literature in the Early Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 232-46.
58. Ed. Edmond Faral, *Les Arts poétiques du XIIe et XIIIe siècles* (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1924), 106-193. Trans. Aubrey E. Galyon, *The Art of Versification* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1980).
59. Faral, 164; Galyon, 80.
60. Faral, 109; Galyon, 25.
61. Faral, 193. Translation my own.
62. See J. S. P. Tatlock, "The Epilog of Chaucer's *Troilus*," *Modern Philology* 18 (1921): 625-59, 627-8. Tatlock suggests that Ovid may have imitated Horace's ending to his first book of *Epistles* (i.20).
63. "Ut pueros elementa docentem occupet extremis in vicis balba senectus." (*Epistles* I.20). l. 17-18.
64. For example, the narrator claims at the outset that his story moves him to "*wepen as I write*" (*Troilus*, l.7). See Winthrop Wetherbee, "*Per te poeta fui, per te cristiano*": Dante, Statius, and the Narrator of Chaucer's *Troilus*," in *Vernacular Poetics in the Middle Ages*, ed. Lois Ebin (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1984), 153-76. Wetherbee sees the relationship between the narrator of the *Troilus* and that of the *Thebaid* as mitigated by the figure of Dante's Stazio.
65. Trans. Gildas Roberts (Cape Town: A. A. Balkema, 1970), xiii. The work opens with "The tears of the Trojan women, the city conceded to the Fates, the two mighty wars of the princes, Troy twice brought to ashes—all this I lament. I weep also that the wrath of Hercules . . ." (3). The opening detail of the tears of the women itself recalls the *Thebaid*, all of whose chief episodes are punctuated by laments by women, often quite lengthy.
66. Anderson, 144-5.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

1. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski sees parallels between the war between Ethïoclés and Pollinicés and the recent (1141-44) civil war in England between Stephen I and Matilda. See her "The Traditions of the Old French *Roman de Thèbes*: a Poetico-Historical Analysis," diss., Princeton University, 1980, 80; Paul Clogan makes a similar correspondence between the events of the Theban war and the "parricidal and fratricidal sons of Henry II." See his "Lydgate and the *Roman Antique*," *Florilegium* 11 (1992): 7-21, 8; also his "*The Knight's Tale* and the Ideology of the *Roman Antique*," *Medievalia et Humanistica* 18 (1992): 129-155, 134-5. Expanding upon the theme of pacifism, one recent feminist reading of the *Thèbes* locates the poet's message of

- peace in the female characters of the poem who, as mourners, lovers and negotiators, expose the destructive pattern of behavior in the male characters. See Disa Gambera, "Disarming Women: Gender and Poetic Authority from the *Thebaid* to the *Knights Tale*," diss., Cornell University, 1995, 72-91.
2. I place the *Roman de Thèbes* in a specifically Norman (as opposed to Angevin or Plantagenet) context because, as I will argue, the poem celebrates a political vision that reflects the social, political and military policies specific to the Norman kingdom in the first half of the twelfth century. After 1154, with the coronation of Henry II Plantagenet, who was as much an Angevin as a Norman, it becomes more difficult to characterize a distinctly Norman presence in Europe. On Norman identity during this period, see David C. Douglas, *The Norman Fate, 1100-1154* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976). Douglas indicates that "after 1154, it becomes progressively less appropriate to speak without serious qualification of any specifically Norman influence as continuing to operate on Europe at all. The consequences of policies powerfully pursued from London to Palermo would be widespread during the ensuing decades. But these policies became rapidly less and less dependent upon the Norman past" (*Norman Fate*, 214). The *Roman de Thèbes* appears at the twilight of Norman influence in Europe, but it captures the essence of the specifically Norman political achievement.
  3. On the importance of crusading to Norman identity see David C. Douglas, *The Norman Fate 1100-1154*, Chapter nine, "Crusading Origins," 156-68; also John O. Ward, "Some Principles of Rhetorical Historiography in the Twelfth Century," *Classical Rhetoric and Medieval Historiography*, ed., Ernest Breisach (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 1985), 103-65.
  4. On the chronology of the *romans antiques*, see E. Faral, *Recherches sur les sources latines des contes et romans courtois du Moyen Age* (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1913), 169-87.
  5. Jean-Charles Huchet, "The Romances of Antiquity," *A New History of French Literature*, ed. Denis Hollier (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 36-41; see also his *Le roman médiéval* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1984), 11-12.
  6. See Erich Auerbach, *Literary Language and Its Public in Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965) 206; Barbara Nolan, *Chaucer and the Tradition of the Roman Antique* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 8.
  7. Léopold Constans, ed., *Le Roman de Thèbes*, 2 vols. (Paris: Librairie de Firmin Didot et Cie, 1890); also his *La Légende d'Oedipe étudiée dans l'Antiquité, au Moyen-Age et dans les Temps Modernes* (Paris: Maisonneuve & Cie, Librairie-Éditeurs, 1881); L. G. Donovan, *Recherches sur le 'Roman de Thèbes'* (Paris: Société d'Édition d'Enseignement, 1975); Barbara Nolan devotes a portion of a chapter to the *Thèbes* in her *Chaucer and the Tradition of the Roman Antique*, 55-62; Blumenfeld-Kosinski, "The Traditions of the *Roman de Thèbes*"; Disa Gambera, "Disarming Women," 72-91. By far the most succinct and thoughtful recent discussion of the genre as a whole is Christopher Baswell's "Marvels of Translation and Crises of Transition in the Romances of Antiquity," in Roberta L. Krueger, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 29-44.
  8. The best discussion of the manuscripts of the *Thèbes* can be found in Blumenfeld Kosinski's doctoral dissertation, "The Traditions of the Old French *Roman de Thèbes*";

- see also Constans, *La Légende d'Oedipe*, 156-70; also Alain Renoir, *The Poetry of John Lydgate* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), 119-35 and 161n.
9. Throughout this chapter, I use the phrase “*Thèbes* poet” chiefly as a convenience measure, keenly aware that several poets and interpolators appear to have had a hand in the *Thèbes*.
  10. For an analysis of the *Thebaid* as a source for the *Thèbes*, see J. Dufournet, “La *Thebaïde* de Stace et le *Roman de Thèbes*,” *Revue des Langues Romanes* 82 (1976): 139-60; by far the most extensive study of the *Thèbes* in relation to the *Thebaid* is by Aimé Petit, *Naissances du Roman: les Techniques Littéraires dans les Romans Antiques du XIIIe Siècles*, 2 vols. (Paris: Atelier nationale Reproduction des thèses, Université Lille III; Champion; Slatkine, 1985); on the Ovidian sources of the *Thèbes*, see Edmond Faral, “Ovide et le *Roman de Thèbes*,” in *Recherches sur les Sources Latines des Contes et Romans Courtois du Moyen Age*, 63-71; on the *Thèbes* and the *chanson de geste* tradition, see A. Micha, “Couleur Épique dans le ‘*Roman de Thèbes*,’” *Romania* 91 (1970): 145-60; also Francine Mora-Lebrun, ed., *Le Roman de Thèbes* (Librairie Générale Française, 1995), 20-26.
  11. Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953, 1983, 1990), 24-30 and 383-5. See also Edouard Jauneau, *Translatio Studii: The Transmission of Learning. A Gilsonian Theme* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1995).
  12. *Gesta Philipii Augusti*, in Henri-François Delaborde, ed., *Oeuvres de Rigord et de Guillaume le Breton*, 2 vols. (Paris: Librairie Renouard, H. Loones, successeur, 1882), Chapter 38.
  13. Patterson, *Negotiating the Past* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 160.
  14. Cited in Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, 384-5.
  15. “Old French Narrative Genres: Towards the Definition of the *Roman Antique*,” *Romance Philology* 34 (1980): 143-159, 147.
  16. All citations from the *Thèbes* are from Guy Raynaud de Lage, ed., *Le Roman de Thèbes*, 2 vols. (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1991) unless I indicate the edition by Constans.
  17. All translations are from John Smartt Coley, trans., *Le Roman de Thèbes (The Story of Thebes)* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1986).
  18. Kosinski, citing Curtius, notes that this “duty to impart” wisdom is an ancient rhetorical topos. Kosinski, “Old French Narrative Genres,” 149; Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, 87.
  19. Kosinski, “Old French Narrative Genres,” 149.
  20. Benoît uses a very similar prologue in the *Roman de Troie*. See Nolan, *Chaucer and the Tradition of the Roman Antique*, 15-25.
  21. Kosinski, “Old French Narrative Genres,” 153.
  22. See John O Ward, “Some Principles of Rhetorical Historiography in the Twelfth Century,” 122.
  23. All of these accounts have been collected in *Recueil des Historiens des Croisades: Historiens Occidentaux*, 5 Vols. (Paris: Imprimerie Imperiale, 1859; Republished by Gregg International Publishers, 1967).
  24. Ward, “Some Principles of Rhetorical Historiography in the Twelfth Century,” 122.
  25. *The Crusades: A Short History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987) 92.
  26. Riley-Smith, *The Crusades*, 89-90.

27. Riley-Smith, *The Crusades*, 96.
28. Riley-Smith, *The Crusades*, 97.
29. Riley-Smith, *The Crusades* 103.
30. Riley-Smith, *The Crusades*, 97.
31. Riley-Smith, *The Crusades*, 124-30.
32. "Recherches sur les sources du *Roman de Thèbes*," *Melanges de Philologie Romane et d'Histoire Litteraire offerts à M.Maurice Wilmotte*, vol. 2 (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, Éditeur, 1910), 595-618. While Jean Charles Payen has explored the crusading dimension of the *Thèbes*, he looks to the *chanson de geste* for its literary model, overlooking the chronicle accounts entirely. Though the poem makes use of the *chanson de geste* tradition, the roman antique cannot be classified narrowly as *chanson de geste*. See Payen, "Structure et Sens d *Roman de Thèbes*," *Le Moyen Age* 25 (1970): 493-513; for further discussion of the *Thèbes* and the *chanson de geste*, see Karen Pratt, "Reading Epic through Romance: the *Roland* and the *Roman de Thèbes*," *Reading Around Epic: A Festschrift in Honour of Professor Wolfgang van Emden*, ed., Marianne Ailes, Philip E. Bennett, and Karen Pratt (London: King's College Centre for Late Antique and Medieval Studies, 1998), 101-127; for the most recent overview of the crusade elements of the poem, see the introduction to Francine Mora-Lebrun, ed., *Le Roman de Thèbes*, 15-20.
33. "Les Romains antiques et la Représentation de la Réalité," *Moyen Âge* 67 (1961): 247-91, 266.
34. "La premier roman," *Orbis Mediaevalis: Mélanges de langue et de littérature médiévales offerts à Reto Raduolf Bezzola à l'occasion de son quatre-vingtième anniversaire*, ed., George Güntert, Marc-René Jung, and Kurt Ringger (Berne: Editions Francke, 1978), 323-327.
35. William of Tyre, *A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, trans. Emily Atwater Babcock and A. C. Krey, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943) II, 393. William also has a Teutonic priest called Gottschalk who acts ignobly by allowing his army of crusaders to plunder the goods offered for sale by the Hungarians. After plundering, they slay the Hungarians randomly (I, 110). In both cases, the name Gottschalk denotes untrustworthiness.
36. See also Payen, "Structure et Sens," 502-4.
37. Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), II, 11.
38. Riley-Smith, *The Crusades*, 90-1.
39. Runciman, *History of the Crusades*, II, 275. For Manuel's sympathies with Islam, see also Craig L. Hanson, "Manuel I Comnenus and the 'God of Mohammed': A Study of Byzantine Ecclesiastical Politics," *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam*, ed. John Victor Tolan (New York: Garland, 1996), 55-82.
40. *Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, II, 462.
41. An Acoupart/Acoupars/Achopart also appears in the OF *Chanson d'Antioch* ll. 1415, 2821, and 8766. Suzanne Deparc-Quioc, ed., *La Chanson d'Antioch*, 2 vols. (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1977).
42. Many of the mercenaries fighting for Ethüoclés, including Slavs, Turks, and Persians, also fight on behalf of the Saracen King Marsile in the *Chanson de Roland* (vv. 3214-64).

43. See Reinhold Schumann, *Italy in the Last Fifteen Hundred Years*, 2nd. ed. (Lanham and New York: University Press of America, 1992), 35-51. Also Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, I, 55-6.
44. The name "Galeran" is also found in the chronicle accounts of the First Crusade. According to Fulchre of Chartres, a certain Galeran, kinsman of Joscelin, the count of Edessa, was captured in 1122 by Belek enemies. See his *History of the Expedition to Jerusalem* (1095-1127), ed. Harold S. Fink, trans. Frances Rita Ryan (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1969), 237-40.
45. Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, II, 315.
46. All citations of the *Thebaid* are from Roger Lesueuer, ed., *Thébaïde*, 3 vols. (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1994); translations are from A. D. Melville, *Thebaid* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
47. "Marre" may refer to "Maara," the city taken just prior to Antioch during the First Crusade (William of Tyre, *Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, I, 310-11), or it may derive from "Marum/Maron/Mareuil," whence comes a certain "Rainerius." Rainerius deals a fatal wound to one of Saladin's richest emirs during a siege of a newly rebuilt fortress along the river Jordan (William of Tyre, *Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, II, 440).
48. In the de Lage edition, it is the king of "Alcors," an unidentified place (4664).
49. In Constans, the line reads "*Et il venqui les Turs de Perse*" (4058) ["And vanquished the Turks from Persia" (Coley 4058)]. The gesture is the same.
50. See his "Recherches sur les sources du *Roman de Thèbes*, 601-18.
51. This Meleager appears to share no resemblance with the Meleager of the ancient tale of the Caledonian Boar Hunt.
52. H. R. Loyn, ed., *The Middle Ages: A Concise Encyclopedia* (London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1989) 154; P. B. Grout, "Contemporary Life and Society in the *Roman de Thèbes*," *Medium Aevum* 38 (1969): 262-73, 266-7.
53. See Joshua Prawer, "The Venetians in Crusader Acre: A Reconsideration," in Michael Goodich, Sophia Menache, and Sylvia Schein, eds., *Cross-Cultural Convergences in the Crusade Period* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 215-23.
54. Barbara Nolan counts seventeen scenes of conciliar debate in the *Thèbes* compared with only four in the *Thebaid* (Nolan, *Chaucer and the Tradition of the Roman Antique*, 55).
55. See, for example, William of Tyre, *Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, I, 270-1, 314, and II 236.
56. See the *Gesta Francorum et aliorum Hierosolimitanorum* (*The Deeds of the Franks and other Prilgrims to Jerusalem*) ed. Rosalind Hill (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962), V, 13; also Fulchre of Chartres, *A History of the Expedition to Jerusalem* 1095-1127, I, 16; J.J. Salverda de Grave, "Recherche sur les sources du *Roman de Thèbes*," 612-17.
57. Paul Bancourt, "Or Antique, or Epique, Or d'Occident et d'Orient dans le *Roman de Thèbes*," *L'or au Moyen Age: monnaie, metal, objets, symbole* (Aix-en-Provence: Publications du CUER-MA, 1983) 27-39, 32.
58. *Gesta Francorum*, I, iv; Salverda de Grave, "Recherche sur les sources du *Roman de Thèbes*," 616.
59. See John France, *Western Warfare in the Age of the Crusades, 1000-1300* (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1999), 212-13.

60. Christopher Baswell, "Marvels of Translation and Crises of Transition in the Romances of Antiquity," 36-7.
61. L. G. Donovan compares the trial of Daire to the judgment of Ganelon in the *Chanson de Roland* (Donovan, *Recherches sur le Roman de Thèbes*, 206-9); P. B. Grout, "Contemporary Life and Society" 264-6; P. B. Grout, "The Trial of Daire le Roux and the Dating of the *Roman de Thèbes*," *French Studies* 19 (1965): 392-5; Barbara Nolan distinguishes the Daire episode from the *chanson de geste* tradition, the Ganelon episode in particular, and places the trial, instead, within the tradition of twelfth-century academic argumentation (Nolan, *Chaucer and the Tradition of the Roman Antique*, 57-62).
62. Spelling of his name varies in the accounts: Firruz, Firuz, Firouz, Feirus, Pirrus, Muferos, etc. For a comparison of the different versions of this episode in the chronicle accounts of the First Crusade, see Robert Levine, "The Pious Traitor: Rhetorical Reinventions of the Fall of Antioch," *Mittellateinisches Jahrbuch* 33 (1998): 59-80.
63. Lewis Sumberg, ed., *La Chanson d'Antioch* (Paris: A. et J. Picard, 1968) 25.
64. Baldric of Dole, who composed his *Historia Jerosolimitana* around 1107, identifies Pirus as a prominent Turk. See Baldricus ep. Dolensis, *Historia Jerosolimitana*, in *Recueil des Historiens de Croisades, Historiens occidentaux*, vol. IV, 1-111; Levine, "Pious Traitor," 69.
65. See, for instance, William of Tyre, *Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, I, 242. William gives the fullest account of the Pious Traitor episode, but his chronicle, composed between 1167-1184, postdates the *Roman de Thèbes*.
66. For example, see William of Tyre, *Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, I, 242ff.
67. Accounts vary on the tool of entry. Some accounts have the traitor lower a rope to which the crusaders attach a ladder, while others (i.e. Robert the Monk) claim that he lowers a ladder.
68. Though not all the chronicle accounts specify Pirus' social standing, he is powerful enough in all versions to control three of the city's towers.
69. For a full discussion of anachronism in the *romans antiques*, see Raymond Cormier, "The Problem of Anachronism: Recent Scholarship on the French Medieval Romances of Antiquity," *Philological Quarterly* 53 (1974): 145-57.
70. Constans, *Thèbes*, II, liiii-lv; Raynaud de Lage, *Thèbes*, I, xxxiii.
71. "Religion and Mythology in the *Roman de Thèbes*," *The Classical Tradition in French Literature*, ed. H. T. Branwell, A. H. Diverres, G. F. Evans, F. W. A. George and Vivienne Mylne (London: Grant and Cutler, Ltd., 1977): 23-30, 24.
72. Kosinski, "Gods as Metaphor," 10.
73. Payen, "Structure et Sens," 507.
74. Grout, "Religion and Mythology," 25.
75. As Norman Daniel points out, medieval western poets of the twelfth century typically attributed polytheism to Islam, and often fused the Greco-Roman pantheon with Muslim belief. See his *Heroes and Saracens: An Interpretation of the Chanson de Geste* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984), 121-54.
76. Constans, *Thèbes*, II, appendix II.
77. Blumenfeld-Kosinski notes that Christian writers of the Middle Ages often held pagan gods as "falsely deified and worshiped human beings." See her "The Gods as Metaphor," 1.
78. Payen, "Structure et Sens," 506.

79. "The Gods as Metaphor," 7.
80. "Gods as Metaphor," 8. Kosinski bases this reading on the many terms of literary production used to describe the temple and the activities therein including "gramaire" (93234), "chant" (9325), "sautier" and "messe" (9330), "clers" and "clergesse" (9332).
81. There is a very detailed description of the temple and its artwork just prior to Capaneüs' attack. See Constans, *Thèbes*, II, appendix II, 9169-9238. On the connection between the fight against paganism and the smashing of idols in crusade narratives, see John V. Tolan, "Muslims as Pagan Idolaters in Chronicles of the First Crusade," 97-117.
82. Grout, "Religion and Mythology," 24.
83. C. S. Lewis, "Dante's Statius," *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 94-102, 99. D. C. Feeney sees Statius' Jupiter as an autocrat who exhibits "Ovidian harshness" in his readiness to punish mortals. See his *Gods in Epic: Poets and Critics of the Classical Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991) 353-55. Feeney, however, does not discuss Jupiter's moments of compassion, or the tightness of Jupiter's arguments for punishing Thebes. The fact remains, as Lewis points out, that Statius is not consistent in his handling of Jupiter, which may account for the disparities in critical response.
84. *Historia Iherosolimitana*, Book XI, Chapter XXI, *Recueil des Historiens des Croisades*, vol. 3.
85. Payen, "Structure et Sens," 507.
86. For an excellent listing of medieval manuscript witnesses of the *Thebaid*, including information on accompanying material, see Birger Munk Olsen, *L'Étude des auteurs classiques latins aux XIe et XIIe siècles*, 3 vols (Paris: Editions CNRS, 1985), vol. II, 521-567 and vol. III, 128-31.
87. For descriptions of the manuscripts of the *Roman de Thèbes*, see de Lage, *Thèbes*, vol. I, v-ix, and Constans, *Thèbes*, vol. I, ii-xxiv, as well as his *La Légende d'Oedipe*, 156-70.
88. Constans, *Thèbes*, vol. II, xix, and de Lage, *Thèbes*, vol. I, vi-vii.
89. De Lage, *Thèbes*, vol. I, vii.
90. Françoise Viellard, *Bibliotheca Bodmeriana Manuscripts Français du Moyen Age* (Cologny: Foundation Martin Bodmer, 1975) 40-45.
91. Constans, *Thèbes*, vol. II, x.
92. Constans, *Thèbes*, vol. II, x. Constans transcribes the word *roman* as *ronmans* here, though given the similarity between *u* and *n* in medieval scripts, it may also read as *roumans*. In the *incipit* to the *Thèbes* in ms. B, Constans uses *roumans*.
93. Constans, *La Légende d'Oedipe*, 156-7.
94. Constans, *La Légende d'Oedipe*, 159.
95. Constans, *Thèbes*, Appendix V, ll. 13,279-95.
96. I am indebted to A. C. Spearing and Gregory Hays for help in translating these lines.
97. Malcolm Hebron, *The Medieval Siege: Theme and Image in English Romance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) 94-100.
98. In the twelfth-century commentary *Super Thebaiden*, formerly ascribed to Fulgentius, Adrastus' army is similarly referred to as "the Greeks." See L. G. Whitbread, ed., *Fulgentius the Mythographer* (Akron: Ohio State University Press, 1971), 235-44.
99. Both commentaries discussed here have been edited by David Anderson in his *Before the Knight's Tale: Imitation of Classical Epic in Boccaccio's Teseida* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), Appendixes I and II, 226-50, 232.

100. Anderson, *Before the Knight's Tale*, 242.
101. According to Greek legend, Polydorus is also the name of one of the *Epigonoï*, the sons of the Seven against Thebes, who return under the command of Adrastus (the only survivor of the Seven) to destroy the city of Thebes, an event that takes place just prior to the Trojan War. Polydorus, the son of Hippomedon, does not figure in Statius' *Thebaid*, which ends with Theseus' slaying of Creon. Nevertheless, the OF poet might have associated this name with either of these stories.
102. Haud procul inde iugum tutisque accomoda castris / arva notant, unde urbem etiam turresque uidere / Sidonias; placuit sedes fidiq̄ue receptus, / colle per excelsum patulo quem subter aperto / arua sinu nullique aliis a montibus instant / despectus; nec longa labor munimina durus / addidit: ipsa loco mirum natura faebat. / In uallum elatae rupes deuexaque fossis / aequa et fortuito ductae quater aggere pinnae (VII, 441-9) [They noticed, not far off, a ridge of land / Convenient for their camp, whence too they could / Observe the city and the towers of Thebes. / They liked the place with its security, / A summit spreading wide with open fields / Nestling below and nowhere overlooked / By other heights. Nor was hard toil required / To add long earthworks. Nature blessed the place / Amazingly: rocks rose to form a wall, / The shelving ground shaped ditches, and it chanced / Four mounds were there to serve as bastions].
103. G. D. West has studied the formulaic nature of descriptions of towns in OF poetry. Among the similarities he notes between the descriptions of Carthage, Troy and Thebes in the *romans antiques* is the situation of the town within a fertile landscape of rivers and arable land. He also suggests that the situation of all of these cities by the sea may be another descriptive theme. While it is certainly possible that the pastoral landscape surrounding Thebes in the OF *Roman de Thèbes* participates in the descriptive formulae for towns in OF poetry, the other two cities in the *romans antiques* that West discusses, Carthage and Troy, were actually coastal cities, which is not true of Thebes. Moreover, since the OF *Roman de Troie* and the *Roman d'Éneas* both postdate the *Thèbes*, the *Thèbes* poet could not have derived his description of Thebes from those works. See G. D. West, "The Description of Towns in Old French Verse Romances," *French Studies* 11 (1957): 50-59.
104. In Vergil's *Aeneid*, for example, Aeneas speaks of how the Greeks commanders, "*fracti bello fatisque repulsi*" and by the "*labentibus annis*," (II.13-14) devise the final battle plan involving the Trojan horse. R. A. B. Mynors, ed., *P. Vergili Maronis Opera* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).
105. Dictys Cretensis, *Ephemeridos Belli Troiani Libri a Lucio Septimio ex Graeco in Latinum Sermonem Translati*, ed. Werner Eisenhut (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1973), 5.11-12.
106. Rigord, Chapter 38. Rigord's *Deeds of Philip Augustus* (1189-1207) postdates the *Roman de Thèbes*, but we can assume that he got his material from earlier sources.
107. De Lage, xxxi.
108. Jean-Charles Huchet summarizes scholarly consensus on this point in his article "The Romances of Antiquity," 38.
109. Kosinski, "The Tradition of the Old French *Roman Antique*," 80; see also her "Gods as Metaphor," 5.
110. Both edited by David Anderson in his *Before the Knight's Tale*, Appendixes I and II.
111. "Form Remade: Statius' *Thebaid*" in *Roman Epic*, ed. A. J. Boyle (London: Routledge, 1993): 162-191, 188.

112. *The Norman Fate 1100-1154* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 3.
113. Douglas, *The Norman Fate*, 9.
114. Douglas devotes an entire chapter to the crusading origins of the Normans. See *The Norman Fate*, 156-68.
115. Douglas, *The Norman Achievement* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1969), 103-6.
116. Letters of Gregory VII, cited in Douglas, *The Norman Achievement*, 106.
117. *Historiam Regum Britanniae*, ed. Acton Griscom and Robert Ellis Jones (London: Longmans, Green and Co. 1929), IX.xviii-X.ii and X.vi-X.viii.
118. Douglas, *The Norman Achievement*, 135.
119. Douglas, *The Norman Fate*, 165.
120. Douglas, *The Norman Fate*, 172.
121. Hill, *Gesta Francorum*, xii.
122. Of course, several members of the Greek army of the *Thèbes* dress in the manner of Frenchmen, but their Frenchness does not necessarily mean Capetian. By this point, the Normans had assimilated to French culture and considered themselves thoroughly French, routinely referring to their subjects as *franci*. Thus the French-style Greeks in Adrastus' army may just as easily represent Norman culture. See Douglas, *The Norman Achievement*, 25n.
123. Douglas, *The Norman Achievement*, 107.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

1. For the most recent study of the prose adaptations of the *Roman de Thèbes*, including an edition of one of the manuscript witnesses, see Molly Lynde-Recchia, *Prose, Verse, and Truth-Telling in the Thirteenth Century* (Lexington, Kentucky: French Forum, Publishers, 2000).
2. For the most substantive discussions of history in the *Teseida*, see Winthrop Wetherbee, "History and Romance in Boccaccio's *Teseida*," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 20 (1991-2): 173-84; Ronald L. Martinez, "Before the *Teseida*: Statius and Dante in Boccaccio's Epic," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 20 (1991-2): 205-19; and especially David Anderson, *Before the Knight's Tale: Imitation of Classical Epic in Boccaccio's Teseida* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988).
3. Boccaccio composed the *Teseida* somewhere between 1339-41. He seems to have begun the work while living in Naples and he completed it after he had moved back to Florence. See Vittore Branca, *Boccaccio: The Man and His Works*, trans. Richard Monges (New York: New York University Press, 1976), 49; Anderson, *Before the Knight's Tale*, 7. On the *Teseida* as the first epic in the Italian language, Boccaccio addresses his work as "*primo a lor cantare l di Marte*" (12.84) ["the first to sing of Mars"]. Many scholars feel that Boccaccio alludes to Dante's list of subjects suitable for vernacular poetry, which includes (along with love and moral recitude) "arms" (*arma*). See Dante Alighieri, *De vulgare eloquentia*, ed. P. V. Mengaldo, in *Opere minori*, 2 vols (Milan and Naples: Ricciardi, 1979), vol. 2, 152.
4. *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Book, 1972), XV.1, 595.
5. *City of God*, XIV.28, 593.
6. *City of God*, XVIII.22, 787.
7. *City of God*, XVIII.2, 762.

8. *City of God*, V.10, XII.14, 18, 20, 21, 28.
9. See pp. 46-48.
10. For the epilogue of MS P, see Léopold Constans, *Le Roman de Thèbes*, 2 vols. (Paris: Librairie de Firmin Didot: 1890), vol. II, appendix V, ll. 13,279-95. The prose version of this ending preserved in the *Histoire ancienne* reads: "Ainsy comme vous avés oy, fu celle noble chité arse et destruite, quy fu chité de moult grant auctorité et seoit oultre Gresse sur la mer, ou on le pourroit encores trouver, et fu destruite .XX. ans devant le siege de Troyes et IIIc. ans devant que Romme fu fondee." See François Viellard, *Bibliotheca Bodmeriana Manuscripts Français du Moyen Age* (Cologne: Fondation Martin Bodmer, 1975), 81-3.
11. Anderson, *Before the Knight's Tale*, 144.
12. Mario Marti, ed., *Il Filocolo in Opere minore in volgare* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1969); translation my own. Boccaccio bases this description of king Felice's palace on that of Priam in Guido delle Colonne's *Historia Destructionis Troiae*. See Roberto Venuda, *Il Filocolo e la Historia destructionis Troiae de Guido delle Colonne* (Firenze: Firenze Atheneum, 1993), 81.
13. All citations of the *Thebaïd* are from Stace, *Thebaïde*, ed. Roger Lesueur, 3 vols. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1994); translations are from A. D. Melville, *Thebaïd* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).
14. For more on the pattern of historical repetition between Thebes and Troy, particularly for the works of Chaucer, see Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 61-83 and 131-6.
15. Orosius, *Seven Books of History against the Pagans*, trans. I. W. Raymond (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 59; *Eusebii Pamphili Chronici Canones Latine Veritit Eusebius Hieronymus*, ed. J. K. Fotheringham (London: Humphrey Milford, 1923), 91-97. On Boccaccio's use of Orosius and Eusebius, see David Anderson, "Mythography or Historiography? The Interpretation of Theban Myths in Late Medieval Literature," *Florilegium* 8 (1986): 113-39 and his *Before the Knight's Tale*, 167.
16. *Metamorphoses*, VII, VIII, XII; references to Theseus' adventures also appear in the *Heroides*, particularly letter X.
17. There is, as yet, no modern edition of the full *Histoire ancienne*, so I base my evidence on a manuscript of the First Redaction of the *Histoire* dated to the end of the thirteenth century (Princeton University Library MS. Garrett 128), fol. 21v-23v, as well as on catalog descriptions of the *Histoire*, for instance Royal MS 20 D.I, dating to fourteenth-century Naples, which includes only two miniatures for the Amazon episode, both of which depict Hercules. See Sir George F. Warner and Julius P. Gilson, *Catalogue of Western Manuscripts in the Old Royal and King's Collection*, 1921, 4 vols, vol. III, 376.
18. Boccaccio's copy of the *Thebaïd* (Plut. 38.6) contains the late-antique commentary of Lactantius Placidus. Oskar Hecker identified Boccaccio's handwriting on four of its leaves in 1902. See his *Boccaccio—Funde* (Braunschweig: Westermann, 1902), 33-4 and Table VIII; also David Anderson, "Boccaccio's Glosses on Statius," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 22 (1994): 3-134.
19. One such history available to Boccaccio, the *Chronologia Magna* of Paolino Veneto (MS. Vat. lat. 1960), contains a summary of Theban history following the outline of the *Roman de Thèbes*. Boccaccio's handwriting appears in a separate copy of Veneto's *Chronologia* (Paris, Bibl. Nat. MS lat. 6802). See Anderson, *Before the Knight's Tale*, 91.

20. David Wallace, *Chaucer and the Early Writings of Boccaccio*, (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 1985), 27.
21. For Boccaccio's use of Guido, see Roberto Venuda, *Il Filocolo e la Historia Destructionis Troiae*.
22. For example, Royal MS. 20 D.1, which represents a second redaction of the *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*, substitutes the accounts Dares and Dictys with a prose paraphrase of Benoît's *Roman de Troie*. See Warner and Gilson, *Catalogue of Western Manuscripts*, vol. 2, 375-7; also, Bernhard Degenhart and Annegrit Schmitt, "Die Illustrierung französischer Unterhaltungsprosa in neopolitanischen Scriptorien zwischen 1290 und 1320," *Festschrift Wolfgang Braunfels*, ed. Freidrich Piel and Jörg Traeger (Tübingen: Ernst Wasmuth, 1977), 71-92.
23. Boccaccio became familiar with Homer some twenty years later when he began studying Greek with Leontius Pilatus, a Calabrian Greek. Leontius lived with Boccaccio while translating Homer's *Iliad* into Latin. See Branca, *Boccaccio*, 115-8.
24. All citations of the *Teseida* are from *Teseida delle Nozze di Emilia*, ed. Alberto Limen-tani, in *Tutte le Opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. Vittore Branca (Verona: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1964); all translations are from *The Book of Theseus*, trans. Bernadette Marie McCoy (New York: Medieval Text Association, 1974).
25. "Chaucer's Use of the *Teseida*," *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 62 (1947): 598-621, 602.
26. "From Amazon to Courtly Lady: Generic Hybridization in Boccaccio's *Teseida*," *Comparative Literature Studies* 32 (1995): 226-43, 229.
27. *Boccaccio and Fiametta* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 67.
28. *Before the Knight's Tale*, 68.
29. "From Amazon to Courtly Lady," 230-1.
30. Anderson, *Before the Knight's Tale*, 69; Gambera, *Disarming Women: Gender and Poetic Authority from the Thebaid to the Knight's Tale* (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1995), 165-73.
31. Gambera, *Disarming Women*, 164.
32. *Historia Destructionis Troiae*, ed. Nathaniel Edward Griffin (Cambridge: Medieval Academy of America, 1936), book XIV, 120-27. All translations are from Mary Elizabeth Meek, *Historia Destructionis Troiae* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1974), 116-23. Guido's *Historia* relies heavily on Benoît de Saint Maure's *Roman de Troie* (though he never credits Benoît), but this particular scene has no parallel in Benoît's rendition of the early stages of the siege of Troy, and the arrival of the Greek ships at Troy is given only the briefest mention by Dares. Therefore, it is safe to assume that Boccaccio drew this scene from Guido. For Guido's use of Benoît, see C. David Benson, *The History of Troy in Middle English Literature* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 1980), 4-6.
33. Cf. *Teseida* I.78.
34. Peter Toohey, *Reading Epic: An Introduction to the Ancient Narratives* (London: Routledge, 1992), 26
35. Anderson, *Before the Knight's Tale*, 103.
36. David Anderson traces Boccaccio's source for these mythological figures in the catalog to the *Thebaid*. See *Before the Knight's Tale*, 128-9.
37. *Metamorphoses* XII.611; see also Anderson, *Before the Knight's Tale*, 124.

38. For further discussion of the Trojan elements in the catalog of warriors, see James H. McGregor, *The Shades of Aeneas: The Imitation of Vergil and the History of Paganism in Boccaccio's* Filostrato, Filocolo, and the Teseida (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 64-66.
39. A good example of such a catalog occurs in Guido's *Historia* (VIII.128ff.), where he describes the Greeks and Trojan forces gathered for the Trojan War.
40. Boccaccio would have known of this affair through Ovid's *Heroides* V and XVI, as well as through Guido delle Collone's *Historia Destructionis Troiae* IV and following, among other sources.
41. Emilia's words recall those of Helen as she mourns the death of Hector in Benoît's *Roman de Troie*:

Ja plus terre ne me sustienge,  
 Je ja mais par femme ne vienge  
 Si grant damage com par mei!  
 Tant riche duc e tant bon rei  
 E tant riche amiraut preisié  
 En sont ocis e detrenchié!  
 Lasse! A quel hore fui jo nee,  
 Ne por quei oi tel destinee  
 Que il monz fust par mei destruit?' (22855-64)

- Helen's speech here extends for much longer than Emilia's. See *Le Roman de Troie*, ed. Léopold Constans, 6 vols. (Paris: Librairie de Firmin-Didot, 1907), vol. 3. Guido omits this lament in his adaptation of Benoît's *Troie*, but Boccaccio may well have had access to the *Troie* itself.
42. Anderson, *Before the Knight's Tale*, 66-82; Robert Haller has made the same connection between the Theban throne and Emelye for Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*. See his "The *Knight's Tale* and the Epic Tradition," *Chaucer Review* 1 (1966): 67-84.
43. For Boccaccio's familiarity with Lucan see A. E. Quaglio, "Boccaccio e Lucano: una concordanza e una fonte da *Filocolo* all'*Amorosa visione*," *Cultura neolatina* 23 (1963): 153-71; also Giuseppe Velli, "Cultura e imitatio nel primo Boccaccio," *Annali della R. Scuola normale superiore di Pisa*, series II, 37 (1968): 65-93; also David Wallace, *Chaucer and the Early Writings of Boccaccio*, 47.
44. Lucan, *Pharsalia*, ed. A. E. Housman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926); trans. Jane Wilson Joyce (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).
45. *Latin Literature: A History*, trans. Joseph B. Solodow (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 445-6.
46. See Frederick Ahl, *Lucan: an Introduction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), 209-22.
47. Boccaccio provides a synopsis of this story in the very lengthy gloss to 7.50.
48. Wetherbee, 174.
49. See Anderson's chart comparing the plot structure of the *Teseida* and the *Thebaid* in *Before the Knight's Tale*, 79.
50. For a concise history of the critical bias towards the *Teseida* as a failed epic, see Anderson, *Before the Knight's Tale*, 1-37. Even a critic like Piero Boitani, who has devoted much of his career to Boccaccio's works, including the *Teseida*, accuses Boccaccio of "often losing sight of the main thread of his story and thus diluting the compactness and consequentiality of his theme." See "Style, Iconography and Nar-

- rative: The Lesson of the *Teseida*," *Chaucer and the Italian Trecento* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 185-99, 187.
51. Rita Librandi, "Corte e cavalleria della Napoli Angioina nel *Teseida* del Boccaccio," *Medioevo romanzo* 4 (1977): 53-72.
  52. Anderson, *Before the Knight's Tale*, 97-119.
  53. *The Trojan War: The Chronicles of Dictys of Crete and Dares the Phrygian*, trans. R.M. Frazer, Jr. (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1966), 23.
  54. Venus' comparable lines in the *Aeneid* read:
 

*'en perfecta mei promissa coniugis arte  
munera. ne mox aut Laurentis, nate, superbos,  
aut acrem dubites in proelia poscere Turnum.'* (8.612-14)

[ 'Here are the gifts I promised,  
Forged to perfection by my husband's craft,  
So that you need not hesitate to challenge  
Arrogant Laurentines or savage Turnus,  
However soon, in battle. ']
  - R. A. B. Mynors, ed., *P. Vergili Maronis Opera* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969; *The Aeneid*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Vintage Books, 1981). In both scenes, the armor is the work of Vulcan and is bestowed on the hero by a female figure as a gift (i.e. not actually placed on the hero, but granted to him). Both women indicate that the armor can be used with confidence (without qualm or hesitation).
  55. Thideüs of the OF *Roman de Thèbes* carries a sword crafted by Vulcan, a detail that emerges well before the battle begins. Constans, ed., *Roman de Thèbes*, ll.1561-2.
  56. There is some incongruity here in that Palemone does not fight at Troy, since, after all, Boccaccio created him as a fictional character and thus he does not appear in the accounts of Troy.
  57. For a discussion of the games in Book Eleven as Boccaccio's attempt to create an atmosphere of pagan authenticity in the theater at Athens, see James H. McGregor, *The Image of Antiquity in Boccaccio's Filocolo, Filostrato, and the Teseida* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 150-59.
  58. Although Boccaccio claims that many others participated in the games (11.67), these are the only winners named for the event.
  59. See, for example, Guido's descriptions of Helen (VII.171ff.), Andromache (VI-II.264-7), Cassandra (VIII.268-72), Polyxena (VIII.273-81), and Briseida (VI-II.191-9).
  60. Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria Nova*, for instance, devotes an entire section to describing female beauty, proceeding from head to toe and likening a woman's features to fruits and flowers. See *The Poetria Nova of Geoffrey of Vinsauf*, trans. Margaret F. Nims (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1967), ll. 550-620.
  61. Robert Hollander suggests that this very sensuous description participates in the submission of the Terrestrial Venus to the Celestial Venus that marks the ending of the poem, a view shared by Victoria Kirkham. Hollander, *Boccaccio's Two Venuses* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977); Kirkham, *The Sign of Reason in Boccaccio's Fiction* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1993), 203. Hope Weissman, for example, views the catalog as a "masterful performance of . . . vacant and vacating detail." See "Aphrodite/Artemis//Emila/Alison," *Exemplaria* 2 (1990): 89-125, 106. Disa Gambera accounts for the late description of Emilia within the context of other

- formal descriptions in the poem, suggesting that Emilia memorializes “virginal sexuality.” Her body becomes a monument, and as such it “walls up the troubling chapters of Theban History.” *Disarming Women*, 208. Carla Freccero concurs that the blason provides one last instance where “courtly romance, as genre, is deployed . . . to resolve the conflict set up in the epic presentation of the heroines” (notably their Amazon origins). See “From Amazon to Court Lady,” 239.
62. *Historia*, VII.171-230.
63. James H. McGregor argues that the second half of the *Teseida* is a “partially disguised version of the second half of the *Aeneid*” (47). He sees Theseus as “a kind of Aeneas” (49), the conflict between Palemone and Arcita as modeled on that of Aeneas and Turnus (47), and Emilia as “a Dido figure” (65). While he has done much to bring the epic machinery of the second half of the *Teseida* to the forefront, his larger reading is not in keeping with the chronological framework to which Boccaccio works so hard to adhere. See *The Shades of Aeneas*, 44-103.
64. *Historia*, II.19-24.
65. *Famous Women*, edited and translated by Virginia Brown (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 146-7.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1. The dating of both poems has revolved in large measure around the question of when Chaucer first discovered the work of Boccaccio, for both works show influence of the *Teseida*. Chaucer visited Italy twice during his career: once in 1372-3 and again in 1378. While he may have read the *Teseida* on either of these trips, it is generally accepted that Chaucer was not familiar with Boccaccio until the second trip in 1378. See Robert Pratt, “Chaucer and the Visconti Libraries,” *English Literary History* 6 (1939): 191-9; also William E. Coleman, “Chaucer, the *Teseida*, and the Visconti Library at Pavia: a Hypothesis” *Medium Aevum* 51 (1982): 92-101.
2. The similarities between the *Anelida* and the *Knight's Tale* include 1) the backdrop of Theseus' victory over the Amazons and his subsequent war against Thebes, 2) the appearance of Theseus, Ipolita, and Emelye early in the main action, and 3) the principal character of Arcite. The precise relationship between these two works, however, has been the focus of considerable debate, fueled in part by a reference in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* to a poem about “al the love of Palamon and Arcite / Of Thebes” (*LGW*, F, 420-1). In the late nineteenth century, Bernhard ten Brink proposed a theory that Chaucer had composed a redaction (now lost) of Boccaccio's *Teseida* in rhyme royal which became the source for the *Anelida*, a theory later corroborated by John Koch. See Bernhard ten Brink, *Chaucer: Studien zur Geschichte Seiner Entwicklung und zur Chronologie Seiner Schriften* (Munster: A. Russell, 1870), 48; Koch, *Essays on Chaucer*, Chaucer Society (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1877), 357-411. J. S. P. Tatlock and V. Langhan subsequently disproved the lost-text theory and argued, first, that the *Anelida* predates any redaction by Chaucer of the story of Palaemon and Arcite and, second, that the work referred to in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* is, in fact, the *Knight's Tale*. See Tatlock, *The Development and Chronology of Chaucer's Works*, Chaucer Society, Series 2, No. 37 (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1907), 45-86; V. Langhan, “Chaucer's *Anelida* and *Arcite*,” *Anglia* 44 (1920): 226-44. Their findings have been accepted by virtually all

- subsequent scholars. Nevertheless, some scholars continued to try to account for the differences between the *Anelida* and the *Knight's Tale* and have suggested that, despite Chaucer's use of the *Teseida* in both poems, he intended them as two distinct treatments of the same material. See Robert Pratt, "Chaucer's Use of the *Teseida*," *Proceedings of the Modern Language Society* 62 (1947): 599-621, 604n.; Michael D. Cherniss, "Chaucer's *Anelida* and *Arcite*: Some Conjectures," *Chaucer Review* 5 (1970): 9-21, 17-19.
3. I speak here only of Chaucer's Theban works, the *Knight's Tale* and the *Anelida*. In his Troy narrative, *Troilus and Criseyde*, however, Chaucer does blend Theban and Trojan themes, and, in this respect, Chaucer's *Troilus*, far more than the *Knight's Tale*, imitates the larger project of the *Teseida* of exploring the link between the Theban and Trojan conflicts.
  4. For Boccaccio's historicist treatment of much of the physical setting of the poem in the pagan past, see James McGregor, "Boccaccio's Athenian Theater: Form and Function of an Ancient Monument in *Teseida*," *Modern Language Notes* 99 (1984): 1-42.
  5. On Chaucer's historicism, see Morton Bloomfield, "Chaucer's Sense of History," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 51 (1952): 301-13; C. David Benson, "The *Knight's Tale* as History," *Chaucer Review* 3 (1968): 107-123; also A. J. Minnis, *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1982), 121-43.
  6. The commentary tradition records a similar fate for Thebes; for instance, the *Ovide Moralisé* (9.1810-12) claims that the city was destroyed after the war and contains no mention of any rebuilding.
  7. See David Anderson's chapter "Imitation of the *Thebaid* in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*," in *Before the Knight's Tale: Imitation of Classical Epic in Boccaccio's Teseida* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 192-224; Winthrop Wetherbee, "Romance and Epic in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*," *Exemplaria* 2.1 (1990): 303-328.
  8. "The *Knight's Tale* and the Epic Tradition," *Chaucer Review* 1 (1966): 67-84, 68.
  9. Anderson, *Before the Knight's Tale*, 199-207. This is one of the most frequently excerpted lines from the *Thebaid* in medieval *florilegia*. All citations to the *Thebaid* are from Stace, *Thebaïde*, ed., Roger Lesueur, 3 vols. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1994).
  10. Anderson, *Before the Knight's Tale*, 193 and 147-50. Servius' definition of *metrum heroicum* included the mixture of "human" and "divine" elements.
  11. Anderson, *Before the Knight's Tale*, 199.
  12. "Romance and Epic in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*," 318.
  13. See also Nolan, *Chaucer and the Tradition of the Roman Antique* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 248; for further consideration of the epic dimensions of the poem see John Finlayson, "The *Knight's Tale*: The Dialogue of Romance, Epic, and Philosophy," *Chaucer Review* 27 (1992): 126-49.
  14. I derive this term from W. F. Bolton, who claims that "the *Teseida* is only a quarry for Chaucer; it is not the artifact." See "The Topic of the *Knight's Tale*," *Chaucer Review* 1 (1967): 217-27, 217.
  15. "Chaucer's Use of the *Teseida*," 603.
  16. *Chaucer: Complaint and Narrative* (Bury St. Edmunds: D.S. Brewer, 1988), 92.
  17. Helen Cooper, *The Structure of the Canterbury Tales* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1983), 93-4.
  18. Derek Pearsall, *The Canterbury Tales* (London and New York: Routledge, 1985), 119; Derek Brewer calls the *Teseida* an "inflated epic." See *English Gothic Literature* (London: Macmillan Press, 1983), 113.

19. Larry D. Benson, *Riverside Chaucer*, 6; J. A. Burrow, "The Canterbury Tales I: Romance," *Cambridge Chaucer Companion*, ed. Piero Boitani and Jill Mann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 109-124, 121; see also H.S. Wilson, "The *Knight's Tale* and the *Teseida* Again," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 18 (1949): 131-46.
20. James H. McGregor, "The *Knight's Tale* and Trecento Historiography," *The Decameron and the Canterbury Tales*, ed. Leonard Michael Koff and Brenda Deen Schildgen (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2000), 212-25, 221.
21. Helen Cooper, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 68.
22. See especially Elizabeth Salter's discussion of the *Knight's Tale* in *Fourteenth Century English Poetry: Contexts and Readings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 141-81; also John Finlayson, "The *Knight's Tale*: The Dialogue of Romance, Epic, and Philosophy," 140-1.
23. Anderson, *Before the Knight's Tale*, 199.
24. Wetherbee, "Romance and Epic," 307.
25. "The *Knight's Tale* and Trecento Historiography," 222.
26. Anderson, *Before the Knight's Tale*, 199. Anderson responds to Pratt's influential study of "Chaucer's Use of the *Teseida*" and its scholarly offspring.
27. On the belief that Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* exhibits a greater interest in philosophy than the *Teseida*, see Elizabeth Salter, *Fourteenth-Century English Poetry*, 124; Jane Chance, *The Mythographic Chaucer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 184.
28. Pearsall, *The Canterbury Tales*, 119; Cooper, *The Structure of the Canterbury Tales*, 93-4.
29. Anderson, *Before the Knight's Tale*, 173-4. Boccaccio's reversal of the pattern of Theban history in the *Teseida* contrasts with his reinscription of the Trojan pattern of history in the same work, and the relationship between these two projects in the *Teseida* forms the basis of my second chapter. Nevertheless, in this chapter, I refer primarily to the *Teseida*'s treatment of strictly Theban themes (which David Anderson's book addresses at length), and argue that Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* takes issue precisely with Boccaccio's handling of Theban, not Trojan, history.
30. For the classic discussion of the *Teseida* as romance see Robert Hollander, *Boccaccio's Two Venuses* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977).
31. On Palemone and Arcita's use of the language of religion, see Janet Levarie Smarr, *Boccaccio and Fiametta* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 74-80. Of course, in romance the discourses of earthly love (*cupiditas*) and higher love (*caritas*) are collapsed, so that the language of *cupiditas* includes a great deal of the vocabulary of religious devotion, and this is certainly true of the *Teseida*. However, I argue that in Boccaccio's epic the balance between the languages of *cupiditas* and *caritas* is tipped decidedly in the direction of *caritas* and asserts a distinctly Christian transformation.
32. While Chaucer, I argue, does not replicate this conversion experience for his heroes in the *Knight's Tale*, he does allow the pagan Troilus to undergo this transformation in *Troilus and Criseyde*, forming yet another way in which the *Troilus* imitates the *Teseida* in its overall handling of antiquity.
33. All citations of the *Teseida* are from *Teseida della Nozze di Emilia*, ed. Alberto Limentani, in *Tutte le Opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. Vittore Branca (Verona:

- Arnoldo Mondadori, 1964); all translations are from *The Book of Theseus*, trans. Bernadette Marie McCoy (New York: Medieval Text Association, 1974).
34. Anderson, *Before the Knight's Tale*, 169-74.
  35. See Alain Renoir, "Thebes, Troy, Criseyde, and Pandarus: An Instance of Chaucerian Irony," *Studia Neophilologica* 32 (1960): 14-17; Bernhard L. Witlieb, "Chaucer and the French Story of Thebes," *English Language Notes* 11 (1973): 5-9; Barbara Nolan, *Chaucer and the Tradition of the Roman Antique*, 228-231.
  36. Albert S. Cook, "Two Notes on Chaucer," *Modern Language Notes* 31 (1916): 441-2. Cook suggests that the reference to Armenia ("Ermony") in the *Anelida* (72) and to "Lyeys" in the *Knight's Tale* (58) may both derive from the *Thèbes*; Roland M. Smith, "Five Notes on Chaucer and Froissart," *Modern Language Notes* 66 (1951): 27-32, 27-28. Smith argues for Froissart's poetry as a more likely source than the *Roman de Thèbes* for certain details in the *Knight's Tale*; Paul L. Clogan, "The *Knight's Tale* and the Ideology of the Roman Antique," *Medievalia et Humanistica*, New Series, 18 (1992): 129-55. Clogan claims that Chaucer models his knight-narrator on the *clerkly auctor* of the *roman antique* in general, but does not argue for any specific instance of influence of the *Thèbes* on either the *Knight's Tale* or the *Anelida*.
  37. Paul Clogan, "Chaucer's Use of the *Thebaid*," *English Miscellany: A Symposium of History, Literature, and the Arts* 18 (1967): 9-31, 18; also his "Chaucer and the *Thebaid* Scholia," *Studies in Philology* 61 (1964): 599-615, 606-7; Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 63; Jane Chance, *The Mythographic Chaucer*, 186.
  38. All citations are from the *Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).
  39. Several alternate interpretations of "Ermony" include Frederick Tupper's theory that it represents a latinized version of "Ormonde" (the Countess of Ormonde). See his "Chaucer's Tale of Ireland," *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association* 36 (1921): 186-22; Wise, in *The Influence of Statius upon Chaucer*, claims that "Ermony" refers to "Harmonia," the first recipient of the brooch of Thebes (70). Neither of these explanations proves convincing since "Ormonde" is even further removed from medieval histories of Thebes than Armenia, and because Harmonia represents a person, not a place. One further possibility is that "Ermony" refers to Brittany. The *Tristan* (1172-75) of the French poet Thomas, features the domain of "Armenie," or "Ermenie," which borders on Brittany. Gottfried von Strassburg's adaptation of Thomas' work alters the name to "Parmenie," presumably to avoid any confusion with Armenia. The ME *Sir Tristrem* uses "(H)ermenie." Since "Armenie" (or "Ermenie") represents a place rather than a person, it is possible that Chaucer has *Anelida* coming from a region near Brittany. For a discussion of the setting of the French, German and English Tristan legends, see A. T. Hatto, ed. Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982), appendix 1, 357-58, appendix 5, 369-70. However, Brittany is normally associated in literary works of this period (including Chaucer's) with the form of the Breton Lay (see, for example, the *Franklin's Tale*, l.729), which the *Anelida* is not. Moreover, Brittany is far more removed from the medieval Theban scene than Armenia.
  40. All citations from the *Thèbes* are from Guy Raynaud de Lage, ed., *Le Roman de Thèbes* (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1966), unless otherwise indicated. See also Albert S. Cook, "Two Notes on Chaucer," *Modern Language Notes* 31 (1916): 441-2.

41. Chaucer could not have derived his reference to Armenia from the Prose *Thèbes* since all of the eastern aspect of the OF poem had been edited out by the redactor(s).
42. See the recent study of Carolyn P. Collette and Vincent J. DiMarco, "The Matter of Armenia in the Age of Chaucer," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 23 (2001): 317-58.
43. In the Prologue to the Wife of Bath's Prologue, Chaucer similarly refers to the side of Polynices as the "Grekes" (744) while alluding to the story of how Amphiarus' wife, Eriphyle, reveals her husband's hiding place in exchange for the brooch of Thebes. This story does not appear in the verse *Thèbes*, but it does appear in the prose *Thèbes*, ed. Molly Lynde Recchia, *Prose, Verse, and Truth-Telling in the Thirteenth Century* (Lexington, Kentucky: French Forum Publishers, 2001), Appendix, Chapter 72. Therefore, Chaucer's allusion, in this case, derives from the prose redaction.
44. Chaucer, however, unlike the OF poet, does not include Trojan personnel in Thebes in the *Anelida*.
45. In her study of the figure of Chaucer's Arcite, Judith C. Perryman claims that "the origin of this character Arcite is not known." However, Perryman does not discuss Arcite within the larger context of Theban history that Chaucer sought to recuperate, in which case Arcite's falseness seems quite natural. See her "The 'False Arcite' of Chaucer's *Knighi's Tale*," *Neophilologus* 68 (1984): 121-33, 128; also Michel Aaij, "Perverted Love in Chaucer's 'Anelida and Arcite,'" *Medieval Perspectives* 14 (1999): 13-19.
46. See A. J. Minnis, ed., with V. J. Scattergood and J. J. Smith, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Shorter Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 468-73; Aage Brusendorff, *Chaucer Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), 259-60; John Norton Smith, *Medieval Studies for J. A. W. Bennett* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 81-99; A. S. G. Edwards, "Unity and Authenticity of *Anelida and Arcite*: The Evidence of the Manuscripts," *Studies in Bibliography* 41 (1988): 177-88; Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, 62.
47. See Michael D. Cherniss, "Chaucer's *Anelida and Arcite*: Some Conjectures," 21; J. J. Donahue, *Chaucer's Lesser Poems* (Dubuque, Iowa: Loras College Press, 1974), 120; Stephen Knight, *Rymyng Craftily: Meaning in Chaucer's Poetry* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1973), 23; David Wallace, "Chaucer's Continental Inheritance: The Early Poems and *Troilus and Criseyde*," *The Cambridge Chaucer Companion*, ed. Piero Boitani and Jill Mann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 19-37, 26; Charles Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 114; Jane Chance, *The Mythographic Chaucer*, 185.
48. Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, 65.
49. Helen Cooper, *Structure of the Canterbury Tales*, 92.
50. See my discussion on pp. 65-69.
51. Chaucer does include one passing reference to Hector in l. 2832 of the *Knighi's Tale* (which he borrows from the *Teseida*, 11.7), but Hector does not actively participate in the narrative.
52. C. David Benson, *The History of Troy in Middle English Poetry* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 1980), 134-43.
53. Chaucer mentions Lucan in the *Man of Lawe's Tale* (401), the *House of Fame* (1499) and the *Troilus* (V.1792), as well as in the *Monk's Tale*. For Chaucer's knowledge of Lucan's *Pharsalia*, see Edgar Finley Shannon, *Chaucer and the Roman Poets* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929; repr. 1964), 333-39; F. P. Hinton,

- “Lucan and the *Man of Law’s Tale*,” *Papers on Language and Literature* 17 (1981): 339-52.
54. On the classical setting of the *Knight’s Tale*, see A. J. Minnis, *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity*, 7-30 and 100-43; also C. David Benson, “The *Knight’s Tale* as History.”
  55. Joseph Mersand has documented how the *Knight’s Tale* contains the largest number of romance words of any of the *Canterbury Tales*. See *Chaucer’s Romance Vocabulary*, 2nd ed. (New York: Comet Press, 1939), 80.
  56. *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: The First Five Canterbury Tales* (London: Edward Arnold, 1985), 88-98 and 104.
  57. David Anderson explains that Arcite and Palaemon are both “*cosyn*” and “*brother*” because of their incestuous origins. See *Before the Knight’s Tale*, 207-212; also his article “Theban Genealogy in the *Knight’s Tale*,” *Chaucer Review* 21 (1987): 311-20.
  58. Anderson, *Before the Knight’s Tale*, 172.
  59. Cf. *Teseida* 4.84 and *Knight’s Tale*, ll. 1553-4.
  60. For a full discussion of the substitution of love for territory, see Haller, “The *Knight’s Tale* and The Epic Tradition,” 74.
  61. Haller, “The *Knight’s Tale* and the Epic Tradition,” 83. The proliferation of Theban conflict in the *Knight’s Tale* also explains why Chaucer adds to Boccaccio’s story a descent scene, whereby Arcite, while still in Thebes, is visited by Mercury, who prompts him to return to Athens to “shapen of thy wo an ende” (l. 1392). As Ann M. Taylor points out, this scene participates in a long and rich tradition of descent scenes in epic literature, all of which “rarely lead to peace of any sort.” Boccaccio, she notes, does not include a descent scene in his *Teseida*. See her “Epic Descent in the *Knight’s Tale*,” *Classical folia* 30 (1976): 40-56, 54.
  62. See, for example, A.C. Spearing, “Chaucer’s Classical Romances,” *Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 57-8; Derek Pearsall, *The Canterbury Tales*, 135-6.
  63. Melody Kemp has argued that Chaucer systematically redirects our sympathy away from Arcite (the undisputed hero of the *Teseida*) and towards Palaemon in this scene and elsewhere. However, her evidence is sparse, and at times based upon misreadings of basic textual details. See her “Palamon and Theban Restoration in the *Knight’s Tale*,” *Neophilologus* 76 (1992): 317-19.
  64. The spelling of the city’s new name varies throughout the manuscripts (e.g. *Estines*, *Estives*, *Estrie*). See Constans, *La Légende d’Oedipe étudiée dans l’Antiquité, au Moyen-Age et dans les Temps Modernes* (Paris: Maisonneuve & Cie, Librairie-Editeurs, 1881), 343-4. See also Molly Lynde-Recchia’s edition of one of the manuscript witnesses of the prose *Thèbes* (Paris B.N.F.fr.20125), Chapter 103.
  65. “The Imagery of the City of Thebes in the *Knight’s Tale*,” *Typology and English Medieval Literature*, ed. Hugh T. Keenan (New York: AMS Press, 1992), 169-82.
  66. *The Canterbury Tales*, 121ff.
  67. “The *Knight’s Tale* and the Epic Tradition,” 82-3.
  68. On Chaucer’s knowledge and use of the Lactantius commentary, see Anderson, *Before the Knight’s Tale*, 208-10; also his “Theban Genealogy in the *Knight’s Tale*,” 314.
  69. Indeed Chaucer employs animal imagery into his characterization of Palaemon and Arcite, among other characters. In the grove scene, the kinsmen are described as a lion and a tiger, and then as “wilde bores” (l.1658). Jeffrey Helterman, in his study of the animal imagery in this tale, attributes the savage attributes of the heroes (as

- well as other characters) to Chaucer's particular handling of the chivalric ideal. However, as Helterman himself points out, such imagery is absent in the source text, the *Teseida*, where Boccaccio so intently explores the transformative and redemptive power of the chivalric (and, by extension, Christian) ethical system. A more likely source for this imagery is the classical epic tradition, particularly Statius' *Thebaid*, where Adrastus dreams of a "*suen*" and "*leonem*" (boar and lion) who are meant to represent Eteocles and Polynices (I.397). See Jeffrey Helterman, "The Dehumanizing Metamorphoses of the *Knight's Tale*," *Journal of English Literature and History* 38 (1977): 493-511.
70. See, for example, Minnis, *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity*.
  71. See, for example, John Leyerle, "The Heart and the Chain," *The Learned and the Lewed: Studies in Chaucer and Medieval Literature*, ed., Larry D. Benson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 113-45; Salter, *Fourteenth-Century English Poetry*, 149-50; William F. Woods, "My Sweete Foo': Emelye's Role in *The Knight's Tale*," *Studies in Philology* 88 (1991): 276-306.
  72. See, for example, D. W. Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 260-66; J. D. Burnly, *Chaucer's Language and the Philosopher's Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 11-28.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

1. Guy Raynaud de Lage, ed. *Le Roman de Thèbes*, 2 vols. (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1991), ll. 8208ff.
2. *Il Teseida delle Nozze di Emilia*, ed. Alberto Limentani, in *Tutte le Opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. Vittore Branca (Verona: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1964), 8.98.
3. Constans, ed., *Roman de Thèbes*, 2 vols. (Paris: Librairie de Firmin Didot et Cie, 1890), ll. 2025- 2082 and ll. 4711-4824; *Thebaid* III.440-647 and VII.690-823. In the *Thebaid*, Amphiarus is one of two prophets consulted by Adrastus, the other being Melampus. In the *Thèbes*, only Amphiarus is consulted.
4. *Teseida* 4.12-17; *Pharsalia* 9.961-99.
5. David Anderson, *Before the Knight's Tale: Imitation of Classical Epic in Boccaccio's Teseida* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1988), 168-74.
6. For example, he depicts the act of reading as we see Criseyde sitting in a paved parlor with two other ladies listening while another "reden hem the geste / Of the siege of Thebes" (83-4). He also highlights the fabric and layout of the book when Criseyde tells Pandarus that "we stynten at thise lettres rede" (103), indicating a chapter division marked by a rubricated letter. See Nolan, *Chaucer and the Tradition of the Roman Antique* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 228-9; Paul M. Clogan, "Criseyde's Book of the Romance of Thebes," *Hebrew University Studies in Literature and the Arts* 13 (1985): 18-28; Alain Renoir, "Thebes, Troy, Criseyde, and Pandarus: An Instance of Chaucerian Irony," *Studia Neophilologica* 32 (1960): 14-17.
7. "Chaucer's Summary of Statius' *Thebaid*, II-XII," *Traditio* 11 (1955): 409-20. Root has observed that all but one of the manuscripts of the *Troilus* contain the twelve line Latin *argumentum* after l. 1498, though modern editions do not include it in the text. See R. K. Root *The Book of Troilus and Criseyde by Geoffrey Chaucer* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1926), 554.

8. Alain Renoir, "Thebes, Troy, Criseyde, and Pandarus: An Instance of Chaucerian Irony,"; David Anderson, "Theban History in Chaucer's *Troilus*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 4 (1982): 109-133, 119-125; Paul M. Clogan, "Criseyde's Book of the Romance of Thebes,"; Barbara Nolan, *Chaucer and the Tradition of the Roman Antique*, 228-9, 237; Boyd Ashby Wise, *The Influence of Statius upon Chaucer* (New York: Phaeton Press, 1967), 8-9; Laurel Amtower, *Engaging Words: The Culture of Reading in the Later Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 150-52.
9. For discussions of the prose versions of the *Roman de Thèbes*, see Paul Meyer, "Les Premières Compilations Françaises d'Histoire Ancienne," *Romania* 14 (1885): 35-81; G. Raynaud de Lage, "Les 'romans antiques' dans l'Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César," *Le Moyen Age* 63, 4<sup>th</sup> serie, 12 (1957): 267-309; Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, "The Earliest Developments of the French Novel: The *Roman de Thèbes* in Verse and Prose," *The French Novel: Theory and Practice. Publications of the Annual French Literature Conference Held from the 24th through the 26th of March 1983 at the University of South Carolina, Columbia*. French Literature Series 11 (1984): 1-10; Jeffrey H. Kaimowitz, "A Fourth Redaction of the *Histoire Ancienne jusqu'à César*," in David F. Bright and Edwin S. Ramage, eds., *Classical Texts and Their Traditions: Studies in Honor of C. R. Trahman* (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1984), 75-87; Molly Lynde-Recchia, *Prose, Verse, and Truth-Telling in the Thirteenth Century: An Essay on Form and Function in Selected Texts, Accompanied by an Edition of the Prose Thèbes as Found in the Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César* (Lexington, KY: French Forum: Edward C. Armstrong Monographs on Medieval Literature 10), 2000.
10. Chaucer himself continues to carry on a vigorous dialogue with the Italian works of Boccaccio, including the *Teseida*, despite the fact that his audience would have no knowledge of these works. For more on this question, see A. C. Spearing, "*Troilus and Criseyde*: The Illusion of Allusion," *Exemplaria* 2 (1990): 263-77, 270-1.
11. Renoir, "Thebes, Troy, Criseyde, and Pandarus: An Instance of Chaucerian Irony"; for Chaucer's knowledge of the *Roman de Thèbes*, see Boyd Ashby Wise, *The Influence of Statius upon Chaucer* (Baltimore, J. H. Furst, 1911), 127-37, and my discussion in Chapter 4, pp. 119-123. More recently, Catherine Sanok has argued that Criseyde is not reading the OF *Thèbes* but rather the Latin *Thebaid*. However, she fails to either produce sufficient evidence that the text in question is Statius' poem, or to account satisfactorily for the copious evidence in the scene that Criseyde is reading the OF *Thèbes*. See Sanok, "Criseyde, Cassandre, and the *Thebaid*: Women and the Theban Scene of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 20 (1998): 41-71, 44-9.
12. In the *Roman de Thèbes*, ed. Constans, Amphiorax is referred to as "arcevesques" (4791) and his replacement following his death is referred to as "evesque" (5053). In the prose *Thèbes*, Amphiarus is referred to as "evesque" (Chapter 73). See Molly Lynde-Recchia, Appendix, 171.
13. See also the *Anelida*, l.57, and the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, l. 741, where Chaucer also uses the French spelling.
14. London, British Museum, MS Add. 34114, (*En enfer chiet(e) l'espee traite*). See Constans, ed., *Le Roman de Thèbes*, vol. II, Appendix I, l.4477.
15. For a table of the placement of the capitals in the OF *Thèbes*, see Aime Petit, *Naissances du Roman*, vol. 2 (Paris: Champion, 1985), 1131-61.

16. Evidence would suggest that Chaucer was aware of these differences, at least the differences between Statius' *Thebaid* and the OF *Roman de Thèbes*. In his first dealings with Theban history, the *Anelida and Arcite*, Chaucer borrows the Theban setting of the *Roman de Thèbes*, situating Thebes within a larger network of allied eastern kingdoms including Armenia, whence Anelida comes, and designating the opposing sides as the "Thebans" versus the "Greeks," a designation derived from the medieval tradition of Thebes, not the ancient tradition (since the Thebans *are* Greek). He later dropped this eastern landscape for Thebes in the *Knights Tale*, working closely instead with Statius' *Thebaid*. Thus we know that Chaucer was indeed aware of the differences between the texts of which Criseyde and Pandarus speak.
17. See Barry Windeatt, ed., *Troilus and Criseyde: A New Edition of "The Book of Troilus"* (London and New York: Longman, 1984, II.82n; also Clogan, "Criseyde's Book of the Romance of Thebes," 22-3; D. S. Brewer, *Chaucer in His Time* (London: Nelson, 1963), 199-220.
18. See pp. 51-55.
19. See, for example, ll.6173-6210 (Constans) where Ismene and Antigone discuss their love for Ates and Parthenopeus respectively, or the earlier episode involving Tydeus and the daughter of Lycurgus (which appears in mss. A and P only) in Constans, ed. *Thèbes*, vol. II, appendix III, ll.137-45.
20. Troilus compares himself to Oedipus while in his bed chamber while lying on his bed (IV.300); Criseyde reveals the identity of her mother as Argia (the name of Polynices' wife) in the course of a private lament while in "hire chambre . . . out of the halle" (IV.732, 762); Cassandre recounts the story of Thebes for Troilus in the privacy of his bedchamber (V.1457ff.). One exception to the setting of the private chamber occurs when Troilus begs that Cupid not be cruel to Troy the way Juno had been to Thebes (V.600-1), but even here the connection is made in the context of his private observations while gazing upon Criseyde's empty house.
21. One of the few times we see Pandarus mentioning news of the war to Criseyde occurs in the scene where he delivers Troilus' letter to her. He uses news of a "Greek espie" (II.1112) as a pretext for gaining a private audience with Criseyde out of others' earshot (II.1118-19). It remains unclear, therefore, whether he speaks of a real spy or whether he invented the spy to get her attention.
22. Her points of argument that reflect on her understanding of the political scene include the following: there is talk of peace and Helen will likely be returned to the Greeks soon, after which the Greeks will make reparation to us (IV.1345-48); the nature of the peace will compel both sides to renew dealings with one another (IV.1352-5); travel will be much easier between camps (IV.1357-8); my father will see my good connections with the Trojan court as a means of gaining acceptance back into Troy (IV.1390-93). All prove to be blatantly false.
23. Chaucer tells us, for example, that Pandarus had been in the Parliament chamber when the exchange of prisoners was agreed upon (IV.344).
24. Sanok argues that Criseyde's (and Cassandre's) knowledge of Theban history indicates how "Chaucer assigns to women . . . the most pronounced historical consciousness in the poem." See "Criseyde, Cassandre, and the *Thebaid*," 67. I would argue instead that Chaucer's placement of a text of Theban history in this scene in a woman's house reflects more on what has become of Theban history (as emblematic of historical knowledge in general) than on the depth of Criseyde's character.

25. For Criseyde as an impressionistic reader who does not impose any system of rational interpretation on what she reads, see Nolan, *Chaucer and the Tradition of the Roman Antique*, 234-43.
26. In Constans' edition, this episode ends at l.4842, nearly halfway through the poem.
27. The designation of the two sides of the Theban conflict as "Greeks" and "Thebans" is unique to the medieval tradition of Thebes.
28. For discussions of Chaucer's "Argyve," see W. W. Skeat, *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1900), 489; R. K. Root, *The Book of Troilus and Criseyde by Geoffrey Chaucer*, 513-14; F. N. Robinson, *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, 2nd ed. (Boston, 1957), 836; Anderson, "Theban History in Chaucer's *Troilus*," 125-9. Susan Schibanoff proposes that Chaucer's "Argyve" does not mean "Argia," that, instead, he invented her as an allegorical figure representing *providentia*, in keeping with the medieval tradition of the exposition of etymologies of personal names. I find this argument unconvincing first in that the commentary from which she draws the meaning of Argia, the *Super Thebaiden* of Pseudo Fulgentius, was not especially influential in the medieval tradition of Thebes. Secondly, this reading does not apply to Chaucer's use of other Theban names throughout the *Troilus*, including Antigone, Athamante, Niobe, Oedipus, or with Chaucer's non-allegorical use of the name "Argyve" in Cassandra's summary of Theban history (V.1509). See "Argus and Argyve: Etymology and Characterization in Chaucer's *Troilus*," *Speculum* 51 (1976): 647-58.
29. Argia's lament was frequently excerpted in medieval *florilegia* and, in some cases, set to music. Thus medieval audiences would have known of this lament in a variety of forms.
30. "Theban History in Chaucer's *Troilus*," 127-8.
31. Statius suggests that Argia and the other Argive women who buried their dead against Creon's command were taken into custody, but it is not clear whether she was executed (*Thebaid*, XII. 461-3).
32. For example, see Winthrop Wetherbee, *Chaucer and the Poets: An Essay on Troilus and Criseyde* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), 118-20; Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 133.
33. Wetherbee, *Chaucer and the Poets*, 118. Sanok, like Wetherbee, suggests that Criseyde's relation to Antigone (as well as Argia) be taken figuratively rather than literally. See her "Criseyde, Cassandre, and the *Thebaid*," 69-70.
34. Antigone's most important appearance occurs in *Thebaid* XI.708-39 where she apologizes to Creon for her father's hasty words of insult and begs Creon for permission for the Thebans to bury their dead.
35. *Thebes*, 3801-3960.
36. See Boccaccio's *Genealogiae* Book VI, Chapter VII (p. 48). According to the First and Second Vatican Mythographer, Antigone is either the daughter or granddaughter of King Laomedon. See Jane Chance, *The Mythographic Chaucer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 127-29. It is possible, therefore, that Chaucer's Antigone could be the granddaughter of Laomedon, but that would still leave her designation as Criseyde's niece in question since neither Calkas nor Argia has any blood ties to the royal house of Troy.
37. See H. David Brumble, *Classical Myths and Legends in the Middle Ages and Renaissance: A Dictionary of Allegorical Meanings* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1998), 27-8.

38. Anderson, "Theban History in Chaucer's *Troilus*," 127-8.
39. For a full discussion of Criseyde brooch as the brooch of Thebes, see Anderson, "Theban History in Chaucer's *Troilus*," 127-8 and fn.35.
40. Chaucer refers to this episode involving Amphiarus' wife and the brooch of Thebes in the Prologue to the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, 1.740-46.
41. Boccaccio specifies that Criseyde has no children (*Filostrato* 1.15); Benoit calls her "la pucele" (*Roman de Troie*, 1.13,111); Guido delle Colonne says nothing about children (*Historia* 8.192-99).
42. Julia Ebel views this scene as the culmination of all of the Theban references in the *Troilus* with which Chaucer draws parallels between the tragedy at Thebes and that of Troy. She concludes that the blind Oedipus "is the poem's most significant image." See "Troilus and Oedipus: The Genealogy of an Image," *English Studies* 55 (1974): 14-21, 21. Winthrop Wetherbee identifies the fates of Thebes and Troy in "the same long history of confused dealings among humans and between humans and gods, conscious and unconscious breaches of trust and piety, and blindness or willful ignorance in the face of prophecy." Troilus, he goes on, "is . . . the Oedipus of the Trojan version of the story." See his *Chaucer and the Poets*, 116. Lee Patterson gives a similar reading in *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, 135-6.
43. Working with the theme of blindness, Chauncey Wood views Troilus' desire for physical blindness as a sign of his spiritual blindness. See *The Elements of Chaucer's Troilus* (Durham, North Carolina, 1984), 160-61. Jane Chance also emphasizes the personal flaw of inner blindness which, she says, both Oedipus and Troilus share. See her *Mythographic Chaucer*, 146-7. John P. McCall likens the living hell that Oedipus endures to the hell of love that afflicts Troilus. See *Chaucer among the Gods* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979), 29-39.
44. See also W. A. Davenport, *Chaucer: Complaint and Narrative* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 1988), 155-57.
45. Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, 136, Wetherbee, *Chaucer and the Poets*, 115-16.
46. This is a typically Chaucerian strategy, perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*.
47. Chance, *The Mythographic Chaucer*, 118-19; also Fleming, *Classical Imitation and Interpretation in Chaucer's Troilus*, 121-2; McCall, *Chaucer among the Gods*, 29.
48. The story can be found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* IV.481-562.
49. Chance, *Mythographic Chaucer*, 150-53; McCall, 34. Chance, in particular, uses Dante's classification of Athamas as a "falsifier" as a basis for her interpretation of this scene in the *Troilus*. By contrast, the mythographer of the *Ovide Moralisé* (4.3964-ff.) focuses his analysis of this legend on Ino, not Athamas, using the theme of avarice rather than fidelity. See C. de Boer, ed., *Ovide Moralisé* (Amsterdam: Johannes Müller, 1915).
50. Anderson, "Theban History in Chaucer's *Troilus*," 121-2.
51. Wetherbee, *Chaucer and the Poets*, 128; Ebel, "Troilus and Oedipus," 19; Anderson, "Theban History in Chaucer's *Troilus*," 121-3; McCall, *Chaucer among the Gods*, 101-2; Paul M. Clogan, "Chaucer's Use of the *Thebaid*," *English Miscellany* 18 (1967): 22-25; Amtower, *Engaging Words*, 149-53, 156-57.
52. *Chaucer and the Tradition of the Roman Antique*, 231.

53. In this respect, I agree with Monica McAlpine that “the unique authority that modern readers have unquestionably granted her is entirely undeserved.” See *The Genre of Troilus and Criseyde* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 170.
54. For Cassandra’s greater authority in the *Troilus* over the *Filostrato*, see Minnis, *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 1982), 77-8.
55. Minnis, *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity*, 76.
56. Chaucer refers to the genealogy of Thebes, Troy and Rome (though out of chronological order) when he has the Man of Law speak of events being written in the stars (*MOL*, 197-201), and again later when Custance’s suffering is compared to that of Troy, Thebes and Rome (*MOL*, 288-291).
57. For Ovidian qualities of Cassandra’s narrative, see Wetherbee, *Chaucer and the Poets*, 129-30.
58. In all likelihood, Chaucer relies on the mythographic tradition for Cassandre’s particular spin on the story of the Caledonian Boar Hunt. For example, Peter Besuire’s *Ovidius Moralizatus* brings a quite similar interpretation to the story by attributing all of the death, loss and chaos that follows the hunt to Meleager’s love of a woman, Atalanta. See Jane Chance, *Medieval Mythography*, 2 vols. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), II, 364. Other mythographers, however, adhere more closely to Ovid’s version of the story. For example, in the early fourteenth-century *Ovide Moralisé* (8.2002-2332), the medieval poet, like Ovid, makes clear that the Hunt is a group enterprise. He names all of the participants (8.2054-72), including Atalanta (8.2068). The poet adheres to Ovid’s version of the story in having Atalanta strike the next-to-fatal blow to the boar (8.2212-15) and having Meleager offer her the prize because of her pivotal role in the hunt. While Meleager is described in courtly terms (the poet speaks of his “*courtoisie et sa valour*” (8.2093)), he addresses her as an equal in the hunt (“ . . . *Diex vous ostroit bone aventure!*” (8.2098)). See *Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen* 30 (1931-2).
59. See the *Troilus* V.88, V.803, V.932, V. 1514; *Anelida* 57. Chaucer seems to have derived the genealogy of Diomedes from one or all of the following: the Lactantius commentary on the *Thebaid* (I.463), which identifies Meleager as an ancestor of Diomedes, or Boccaccio’s *Filostrato* (VII.27), where Diomedes’s “grandfather” is said to have killed the Caledonian boar. In Boccaccio’s *Genealogiae*, Meleager is the half-brother of Tydeus. See Anderson, “Cassandra’s Analogy,” *Hebrew University Studies in Literature and the Arts* 13 (1985): 1-17, n.3; Root, 543; and Winthrop Wetherbee, “Convention and Authority: A Comment on Some Recent Critical Approaches to Chaucer,” in *New Perspectives in Chaucer Criticism*, ed. Donald Rose (Norman, Oklahoma: Pilgrim Books, 1981), 77, n. 16. Chaucer may also have derived this genealogy from the First Vatican Mythographer, who claims that Meleager “begot” Tydeus (I.201/204), father of Diomedes. See Jane Chance, *Medieval Mythography*, 2 vols. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), vol. I, 201.
60. G. T. Shepherd refers to Cassandre’s summary as “excess squeezed into a narrow space.” See his “Troilus and Criseyde,” in *Chaucer and Chaucerians*, ed. D. S. Brewer (University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1967), 65-87, 77-8.
61. Anderson, “Cassandra’s Analogy,” 14-15; Sanok, “Criseyde, Cassandre, and the *Thebaid*,” 57-8; Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, 131-2; W. C. Curry, “Destiny in *Troilus and Criseyde*,” *Chaucer Criticism: Troilus and Criseyde and the Minor Poems*, eds. Richard J. Schoeck and Jerome Taylor, 34-70, 61; Peggy Ann

- Knapp, "Boccaccio and Chaucer on Cassandra," *Philological Quarterly* 56 (1977): 413-17, 416.
62. Anderson, "Cassandra's Analogy," 12.
  63. Two details, in particular, indicate that Cassandra works from the ancient account of Statius: first, the Theban segment of her account is based on a Latin verse-argument beginning, "Associat profugum," that appeared in medieval codices of the *Thebaid*. See Francis P. Magoun, "Chaucer's Summary of Statius' *Thebaid*, II-XII." Second, according to Cassandra's account, Capaneus dies by "thonder-dynt" (V.1505) following Statius' account where Capaneus dies from a thunderbolt sent down by Zeus (*Thebaid*, 10.927-30). In the medieval account of the *Roman de Thèbes*, he dies from being struck by a rock thrown by an anonymous Theban citizen (ll. 10,094-5, Constans).
  64. By contrast, the mythographer of the *Ovide Moralisé* does not implicate Meleager or his descendants on grounds of lineage. Meleager remains "*La flour de toute Calidoine*" (8.2628).
  65. Manuscript P of the *Roman de Thèbes* devotes seventeen lines to describing how Thebes sat for twenty years as a burned shell before the Trojan War. See Constans, *Thèbes*, Appendix V, ll. 13,279-95. The first prose redaction of the *Thèbes* (Chapter 102) also reports the destruction of the city of Thebes. See Lynde-Recchia, *Prose, Verse, and Truth-Telling in the Thirteenth Century*, Appendix, 171.
  66. *The Genre of Troilus and Criseyde*, 172.
  67. *Chaucer and the Poets*, 129 and 132.
  68. Nolan, *Chaucer and the Tradition of the Roman Antique*, 210.
  69. Wetherbee, *Chaucer and the Poets*, 129.
  70. Riverside edition, 1020.
  71. For example, in the section of Windeatt's guide to *Troilus and Criseyde* devoted to sources, there is no separate heading for the *Teseida*, though it is mentioned under the more general discussion of "The Story of Thebes" on pp. 121-5.
  72. See his "Chaucer's Use of the 'Teseida,'" *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association* 62 (1947): 599-621, 608-13.
  73. *English Medieval Narrative in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, trans. Joan Krakover Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 199.
  74. Boitani, *English Medieval Narrative*, 193-99.
  75. The awareness of the past that becomes such a catalyst of change and reconciliation in the *Teseida* never materializes in the *Knights Tale*, at least not in the same way or to the same extent. If anything, what historical knowledge Chaucer's Arcite does possess only exacerbates the problem of Theban delinquency in that he embraces the very source of the problem: his own "blood roial" (*Knights Tale*, 1546).

## NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

1. On Chaucer's humanism with respect to the classical past, see A. C. Spearing, *Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 30-46. The extent of Lydgate's humanism has generated perhaps the greatest critical divide in Lydgate scholarship. With respect to the *Siege*, in particular, critics have debated whether Lydgate fully grasped Chaucer's historicism in representing classical antiquity as a distinct culture from that of medieval England.

- Alain Renoir has argued that Lydgate indeed shares Chaucer's proto-humanistic vision, and "presents classical antiquity in a much more appealing light" than his medieval source. See his *The Poetry of John Lydgate* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), 119. Derek Pearsall has countered Renoir's claim on this point, as on many others, in his *John Lydgate* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), as has A. C. Spearing in his *Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry*, 66-110. While I agree with Renoir that Lydgate was more forward looking and experimental than he is generally credited with being, I do so for different reasons, which will become clear.
2. I, of course, do not use the term "genetic" in the specific modern sense of DNA, but rather in the general sense of a curse, initially imposed by divine authority, that is subsequently passed down from one generation to the next. Sophocles, in his play *Antigone*, defines this idea for Theban history: "In life and in death is the house of Labdacus stricken. / Generation to generation / With no atonement, / It is scourged by the wrath of a god." Medieval writers did not have access to Greek drama, of course, but Statius may well have drawn upon Sophocles for his own portrait of the Thebans. See Sophocles, *The Theban Plays* (London: Penguin Books, 1947), 142.
  3. Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, 31.
  4. Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, 28.
  5. M. R. James, *On the Abbey of Saint Edmund at Bury* (Cambridge: Cambridge Antiquarian Society, Octavo Publications 28, 1895).
  6. For instance, in the opening lines of the *Troy Book*, Lydgate paraphrases Chaucer's unsavory description of the Temple of Mars in the *Knights Tale*, establishing a decidedly anti-militaristic tone at the very outset. There is some uncertainty about the conditions under which Lydgate undertook writing the *Siege*, for he seems to have had no patron for the work, which invites us to suppose that he wrote the poem out of personal interest as opposed to professional obligation. Derek Pearsall suggests that Lydgate's interest in Thebes would flow naturally out of his work on Troy, given that the two histories were usually paired, and, indeed, Lydgate was not the first poet to write both a Theban and Trojan narrative. See his *John Lydgate*, 151.
  7. For a recent study of the tradition of the mirror for princes, especially in England, see Judith Ferster, *Fictions of Advice: The Literature of Politics and Counsel in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).
  8. For an overview of both the ancient and medieval traditions of the mirror for princes, see Lester K. Born, ed., *The Education of a Christian Prince* by Desiderius Erasmus (New York: Octagon Books, 1965), 44-130; Allan H. Gilbert, *Machiavelli's Prince and Its Forerunners* (Raleigh: Duke University Press, 1938; New York: Barnes and Noble, 1968), 3-15; Patricia J. Eberle, "Mirror of Princes," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, 13 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1982-9), vol. 8.
  9. Ferster, *Fictions of Advice*, 89-107.
  10. For the story of Cadmus, see Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, III, 1-137.
  11. See my discussion of the Norman context of the OF *Roman de Thèbes* in Chapter 1.
  12. Henry Bergen, ed., *Lydgate's Fall of Princes*, 4 vols. (London: EETS, ES, nos. 121-124, 1924-7; reprinted 1967).
  13. For a discussion of Lydgate's treatment of Fortune, see Willard Farnham, *The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970), 160-70; also Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, 141-4; for further contrasts between Chaucer's *Knights Tale* and the *Siege* on the issue of Fortune, see Stephan Kohl, "The Kingis Quair and Lydgate's

- Siege of Thebes* as Imitations of Chaucer's *Knights' Tale*," *Fifteenth Century Studies* 2 (1978-80): 119-34.
14. There has been some debate over which of these versions Lydgate consulted for his *Siege of Thebes*. In 1884, E. Koepfel became the first scholar to claim that Lydgate's *Siege* was based on a prose redaction of the *Roman de Thèbes* and not the OF poem itself. See his *Lydgate's Story of Thebes* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1884), 52. Axel Erdmann, in his 1930 edition of the *Siege* for the EETS, corroborates Koepfel's case for a prose redaction of the *Thèbes*, but identified an abbreviated version of the First Redaction of the prose *Thèbes*, entitled the *Roman de Edipus*, as Lydgate's source. See Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes*, ed., Axel Erdmann and Eilert Ekwall, 2 vols. (London: EETS, ES, 108 and 125, 1930), II, 6-7. Alain Renoir has argued in support of Erdmann's claim for the *Edipus*, but his case is unconvincing, especially on the matter of the qualitative changes that Lydgate allegedly brought to the story, since these features also appear in the longer version of the prose *Thèbes* as well as in the OF *Thèbes*. See his "The Immediate Source of Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes*," *Studia Neophilologica* 33 (1961): 86-95; also *The Poetry of John Lydgate*, 119-29. Léopold Constans, in his 1890 edition of the *Roman de Thèbes*, claims that Lydgate most likely used a manuscript of the First Redaction of the poem, a redaction which also served as the basis for the *Roman de Edipus*, a view which I share given the structural and thematic similarities between Lydgate's poem and the First Redaction. See his *Le Roman de Thèbes*, 2 vols. (Paris: Librairie de Firmin Didot et Cie, 1890), II, clxii. For further discussion on this, see Derek Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, 153.
  15. Paul Meyer, "Les Premières Compilations Françaises d'Histoire Ancienne," *Romania* 14 (1885): 35-81, 36-63.
  16. Meyer, "Les Premières Compilations," 63-75.
  17. Meyer, "Les Premières Compilations," 64fn. Meyer characterizes the Third Redaction as a compilation of the previous two redactions; see also Jeffrey H. Kaimowitz, "A Fourth Redaction of the *Histoire Ancienne Jusqu'à César*," *Classical Texts and Their Traditions: Studies in Honor of C. R. Trahman*, ed. David F. Bright and Edwin S. Ramage (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984), 76-87, 79.
  18. Kaimowitz, "A Fourth Redaction," 85.
  19. For more on the *Histoire Ancienne* and its incorporation of the *romans antiques*, see Guy Raynaud de Lage, "*Histoire ancienne Jusqu'à César*," *Dictionnaire des Lettres Françaises: Le Moyen Age* (Paris: A. Fayard: 1994): 684-5; and his "Les 'romans antiques' dans l'*Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*," *Le Moyen Age* 63, 4th series, 12 (1957): 267-309.
  20. De Lage, "*Histoire ancienne*," 684.
  21. There is, as yet, no close comparative reading of Lydgate's *Siege* against the prose *Thèbes*, perhaps due to the lack, until most recently, of a modern edition. Alain Renoir includes some comparative material in his study of Lydgate's poetry, but he misidentifies Lydgate's source text as a later, much abbreviated, redaction of the prose *Thèbes* known as the *Roman de Edipus*, leading to some false claims for Lydgate's artistry. These include his claim that Lydgate "creates in the person of Tydeus a hero for the story," when, in fact, Tydeus is unquestionably the hero of both the OF *Roman de Thèbes* and of the longer prose versions of the *Thèbes*. Similarly, he claims that Lydgate "presents classical antiquity in a much more appealing light," when, in fact, both the OF poet and the MF redactor give a varied treatment of their pagan characters and include numerous examples of admirable pagans, Tydeus among them.

- See Renoir, *The Poetry of John Lydgate*, 119. While Derek Pearsall supports Constans' claim for the First Redaction as the source text for Lydgate's *Siege*, his discussion of the *Siege* does not include much in the way of close textual comparisons. See *John Lydgate*, 151-6.
22. I refer here to Tydeus' encounter with Lycurgus' daughter after his slaying of the fifty (*Siege*, 2264ff.). This scene appears only in manuscripts A and P of the OF *Roman de Thèbes*, and in the First Redaction of the prose *Thèbes*, though not in subsequent redactions. For a reprint of this scene in the verse *Thèbes*, see Constans, *Thèbes*, vol. II, appendix III, 137-145; for his discussion of this scene within the manuscript tradition of the *Roman de Thèbes* and its prose redactions, see *Thèbes*, vol. 2, cxxii-cxxxv and clxi, fn.2. All citations of the prose *Thèbes* are from Lynde-Recchia, *Prose, Verse, and Truth-Telling in the Thirteenth Century* (Lexington, Kentucky: French Forum Publishers, 2001), Appendix, 127-93.
  23. Léopold Constans reprints an explanation provided in one of the manuscript witnesses of the First Redaction for the exclusion of the *Daire le Roux* episode. The redactor claims that the scene is very beautiful but does not follow the truth. See *La Légende d'Oedipe étudiée dans l'Antiquité, au Moyen-Age et dans les Temps Modernes* (Paris: Maisonneuve & Cie, Librairie-Éditeurs, 1881), 322.
  24. M. R. James, "Bury St. Edmund's Manuscripts," *English Historical Review* 41 (1926): 51-60.
  25. In his *Troy Book*, Lydgate also chooses to tell the entire story of Troy rather than the focused portion of the war that Chaucer, working from Boccaccio's *Filostrato*, treated in the *Troilus*.
  26. See Pearsall, "Chaucer and Lydgate," *Chaucer Traditions*, ed., Ruth Morse and Barry Windeatt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 39-53, 47-48.
  27. David Anderson, *Before the Knight's Tale: Imitation of Classical Epic in Boccaccio's Teseida* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 146-50. Anderson has edited two late medieval *Thebaid* commentaries both of which define *metrum heroicum* as a blend of factual and fictional elements. The first of these, "In principio," dating to the twelfth century, indicates "Qualitas carminis metrum est heroicum et est hoc metrum continens tam divinas quam humanas personas vera falsis admiscens" (Anderson, 230-33, 231). The second commentary, "Scriptum," dating to c. 1420, indicates "Carmen autem heroycum constat ex divinis humanisque personis continens vera cum fictis" (Anderson, 242-9, 243).
  28. Ayers, "Medieval History, Moral Purpose, and the Structure of Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes*," *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 73 (1958): 463-74, 463.
  29. Ayers, "Medieval History and Moral Purpose," 468; Lee Patterson, "Making Identities in Fifteenth-Century England: Henry V and John Lydgate," *New Literary Historical Study*, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox and Larry J. Reynolds (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 69-107, 93-97; Pearsall, "Lydgate as Innovator," *Modern Language Quarterly* 54 (1992): 5-22, 15-20.
  30. Rosemund Allen claims that "in this newly proffered last tale of all, Lydgate shows the evil of Thebes reasserting itself." See her "The *Siege of Thebes*: Lydgate's Canterbury Tale," *Chaucer and Fifteenth-Century Poetry*, ed. Julia Boffey and Janet Cowen (King's College, London: Centre for Late Antique and Medieval Studies, 1991), 122-42, 128; also James Simpson, "Dysemol daies and fatal houres: Lydgate's Destruction of Thebes and Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*," *The Long Fifteenth Century: Essays for Douglas Gray*, ed. Helen Cooper and Sally Mapstone (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 15-33.

31. All citations are from Erdmann and Ekwall, eds., *The Siege of Thebes*, 2 vols., EETS, ES 108 and 125. I have normalized the *yogh* as either *y* or *gh* depending on the corresponding graphemes in modern English.
32. Alberto Limentani, ed., *Teseida delle Nozzi di Emilia*, in *Tutte le Opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, vol. II, ed., Vittore Branca (Verona: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1964). *The Book of Theseus (Teseida delle Nozze d'Emilia)*, trans. Bernadette Marie McCoy (New York: Medieval Text Association, 1974).
33. Larry D. Benson, ed., *The Riverside Chaucer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).
34. *The English Works of John Gower*, ed., G. C. Macaulay, 2 vols., (London: EETS, ES, nos. 81 and 82, 1901; reprinted 1930, 1973), vol. I.
35. Giovanni Boccaccio, *Genealogiae* (Venice 1494, facsimile edition) in *The Renaissance of the Gods*, ed., Stephen Orgel (New York: Garland Publishing, 1976); on Lydgate's reliance on the *Genealogiae*, see Erdmann, *The Siege of Thebes*, vol. I, 7.
36. *Genealogiae*, II, 63-75. Boccaccio also charts this ancestry in one of the genealogical tables that appear throughout the work. While Lydgate mentions the "twelve trees" (*Siege*, 3538) of the lineage of the gods found in the *Genealogiae*, he clearly chose not to follow the one tracing Theban ancestry.
37. By comparison, the Second Vatican Mythographer indicates that Cadmus is the grandfather of Labdacus, not the brother, and that Oedipus descends from Cadmus through Cadmus' daughter Agave. Jane Chance gives a full chart of Theban genealogy according to the Second Vatican Mythographer in her *Medieval Mythography*, 2 vols. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), vol. 1, 329.
38. See notes to the *Complaint of Mars* in the *Riverside Chaucer*, 1078.
39. Giovanni Boccaccio, *De casibus virorum illustribus*, ed., Vittorio Zaccaria, in *Tutte le Opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed., Vittore Branca (Verona: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1964), vol. 9, book I; *The Fates of Illustrious Men*, trans. Louis Brewer Hall (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1965), I, 7-8; *Genealogiae*, book 2, Chapters 64-67.
40. While he excludes any mention of Cadmus' progeny in the *Siege*, he later includes their full stories in the *Fall of Princes* (1975ff.), composed some seventeen years after the *Siege*. Lydgate was certainly aware of the family tree of Cadmus, for he refers to at least some of these sources (notably Gower and Boccaccio) in the *Siege*, but chose to omit Cadmus' full history in the *Siege*.
41. Although Cadmus is exiled from Thebes according to legend, this takes place late in life after he has produced offspring. Lydgate, however, has Cadmus exiled from the city early in his reign, thus abbreviating Cadmus' role in Theban history.
42. See Derek Pearsall, "Lydgate as Innovator," *Modern Language Quarterly*, 53 (1992): 5-22; also Lois Ebin, "Lydgate's Views on Poetry," *Annuaire Mediaevale* 18 (1977): 76-105, 91. With respect to Lydgate's use of Chaucer specifically, James Simpson argues that the *Siege* constitutes an historical pretext for the *Knight's Tale*, that Lydgate simply expands into wider political, military and historical terms the dark "Statian" historical vision laid out by Chaucer in the *Knight's Tale*. See his "Dysemol daies and fatal houres: Lydgate's Destruction of Thebes and Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*," 15-33. Countering this view of Lydgate's conservative use of his source material is Patricia M. Gathercole's study of the *Fall of Princes* in which she demonstrates how Lydgate readily altered the plot structures of some of the stories he derived from Laurent de Premierfait's *De Cas des nobles*. See "Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* and the French Version

- of Boccaccio's *De Casibus*," in *Miscellanea di Studi e Ricerche sul Quattrocento francese*, ed. F. Simone (Turin: Giappichelli, 1966), 167-78.
43. See Lee Patterson, "Making Identities," 75-77; Spearing, "Lydgate's Canterbury Tale: The *Siege of Thebes* and Fifteenth-Century Chaucerianism," *Fifteenth-Century Studies*, ed., Robert F. Yeager (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1984), 333-64, 337-8.; also his "Renaissance Chaucer and Father Chaucer," *English* 34 (1985): 1-38.
  44. *Genealogiae*, II, 68.
  45. See Patterson, "Making Identities," 75; Tim Machan also reads the stories of Amphion and Cadmus' founding of Thebes as competing versions of the same story, and attributes Lydgate's mention of the Cadmean version as a "perfunctory interest" in textual authority. See his "Textual Authority and the Works of Hoccleve, Lydgate, and Henryson," *Viator* 23 (1992): 281-99, 288.
  46. The story of Amphion is found in Apollodorus, *The Library*, III, v.5-6 and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, VI.146-312.
  47. *Martianus Capella and the Seven Liberal Arts*, 2 vols., volume II: *the Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, trans. William Harris Stahl with E.L. Burge (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 351-2.
  48. *Teseida*, IV.13; *Knight's Tale*, 1546.
  49. *Famous Women*, edited and translated by Virginia Brown (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), Chapter XV, 67-71. Boccaccio derives much of the detail for the story of Niobe and Amphion from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, VI.146-312.
  50. *De casibus virorum illustribus*, Chapter I.
  51. Ovid relates the story of Niobe in book VI of the *Metamorphoses*.
  52. *Genealogiae*, fol. 39v.
  53. While Chaucer refers to Niobe and the story of her turning to stone while grieving twice in the *Troilus* (l.699 and 759), he says nothing about Amphion's offspring.
  54. Later in the *Fall of Princes* (337ff., 3491ff.), Lydgate adheres to the medieval tradition in presenting Amphion as an important artisan/musician figure in Theban history, but he makes no claim for Amphion as the founder of Thebes in any biological sense.
  55. For Amphion as a poet-statesman, see Lois Ebin, "Lydgate's Views on Poetry," 97-99; Joseph Marotta, "Amphion: The Hero as Rhetorician," *Centrepoint* 2 (1977): 63-71.
  56. By contrast, the *Ovide Moralisé* (3.265-72), ed. C. de Boer (Amsterdam: Johannes Müller, 1915), another likely source for Lydgate, portrays the reign of Cadmus as an age of learning and civilization for Thebes and makes no mention of Amphion's building of the walls of the city. Amphion is mentioned only later in connection with the tragic loss of his children (4.995, 1180, 1243, 2068).
  57. For ways in which the Thebes of Amphion in the *Siege* resembles Augustine's description of the *civitas Dei*, see Paul Clogan, "Lydgate and the *Roman Antique*," *Florilegium* 11 (1992): 7-21, 15-16.
  58. In one late-medieval *accessus* on the *Thebaid* edited by David Anderson, the commentator aligns the mountains from which Amphion draws the stone to lazy and intransigent people:
 

*Iste siquidem Amphion sui cantus dulcedine lapides ad muros Thebanos currere fecit, quod nichil aliud est quam istum Amphion[em] eius admirabili descretionem atque facundiam, homines tardos et stupidos more bestiarum sibi vitam propagantes ad humanum et divinum cultum or[e] duxisse,*

*atque ad civitatem constructionem reduxisse; montes appellamus homines incultos, stupidos et tardos instar montis.*

*Before the Knight's Tale*, 247.

59. Lydgate later repeats this literal reading of Amphion's mobilization of the citizens of Thebes in the *Fall of Princes* (339-43).
60. Robert W. Ayers, "Medieval History, Moral Purpose," 469; Lois Ebin, *John Lydgate* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985), 53-4; Jerome Mitchell and Judith Davis Shaw, "John Lydgate," *The Dictionary of Literary Biography* 146: *Old and Middle English Literature*, ed., Jeffrey Heffernan and Jerome Mitchell (Detroit, Washington, DC, and London: Gale Research Co., 1994): 244-56, 248.
61. All references to indicate chapter numbers as provided by the editor, Lynde-Recchia.
62. Both the *Roman de Thèbes* and the prose *Thèbes* give scant coverage to Edippus' wedding (cf. Constans, ed., *Thèbes*, ll. 432-49 and the prose *Thèbes*, Chapter 17).
63. "Lydgate's Canterbury Tale," 355.
64. *John Lydgate*, 153 and 151.
65. Curtis L. McCray, "Chaucer and Lydgate and the Uses of History," diss., University of Nebraska, 1968, 29-72; on Lydgate's historiographic method in the *Siege* in general, see Robert W. Ayers, "Medieval History, Moral Purpose," 464-5.
66. Constans, ed., *Roman de Thèbes*, 1127ff.
67. It is possible that Lydgate borrowed the figure of the wise counselor in this scene from a later scene in the prose *Thèbes*, where "*li sage home*" advises the king against war while others press for war (Chapter 85).
68. The line in the OF *Roman de Thèbes* is still less specific: "*Por veir vos di, mout me merveil / Que prenez autre conseil.*" (Constans, 1355-6).
69. Lycurgus, too, provides another example, among the Greek allies, of a king attuned to the importance of stately procedure. Upon welcoming the Greek army, he arranges lodging for the men at the command level, and food for the troops in their tents (3313ff.). By contrast, Ethiocles has no procedure for the fair payment of his men; instead, he resorts to personal bribes of clothes and jewels (2761ff.).
70. Alain Renoir discusses Lydgate's often favorable treatment of ancient pagans in the *Siege*, which he cites as Lydgate's inclinations toward Renaissance humanism. I would argue, however, that this varied treatment of ancient pagans is less a feature of trends in Renaissance thinking in fifteenth-century England, and more an outgrowth of the medieval tradition of the OF *Roman de Thèbes*, which assigns praise and blame not along Christian/pagan lines (since, technically, all of its characters are pagan), but rather along lines of political affiliation in the conflict. This ethical model carries over into the prose *Thèbes* and thus into the *Siege* as well. See Renoir, *The Poetry of John Lydgate*, 119-26.
71. Cf. Prose *Thèbes*, Chapter 85.
72. Renoir claims that the tag "worthy bishop" for Amphiorax constitutes another of Lydgate's additions to the story (since it does not appear in the *Roman de Edipus*), and is further evidence of Lydgate's favorable (i.e. Renaissance) attitude towards classical antiquity (*The Poetry of John Lydgate*, 123). While not all prose redactions of the OF *Thèbes* reproduce this tag for Amphiorax, in the OF *Roman de Thèbes*, Amphiarax is referred to as "*arcevesque*" ("archbishop") (Constans, 2276), and this title may well have carried over into the copy of the prose *Thèbes* that Lydgate used, and would not constitute Lydgate's addition to the story.

73. Tim Machan reduces Lydgate's allusions to differing versions of the story to "idle curiosity." While this may indeed apply to some of Lydgate's allusions to source material, a case such as this one involves recuperating incriminating evidence against a hero that had been suppressed in the vernacular tradition of Thebes for over two hundred years. It therefore constitutes material that changes, rather than simply expands, our reading of the hero. See Machan, "Textual Authority and the Works of Hoccleve, Lydgate and Henryson," 285-90.
74. Patterson, "Making Identities," 97; Ayers, "Medieval History, Moral Purpose," 467.
75. For example, John M. Bowers claims that "rather than usurp the historical materials or foreign sources which Chaucer had already used, Lydgate seems to have preferred 'to magnifie' or to 'extende the goodlynesse' [borrowing Lydgate's own terms] of Chaucer's work, as he did by continuing the journey of the Canterbury pilgrims." See his "The *Tale of Beryn* and *The Siege of Thebes*: Alternative Ideas of the *Canterbury Tales*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 7 (1985): 23-50; reprinted in Daniel J. Pinti, ed., *Writing After Chaucer: Essential Readings in Chaucer and the Fifteenth Century* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998), 201-25, 210.
76. "Renaissance Chaucer and Father Chaucer," 26; also *Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry*, 66-110.
77. *Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry*, 108.
78. "Renaissance Chaucer and Father Chaucer," 26. For a recent exploration of Lydgate's relationship with Chaucer, see Daniel T. Kline, "Father Chaucer and the *Siege of Thebes*: Literary Paternity, Aggressive Deference, and the Prologue to Lydgate's Oedipal Canterbury Tale," *Chaucer Review* 34 (1999): 217-35.
79. "Making Identities," 76.
80. Patterson notes that Lydgate ignores Chaucer's ending to the *Canterbury Tales* whereby the serious, moral Parson replaces the boisterous Host as presider over the pilgrimage. He also points out that Lydgate intensifies the Host's rudeness, making him a "petty tyrant . . . interested only in mirth." "Making Identities," 76.
81. Lois Ebin distinguishes between the Host's definition of "*myrie tale*," denoting a story that entertains and amuses, and Chaucer's definition of "*myrie tale*" which includes morally instructive and beneficial tales. Ebin suggests that Lydgate's *Siege* "satisfies Chaucer's broader definition of '*myrie tale*,'" which is certainly true of the larger poem. But in the Prologue, it is the Host who requests a "*myrie tale*" from Lydgate the pilgrim, instructing him specifically to "*preche not of non holynesse*" (167), thus denoting the purely frivolous definition of "*myrie tale*." See Ebin, *John Lydgate*, 57-58; also her "Chaucer, Lydgate and the 'Myrie Tale,'" *Chaucer Review* 13 (1979): 316-36.
82. Patterson suggests that "the Prologue to the *Siege* argues that the king's program to reform the Benedictines is both unwarranted and unnecessary: just as the pilgrim Lydgate resists the Host's overbearing directives, so the monastic establishment as a whole needs no political direction in order to perform its traditional functions." "Making Identities," 95. I find this argument to be forced, for, not only is there no evidence in the poem, overt or subtle, for Henry's policy on monastic reform, but also aligning the king with a foul-mouthed, crude innkeeper would completely undermine Lydgate's efforts throughout the poem to encourage Henry towards prudence, honesty and discretion, the very heart of the mirror form.
83. Prose *Thebes*, Chapter 103. Constans notes that the reconstruction of Thebes at the end of the war is a feature of all of the manuscripts of the prose *Thebes*, including

- the most abbreviated versions, though the spelling of the new name may vary (e.g. *Estine, Estives, Estrie*). See *La Légende d'Oedipe*, 343-44.
84. On Palaemon's identity as the incestuous offspring of Polynices and Antigone, see David Anderson, "Theban Genealogy in the *Knight's Tale*," *Chaucer Review* 21 (1987): 311-20, 317-18.
  85. E. P. Hammond, "Lydgate's Prologue to the Story of Thebes," *Anglia* 36 (1912): 360-76, 360-1; Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, 152-3.
  86. See also Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, 151; A. S. G. Edwards, "Lydgate's Use of Chaucer: Structure, Strategy, and Style," *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* 10 (1985): 175-82, 176-7.

## NOTES TO CONCLUSION

1. Included in *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), 1639-81. Hallett Smith, in the introductory notes, dates the play to 1613.

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