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*Elements of Horror in Statius' Thebaid*

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There are a great deal of people without whom I could never have finished this thesis. First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Wim Verbaal for his great deal of patience, honesty and support, and for providing me with this thesis topic that was very much situated in my fields of interest, and who, subsequently, actually allowed me to write about it. Another person I must thank, though I have never met him, is Prof. Noëll Carroll, whose efforts in the field of horror studies made this thesis possible. Not a lot of people have dared to write such an extensive work on the characteristics of horror, and certainly, none have succeeded at doing so more than him. Without his book to guide me through the dark recesses of horror, I would have been lost for a very long time.

I would not dare forget to thank my family, for all the help and support they’ve given me over the last two years. My mother and sister in particular were always there to support me with the same old encouragements and they actually worked more than I thought they would. I am also very grateful to my brother, Tom, and my dear friend, Silke B., who both proofread and spellchecked a large part of my thesis and pointed me to the fact that I use the word “simply” far too much.

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I have faced a very rough patch in my life in the last year and a half, which is one of the reasons why I struggled so much to finish this. Not just the people I have already mentioned, but many others wished me the best of luck, and told me to hold on, to keep going, ... even through failure, which was never easy on me, but they all made achievable. I cannot go on to name all of them, but they have my sincerest gratitude.
Preface

When I decided to write my thesis on Latin Literature, I immediately wished to write something about a work within the epic genre. Since so much had already been written on the more well-known epics, I asked my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Verbaal, for some other classical epics. When he opted for Statius’ *Thebaid*, it was an easy decision to make. I did not know a lot about the *Thebaid*, but the possible research ideas my supervisor provided seemed very interesting. One of those in particular instantaneously caught my eye. It appeared that in the entirety of classical literature, there were some works that contained certain scenes that were exceptionally horrifying. The *Thebaid* was most certainly one of these works, which became instantly clear after reading it.

My entire life, I have adored the horror genre. Whether it in books or films, I had always been fascinated by it; from the moment I saw *A Nightmare on Elm Street* on a far too young age, and, to this day, I can still enjoy both old and new works of horror. Thus, my own personal love for the horror genre combined with my love for classical epics made the decision final. Truly, from the moment my supervisor spoke the word “horror”, I honestly already knew what my thesis would be about.

Of course, when writing a thesis on a subject such as mine, it is only logical to be well-informed on the topic of horror. While I have watched and read my share of horror stories, that on itself was obviously not enough of a basis for an academic research. This prompted me to look up as much as I could on the horror genre and my findings were actually quite underwhelming. It seemed very little had been written on the genre of horror and I needed to intensify my search. Sadly, there was no single, celebrated poetics on the horror genre. While this made things more difficult, I was still able to get very well acquainted with the genre and its characteristics through a more philosophical work on the genre and the writings of the very great authors of modern horror. A consequence of this was that the first part of this thesis would have to be on the horror genre itself. This allowed me to immerse myself even more in and I feel like it really broadened my understanding of it to a large extent, which was, again, quite crucial in writing this thesis.

I will admit that I started out in the hopes of discovering some antecedents of the horror genre in the *Thebaid*. However, it quite quickly appeared that a venture of that sort was unwise. I had to admit that the horror genre in itself was far too bound to the modern age for such a daring speculation to make sense. Nonetheless, that realization did not damage my resolve in any way. The gruesome, horrifying scenes of the *Thebaid* did indeed seem to have some of the characteristics I read about and an analysis of these still seemed very much worthwhile.
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Introduction

In this day and age, there is a considerable amount of novels, films, video games, etc. within the genre of horror. This prominent genre, however, is actually still fairly modern as most scholars would consider its starting point to be Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764. Nonetheless, even before the eighteenth century, there were several books that contained one or more horrifying scenes, or several paintings with horrifying imagery (e.g. religious art in the 15\(^{th}\) and 16\(^{th}\) century)\(^1\). While these works could hardly be said to have been part of a “horror genre” at that time, they must certainly contain some elements that make them so unsettling to us. In this thesis, we will attempt to analyse these “horror” elements in Publius Papinius Statius’ *Thebaid*, a first century epic. In brief, it is the story of the two sons of Oedipus, Eteocles and Polynieces and the war they wage against each other only to end in the death of both of them and many more warriors. At the beginning, Oedipus curses his sons for the way they have mistreated him and prays to the gods of the Underworld to punish them. By doing so, he sets in motion the building conflict between the two brothers. While Eteocles reigns over Thebes, Polynieces receives support from Argos and six other commanders (together they form the “Seven Against Thebes”) and engages Thebes on the battlefield.

The *Thebaid* is indubitably a work that belongs to the epic genre of classical literature. In no way will we attempt to question that statement, nor is it our aim to do something as presumptuous as to prove that the *Thebaid* is part of some sort of “proto-horror” genre. Not only would it take many more centuries for the horror genre to come into existence, but even more generally, the novel (which is the prime medium of the horror genre) could hardly have been said to have existed at that time.\(^2\) What we wish to do is merely to point out several elements, surrounding certain characters, as being legitimately horrifying.

Because of this, it is important for us to first understand what horror actually is, what constitutes the genre and what elements are typically seen in it. This is where we encounter another problem. While there are, admittedly, numerous treatises on horror in films, videogames and television, on why people read and watch horror, and on a specific feature (such as gender) related to horror, few

\(^1\) Fiction: e.g. several early versions of now popular fairy tales; Paintings: e.g. Matthias Grünewald’s *The Temptation of St. Anthony* (1510-1513), Peter Paul Rubens’ *The Fall of the Damned* (ca. 1620), etc.

\(^2\) Though some would definitely consider classical epics such as Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, or Vergil’s *Aeneid* to be forerunners of the modern novel, they were not novels yet and were part of the epic genre.
have attempted to actually create a poetics for the entire genre. Even those that do attempt to establish a poetics of the genre often seem to be able to only capture a part of it. For example, whereas some scholars focus on the modern medium of film and cinema\(^3\), others look more into the “subgenres” of horror, like the Gothic Novel\(^4\) or supernatural horror\(^5\). Alternatively, Todorov (1975) considered horror itself to be a subgenre of the Fantastic and studied it as such. To put it briefly, while these works are very interesting and more than satisfactory in their own respect, they are often not comprehensive enough for the entire horror genre, and thus, not what we need for our study in this thesis.

The most conclusive and comprehensive account we have found (and the most useful for our research) is Noëll Carroll’s *The Philosophy of Horror* (1990). Carroll focuses a lot on the question why people read horror (the full title of the book is after all *The Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Heart*), but the book also discusses what makes up the genre of horror in a very understandable and critical manner. It is still very much an attempt at creating a poetics of a general kind of horror in art, which is perfect for our analysis.

As mentioned above, to understand what horrifying elements there are in the *Thebaid*, we must first grasp what horror is exactly. To do so, we will take Carroll’s work as our prime source and focus on what can be seen as the general characteristics of the horror genre, taking into account why these could be relevant to our analysis of the *Thebaid*. The aim of the first part of the thesis is thus to discuss these horror elements in order to eventually create a list of them. The main object of the second part will then be to apply the elements in that list to some specific characters in the *Thebaid*. We believe the *Thebaid* and its context deserve some more clarification as well but will reserve that for the start of the second part, before we go on to the specific scene analysis, as this is when this knowledge will become more important.

On a final note, and this cannot be stressed enough, it is important to once again affirm that the *Thebaid* is indeed an epic, and in no way a horror narrative, as we will never go so far as to consider it to be some sort of prototypical splatter film. In spite of the fact that some scenes may indeed be equally bloody and gruesome, we will not make such a bold claim. What we do wish to investigate is whether we can indeed notice any clear and asserted horror characteristics in a work that was written in a time when there was no such thing as a *de facto* horror genre, and how these succeed (or fail) at making the scene truly horrifying.

\(^3\) E.g. White, 1971  
\(^4\) Williams, 1995  
\(^5\) Lovecraft 1927
Chapter 1
What is Horror?

1.1 Prologue

In this chapter, we will approach the concept of horror in order to point out some of its basic characteristics. As we have already mentioned, this will not be an easy venture. Stephen King himself once said that “[t]he point seems to be that horror simply is, exclusive of definition or rationalization.” (1981: p.21) While indeed, in his book on horror, King too focuses more on specific works of fiction and their influence on the genre and other works, he does at times talk about horror more generally, as we will discuss at a later point. Regardless, we have found an attempt at rationalizing and defining horror in Carroll’s work. For a large part, this chapter will draw upon his ideas, mostly in a positive manner, yet this will not be a copy of his book. Carroll’s book was written in order to understand what horror is. This thesis, on the other hand, was written to understand horror in order to apply that understanding to a first century epic with some remarkably horrifying scenes. We will take Carroll’s basic assumptions and ideas and discuss them with our mind set on our specific aim, i.e. the characteristics we will discuss will be as comprehensive as possible for the concept of horror and will as such be more probable to be interesting in our research of the Thebaid. Only in this manner can they be used appropriately and correctly. Admittedly, we understand that some people may hold other views over horror and what is truly characteristic about it. Some might even find their own “basic horror element” not to be included in this thesis. As an answer to this, we can only refer to King’s quote again; horror is indeed a very difficult concept to fully comprehend and it will be interesting to see if, in the future, someone will be able to add to Carroll’s already impressive poetics.

First of all, it is important to identify the genre of horror as one that is specifically designed to produce an emotional effect, an effect for which the genre also received its name. When reading horror, an audience is expected to actually experience horror, as much as possible. Naturally, this does not mean that every single work that horrifies its audience is a work of horror, as works within other genres can simply have scenes that contain horrific things as well. This assertion is of course of prime importance for our thesis. Throughout his work, Carroll (1990) will speak of “art-horror” as his main focus, i.e. a horror that is the result of narrative constructs, imagery, etc., in works of art (thus he also includes visual art). He will also explicitly name the emotion that works of horror elicit “art-horror” (p.8-14). While this is interesting in his work and he does so to make the clear distinction, in this thesis we will continue to simply name it horror. It is important to remember that we do mean the same thing as Carroll meant with his art-horror, but it seems irrelevant to name it as such here. We must keep in mind that our “horror” is both a genre, and the emotion that
genre elicits. It is not at all the kind of horror we would experience when we, for example, learn about the horrors that were committed in the Belgian Congo, nor is it the horror we experience when we learn about something as realistically possible as a man murdering his wife in a domestic dispute (even if it is in a work of fiction).

Then what exactly do we mean by horror? How do we approach it? Basically, Carroll’s theory, which we will follow in this respect as well, is very clearly entity-based (p.40-41). When the audience experiences horror, the object of that horror will be an entity (as opposed to an event), and if horror, this is a monster. The monster is the basic and prime characteristic of horror, yet we will refrain from discussing it now as it will be thoroughly discussed in 1.2.1 and will remain important throughout this entire thesis.

Perhaps there is one thing yet to be addressed in this prologue and that is to clarify exactly why we cannot and will not end this thesis by saying that the Thebaid (or any other work before the 18th century) was also part of the horror genre as such, as we already mentioned in the introduction. The beginnings of horror are to be found in the 18th century gothic novel and the German Schauerroman. The horror genre simply could not have come into existence before that time, before that period of Enlightenment because many of its inherent characteristics are so strongly connected to the time of its nascence. Horror could very well be seen as a response to the Enlightenment’s many scientific and technological advancements, either out of fear, or as a compensation for accepting them. One might think that this is a bit too farfetched, and indeed, there is no proof for this, but one could easily suggest though, that the Enlightenment did provide the horror novel with the norm of nature that was needed to produce the right kind of monster, which is indeed what Carroll considers as its prime object (p.55-58). This could explain why this kind of horror was impossible before that period, even if certain elements could be found in older works (which, once again, is obviously an important mention for our thesis).

In the rest of this chapter, we will provide and discuss the elements Carroll’s theory used, starting off with the basic one, i.e. the notion of the “monster”, and will also include King’s (more limited) concept of horror, to finally finish with a list of all considered characteristics. We will also try to provide some simple examples that will make these elements much more understandable.
1.2 Analysis of horror characteristics

1.2.1 The Monster

The key feature in an entity-based theory of horror is the existence of a monster of some sort. This monster can take many shapes and there can easily be more than one, but for us to describe this “horrifying monster”, it is first important to distinguish it from what it is not. A monster merely on its own is not sufficient enough of a criterion for horror, as supernatural and dangerous as it may be. Fairy tales, myths, and other stories often feature monsters as well, though these are very clearly not horror stories. Even if the modern children-oriented tales of Red Riding Hood and Sleeping Beauty, for example, were a lot less shocking and disturbing than their older, more original equivalents, these still contained a man-eating wolf and a powerful, fire-breathing dragon respectively, but they are in no way regarded as horror stories. In addition, a lot of myths (classical or not) also contain a monster of some sort, as we can see in many epics (Homer’s, Vergil’s, etc.), but never would one be so bold (and generally lacking intelligence) as to say that the Aeneid is a genuine horror story.

According to Carroll, what really sets horror apart from fairy tales and myths is the reaction that the characters in the story have to those monsters. Carroll quite agreeably explains this by saying that the monster in a fairy tale or a myth “is an ordinary character in an extraordinary world”, whereas in horror stories, “the monster is an extraordinary character in our ordinary world” (p.15-16). Thus, characters in a fairy tale will react accordingly to that monster, and this will be in an entirely different manner than a character in a horror story. Even if the prince in Sleeping Beauty might have feared the dragon, he was not surprised by its existence, knowing the extent of Malificent’s powers. The same applies to Hercules when he faced the Nemean Lion, for example. They knew what to expect, they knew what they were up against. While the same is true for the Thebaid, it does contain some scenes with seemingly horrifying elements, unlike the Iliad, the Aeneid, and many other classical epics, which will be the focus of the second chapter. For now, though, we will focus on monsters.

1.2.1.1 Threat

For a monster to be genuinely horrifying, according to Carroll (p.27), it has to have two characteristics: “threatening and impure”. So first of all, the monster has to be dangerous, menacing or hostile, as opposed to benevolent or harmless. This mostly speaks for itself. For example, a guardian angel might be a supernatural being, but (normally) it is not threatening to the characters, and as such, it cannot be the object of horror, both the emotion and the genre. The most logical way would of course be physically, both in physical power and in outer appearance. But threat can go much further than just the physical level; the way in which this monster is a threat can actually be manifold. It can also be threatening on a moral or a psychological level, or even on a social or spiritual one. (p.43-47) In a simple example, a werewolf may be especially threatening on the
physical level, while a vampire will be more on a moral or a psychological level, and naturally, some monsters are threatening on multiple levels.

1.2.1.2 Impurity and Abnormality

As we said above, the horrifying monster has to be both threatening and impure. If it is only one of the two, then that will not be enough to elicit actual horror, but will instead prompt some other emotion (either simple fear, or mere disgust). But what is impurity exactly? Just like threat, it can be quite general and can exert itself on several levels. Carroll generally states that a monster is impure when it is “categorically interstitial, categorically contradictory, incomplete, or formless” (p.32). Naturally for our research, this quite wide definition of impurity is necessary. We already know we will not be able to call our “monsters” in the *Thebaid* impure on the most basic, narrow level, which for most people would be a physical one, meaning the monster is nasty and revolting like some sort of slimy blob-monster, and indeed, quite unsurprisingly, there are no slimy blob-monsters in the *Thebaid*. It would be a very different story if there were.

This impurity is often connected to abnormality. In order to be horrifying, the monster must escape our view of the world, it must be something we literally do not believe to exist. Carroll rightly talks of the impure monsters as follows: “they are un-natural relative to a culture's conceptual scheme of nature.” (p.34). Thus, danger and impurity can differentiate horrifying monsters from other monsters, but since that depends a lot on evaluation, Carroll also adds that the monster has to “not exist according to the lights of contemporary science” (p.41). The creature’s mere existence has to break the norm, which is why, for example, a story in which a grizzly bear has killed people in the woods will not really be a horror story, unless the bear, which is already physically threatening, is also impure and unnatural in some way; either by being so overly powerful, dangerous and intelligent that it is automatically so much more than just a normal real-life grizzly, and therefore “categorically interstitial” (as happens in David DeCoteau’s television horror film *Grizzly Rage*), or actually going so far as to make it genetically altered.

So now we know that a monster, in order to be truly horrifying, also has to be impure and unnatural in some way. Carroll discusses five ways in which a creature can be impure. While these are very modern concepts and have only a small chance of being interesting on the subject of the *Thebaid*, we do wish to briefly mention them for the sake of clarity and completeness on this matter, and the hope that we will indeed recognize some parallel to this in the *Thebaid*. The first method in which a horrifying monster is “created” is fusion, i.e. two (or more) contradictory concepts in one stable being, for example, zombies as a combination of living and dead, or the genetically altered grizzly bear from earlier who is both a bear, but also has some un-natural, “monstrous” modifications. Second, there is what Carroll calls fission. Here, the contradictory elements are not visible at the same time, in a single being, but almost as in multiple identities. The best example of this would be a werewolf, normal human by day, but monster during a full moon. The next two methods are magnification and massification of the creature, which are easily explained with an example, respectively, a giant spider, and a horde of giant spiders (though rather obviously, these
two particular tropes will highly likely be irrelevant to the *Thebaid.* Lastly, Carroll points towards *metonymy,* according to which a monster is seen as impure by its surroundings, e.g. the monstrous demon is surrounded by rats and other vermin, or fire shooting from the ground.\(^7\)

However, there is one problem with these monsters we have yet to acknowledge, a distinction that will eventually prove important for our particular aim. In the previous paragraphs we have spoken of the danger, impurity and abnormality (“un-natural-ness”) of monsters and given easy examples like werewolves, vampires and mutated animals. But what if a human is the object of horror? Surely, Hitchcock’s *Psycho* is a horror film and the object of horror in it is the human, Norman Bates. Just like Carroll, we too believe that humans can be monsters even in the (admittedly overly physical) explanation of a monster we have provided thus far. That these humans (e.g. psychopaths) are threatening is often easy to see, but how are they impure and even un-natural when they are so clearly of the human race? Surely, serial killers are still a part of our reality, are they not? Nonetheless, we believe that this is not a counterargument. As Carroll puts it, “their presentation in the fictions they inhabit turn them effectively into fantastical beings. [...] they acquire attributes above and beyond what one would be willing to believe of living creatures”, and in the case of Norman Bates, Carroll very appropriately points to his impurity rather as “a function of psychology rather than biology” (p.37-9). We believe this to be the key to accepting that humans can be horrifying monsters as well as in this manner, they deserve to be considered both threatening and impure, even if it is much clearer for the more “physically monstrous” beings. Like this, humans can break the norm, can be unnatural, and can effectively be “an extraordinary character in an ordinary world” (p.16).

Finally, I would like to point to something Stephen King said in his *Danse Macabre* (1981: p.51-2). King calls to attention the “Apollonian/Dionysian” conflict we often find in the monster of the horror genre. King regards the werewolf myth as the clearest example of this, wherein the man is the Apollonian ideal and the wolf the Dionysian desires. He also, quite logically, links this to why people read horror, but that question is of little interest to us for now. The most important part, though, is that this can also easily be applied to the human monster, as, in such an instance, King speaks of “the Dionysian psychopath locked behind the Apollonian façade of normality ... but slowly, dreadfully emerging.”(p.52). Therefore, the (human) monster can often appear Apollonian, calm and natural at times (often more so at the beginning of the story), but will at some point surrender to a kind of Dionysian debauchery.

### 1.2.1.3 Repulsiveness

From impurity, it is not too large a leap towards repulsiveness. So far, we have seen that the monster carries some sort of threat and at the same time is supposed to be unthinkable to the human mind. Additionally, the impurity the monster holds is normally brought even more to light by it being filthy or unclean as well. There is no question that monsters are easily linked with decay,

\(^7\) Carroll 1990 43-52: He discusses these five ways in which a monster is impure on these pages. Once again, they most easily apply to the physical level, but that does not mean they cannot also apply on others (spiritual, psychological, etc.)
slime or dirt, etc. In this respect, we are easily reminded of our earlier example of the slimy blob-monster.

Once again, we could encounter an obstacle in the case of human monsters. Even if we have already asserted that the psychopath, for example, can be both threatening and impure, we would not consider them to be physically repulsive in the sense that they are ugly or inconceivably deformed. While this might be true for some “human” monsters, it is not necessarily so, as, for example, once more, Norman Bates did not look all that strange when we first see him in Psycho. However, this does not reject that a human monster cannot be repulsive. It could be on a deeper, more psychological level, e.g., a conflict between the moral thoughts and values of the monster and the protagonist, or, the human can even be physically repulsive only exactly at the time when they are committing an act of horror. Yet again, this is easily demonstrated in the figure of Bates, as Stephen King so aptly expresses that “Norman is the Werewolf. Only instead of growing hair, his change is effected by donning his dead mother’s panties, slip, and dress and hacking up the guests instead of biting them.”

Accordingly, these monsters are literally repulsive. When the characters learn of their existence and when they see them for the first time (in fact, often every time they witness them as a monster), they experience disgust, and possibly even nausea to some extent. Carroll would go so far as to say that there is an actual “conviction that mere physical contact with them can be lethal.” and that “[a]long with fear of severe physical harm, there is an evident aversion to making physical contact with the monster.” (p.22-3) He goes on to say that such avoidance of contact with the creature appears in many horror stories, but that it is not a necessary characteristic. This is clearly another reinforcement of the fact that in order for a monster to be truly horrifying, they must draw forth both fear and disgust from the characters and the audience. The fact that this emotive response is indeed one of both the characters in the story and the audience brings us to another important element we find in the horror genre, which is our next topic.

1.2.2  Mirror-effect

In a large amount of fictional stories, very generally, the characters will be confronted with certain things that will make them experience an emotion. When we read about the characters’ experience, we too often have a parallel reaction to this, e.g. when the detective reveals the identity of murderer to the father of the victim, or when the love of our protagonist’s life finally asks their hand in marriage, etc. This seems rather self-evident and the amount of examples we could find appears virtually inexhaustible. However, in terms of horror, Carroll is the first to really explain this particular effect and stress the importance of it to the genre. He states that “horror appears to be one of those genres in which the emotive responses of the audience, ideally, run parallel to the

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8 King 1981 p.52
emotions of characters.” and that “[t]his mirroring-effect, [...] is a key feature of the horror genre.” (p.17-8). Specifically, when we read about or see the character(s) suddenly recoil from the monster(s), trying their very best to keep as much distance as possible between them, we too, as an audience are prompted to respond emotionally.

Now this response we have as an audience could be very much the same as the character’s. For example, when our helpless victim is confronted with the dreaded sight of our good, old slimy blob-monster for the very first time (and it could just as well be their very last time for that matter), we might feel disgusted and horrified, which is a very fitting term here, much in a similar way to that character. Even our behaviour could very much reflect that of the victim. Naturally, this involves there being a willing suspension of disbelief on the part of the audience, but even with the resulting similar unease, the creature is normally never as real to us as it is to the confronted character. For that reason, it is important to still distinguish between the two reactions. Carroll very appropriately articulates this when he says that “[o]ur responses are suppose[d] to converge (but not exactly duplicate) those of the characters” (p.18).

On top of that, Carroll makes two more, necessary nuances. First of all, he states that normally the audience’s emotions “are reflected in the emotional responses of the positive human characters to the monsters in works of horror” (p.24). This should not come as much of a surprise as a positive, human audience will obviously recognize themselves easiest in equally positive human characters, rather than the monster. Otherwise we would rather experience a kind of gleeful anticipation of the hunt for prey, or a thirst for blood. A second distinction he makes is that, since our emotional state is no mere replication of a character’s, our emotions can even be completely different from the character’s at a given moment. We can feel suspense and concern for the character, while the character is just in a state of utter fear (simply not having the time for suspense or to have self-pity), or is still neutral because they, unlike the audience, have not noticed the monster yet. The way in which we react to the monster may be parallel to the character’s, but that does not mean our emotions are exact replicas. (p.90-3)

1.2.3 Plot structure

Now let us turn to something a little more complex, namely, plot structure in horror stories. The problem here is once again the time period. The plot structures Carroll discusses are all only attached to the horror genre (and no others). Since the genre only came to existence in the 18th century, these structures too could only be found after that time. Even if we were to discover that they existed (perhaps in a barer form) before that time, the Thebaid is still very much an epic in theme and structure and rather different from the modern novel. Yet even so, we believe Carroll’s structures to be so very typical of the horror genre, so very connected to its core, that we simply cannot leave it out of this discussion. Chances are very small that we will recognize any of these structures as a similarly overarching macro-structure in the Thebaid, but that does not mean that there will be no parallels to be found, especially in the case of one of the two large plot structures he distinguishes. Perhaps, a particularly “horrifying” passage of the Thebaid may contain one of these structures as a micro-structure, or may contain something remarkably resembling one of its key parts. We will only discover this if we indeed include it in our research.
Simply put, Carroll distinguishes between two major plot structures that make up the large part of all stories in the horror genre. In their perfect form they both contain four parts, but stories can easily exist out of a combination of two or three of those, or even as only one. Each part can be repeated multiple times, but they always follow the same chronology (only changing order in the narrative when the story contains flashbacks and flash-forwards). These two major plot structures are what Carroll calls the “Complex Discovery Plot” (p.99-114) and the “Overreacher Plot” (p.115-24). First of all, we wish to point out that after careful consideration, we have decided not to include an explanation of the Overreacher Plot (also called “the mad scientist plot”) in this thesis because it is already abundantly clear that it would prove invaluable to our research of the Thebaid. An example of this would be Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, in which someone does an experiment that ends up creating a monster. Many modern horror stories fit into this plot structure and in no way do we wish to give the impression that it is less important to the actual genre. Before we continue discussing the Complex Discovery Plot, we will first provide a table here explaining its four movements and their respective functions as concise and practical as possible.

Table 1 The Complex Discovery Plot

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movement</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Onset</td>
<td>Monster or evidence of it is shown to the audience, either gradually or immediately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Discovery</td>
<td>Protagonist(s) discover(s) that the monster is the cause of whatever is happening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Confirmation</td>
<td>The one(s) that discovered the monster earlier succeed(s) at convincing others of the monster’s existence, often giving a description of the monster and its power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Confrontation</td>
<td>Protagonist(s) face(s) the monster in a final confrontation (wins or loses, sometimes multiple confrontations)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Above, we have given a simple rendering of Carroll’s Complex Discovery Plot structure (p.99-109), which will prove to be more or less sufficient of an explanation for our particular thesis. After clearing up the workings of this specific structure, Carroll also covers several variations of it (p.109-14), some of which we will provide a short account of in this paragraph. He first adds that there are also horror stories that only include three of these movements. An example of this is the Discovery Plot, which leaves out the confirmation phase, as in these stories, there is no one to convince of the monster’s existence either because there simply is no one around to tell, or because everyone learned of the monster’s existence at the same time already. Correspondingly, there are also horror stories with only two of the movements, like the onset/confrontation plot, of which a typical example is the platoon monster film, in which a group of people (typically soldiers of some sort) encounter a (group of) monster(s) and fight it to survive (in this structure, discovery essentially coincides with the onset). Even pure single movements are enough to create a horror story (though these often lack complexity and disclosure). (Carroll 1990: p.99-114)

Basically, the point we wish to make here is that so long as these four movements remain in the same chronological order, they can make a great deal of combinations that can be found in stories in the horror genre. Naturally, though, not every single story of the horror genre fits into one of these two overarching groups, but they do cover an enormous part of them.
1.2.4 Suspense

We must first point out that suspense is something we find in many works of fiction of various genres, but it is clear that it is also “a key narrative element in most horror stories” (Carroll 1990: p.128). Thus, unlike our “horrifying monster”, it is not an element we can use to distinguish between horror stories and others, yet it is still often essential to most of the genre. One of the better known definitions of suspense was written by Roland Barthes in his essay “An Introduction to Structural Analysis of Narrative” (as cited. in Carroll, p.129):

“Suspense is clearly only a privileged—or “exacerbated” form of distortion: on the one hand, by keeping a sequence open (through emphatic procedures of delay and renewal), it reinforces the contact with the reader (the listener), has a manifestly phatic function; while on the other, it offers the threat of an uncompleted sequence, of an open paradigm (if, as we believe, every sequence has two poles), that is to say, of a logical disturbance, it being this disturbance which is consumed with anxiety and pleasure (all the more so because it is always made right in the end). “Suspense,” therefore, is a game with structure, designed to endanger and glorify it, constituting a veritable “thrilling” of intelligibility: by representing order (and no longer series) in its fragility, “suspense” accomplishes the very idea of language. …”

Barthes’ definition appears to be a very general one, applicable to all kinds of narrative, basing suspense on “an uncompleted sequence” and “a game with structure”. What he means is that the audience experiences suspense for as long as a sequence is left open in the story, for as long as our questions remain unanswered, whether we have a good idea on what is about to happen or not. While Carroll too will admit that suspense is something that can be found in many genres, he considers Barthes’ “suspense” to be too general and too abstract (p.129). Even if suspense is not exclusive to the horror genre, Carroll’s more narrow definition lies much closer to the suspense we expect to find in horror stories, and is as such of course much more suitable for the purpose of this research.

In this paragraph, we will briefly explain Carroll’s interpretation of suspense. He starts out by stating that almost all popular narratives follow “Erotetic Narration”, in which earlier scenes and themes of a story are connected to later ones, in the sense that the audience gets questions that will be resolved over the course of the story (in other words, a question is raised in an earlier scene and answered in a later scene). This easily fits the plot structures Carroll described for the horror genre. As we can see, a question risen in the onset, e.g. a sudden series of unsolved animal attacks, is answered in the discovery movement, e.g the protagonist is beset by a werewolf in the forest. Next we wonder how our protagonist is going to convince others of the truth, and so on. Now, Carroll uses this hypothesis to explain suspense. He says that when these questions arise, the audience will always respond, namely with an expectation. These questions can be on a macro-level and a micro-level, respectively overarching across the entire story or smaller ones from scene to scene. More or less like Barthes (only less abstract), suspense is then another emotional state that can be experienced when a question comes up and lasts until we receive an answer. It is here that Carroll narrows down his definition by saying that not all questions create suspense. Some just create anticipation, of which suspense is a subcategory according to him. Suspense, more precisely, is only
generated when a particular narrative question has “two possible, opposed answers which have specific ratings in terms of morality and probability.” (p.137) The eventual outcome itself is irrelevant as the suspense precedes it regardless. Carroll believes suspense is mostly generated when the evil outcome is more probable and likely than the moral outcome. Turning to horror then in particular, suspense is instigated by (events surrounding or actions by) the “evil” monster clearly having the upper hand on the positive character(s). (p.130-9)

That the distinction between suspense and horror is difficult to understand is made even clearer when we take notice of Stephen King’s quotes considering some particular stories that focus on human nature. King states that “[t]hese books are not, at least technically, horror novels; there is nary a monster or supernatural occurrence on view. They are labeled “suspense novels.” But if we look at them with that Apollonian/Dionysian conflict in mind, we see that they are very much horror novels;” (1981: p.51). Basically, this shows us that these works that are regarded as suspense novels, are, according to King, actually horror novels after all because they contain that moral/evil conflict in the human protagonist’s mind. It is easy to see how well Carroll’s theory fits into this. He quite succinctly concludes by saying that, “[t]hus, though suspense and horror are distinct—there may be suspense stories without horror and horror stories without suspense—they also have a natural, though contingent affinity.” (p.144)

Finally, suspense can also be linked to something we mentioned earlier in 1.2.2 (“Mirroring-effect”): the emotions of the audience are not always a direct copy of those of the characters. While a character and the audience can experience suspense at the same time, e.g. when the character knows that they are being followed by the monster, mostly a character will not have any time for suspense. In this part, we asserted that suspense is strongly connected to narrative structure, which is something that only effects the audience and not the character. Because of this, suspense is more of an audience emotion and will more often coincide with a character's blissful ignorance (not knowing about the monster) or their abject fear and horror (as they try to survive their encounter with the monster and we wonder whether they will succeed or not, more often expecting them not to because of their small chances).

The thing is, in horror (and this is very typical of horror films), sometimes there is no time for suspense. As an audience (again possibly mirroring a character), we may be shocked instead by something sudden (even if we expect it to come). Shock can also be what follows suspense. We may be held in suspense for an entire scene only to at the end by shocked by a sudden image or event (e.g. the monster appears out of nowhere). Shock is a lot more simple then suspense, both to understand it as to create it, and it often works in tandem with horror.

1.2.5 The Drama of Proof

In the introduction of this thesis, we mentioned literary theorist Tzvetan Todorov. One of his largest contributions to the world of literary theory was his work “The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre” in which he endeavours to define the genre of the fantastic. It is important to note that, according to Todorov, horror is a subgenre of the fantastic. For that reason, his work is of less relevance to us, since we wish to grasp the general notion of horror, and not of an even broader
genre like the fantastic. Nonetheless, Carroll does draw another important horror characteristic from Todorov’s theory, when Todorov defines the genre in three features (as cited. in Carroll, 1990: 145):

“First, the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural (rational) and a supernatural explanation of the events described. Second, this hesitation may also be experienced by a character, and at the same time the hesitation is represented, it becomes one of the themes of the work—in the case of naïve reading, the actual reader identifies himself with the character. Third, the reader must adopt a certain attitude toward the text: he will reject allegorical as well as “poetic” interpretations. These three requirements do not have equal value. The first and the third actually constitute this genre; the second may not be fulfilled.”

Carroll draws our attention to the first feature and states that in a story of the fantastic genre, “the reader suspends judgement between the naturalistic and the supernatural explanation.” (p.146) According to Todorov, a story is purely fantastic when even in the end of the story, we still do not know for certain whether what happened has a rational or a supernatural explanation. When the cause of the phenomena is revealed in the story, Todorov differentiates between the fantastic-uncanny story, in which the rational/naturalistic explanation turns out to be true, and the fantastic-marvelous, in which the supernatural one prevails (1977: p.41-57).

Turning back to horror, Carroll points out that some horror stories “fall into the category of the fantastic-marvelous” (p.150). The fantastic is all about indecisiveness. For example, when the character believes there are rats in their house and suddenly starts hearing strange noises coming from the attic every night, the reader may think that it’s the rats or the character’s imagination (both rational explanations), until it is discovered that there is actually a poltergeist. Of course, as we already established, the monster that is the object of the horror story, must be fearsome and impure (even disgusting in some way) for it to be truly of the horror genre. Thus, not all fantastic-marvelous stories are horror stories because the supernatural creature causing the phenomena might just as well be benevolent and kind. Carroll calls this the “drama of proof” and states that it is a feature very typical of the horror genre. Once again, it is very easy to situate this in his plot structure movements, as discovery and confirmation are strongly connected to it. When the character finally discovers the monster through the evidence of the onset, the drama of proof is resolved, but it may very well return when the characters have to convince others of it (pp.102, 119, 157). This will often cost them some time, in which not only the monster, but also the drama might get stronger. The link with suspense (or at the least “anticipation) is made without difficulty.

On a final note, we wish to already bring up that the chances of finding something like drama of proof in the Thebaid are rather small because it is not only strongly connected to the more modern narrative structures of the horror genre, but it also essentially depends on an indecisiveness as much on our part as that of the characters, which is of course highly problematic for the characters in a world of myths who already believe in the existence of malevolent monsters on the one hand, and we are often perfectly aware of what Fate has in store for us.
1.2.6 The Paradox of Horror

As we said in the prologue to this chapter, horror is the emotion that the genre of that same name intends to bring about in its audience, and has everything to do with fear and disgust. One does not have to be an expert on human emotions and psychology to know that in normal instances of reality, fear and disgust (and thus horror) are not normally something people actively seek to experience as they are not positive emotions. It is, therefore, rather odd that so many people choose to read horror novels and watch horror films when we know, even well before we begin, that we will be horrified (or at least, that is the purpose). This is what is called the paradox of horror: why would we knowingly seek out these unpleasant feelings, why would we spend time on and “enjoy” something that makes us afraid, something that makes us appalled? This is a topic subject to immense speculation and has already received many explanations as it is possible to retrace it to the question of why a human would ever knowingly go through something difficult. While we will admit that the paradox itself is not that interesting to us, it is not illogical that there might be some horror characteristic to be found when examining exactly what it is in the horror genre that makes us want to read or watch it. We will provide a small account of the possible “solutions” Carroll puts the most emphasis on.

There is one last point we would like to add before we continue. The paradox of horror is actually “further burdened” by what we could call the paradox of fiction: why would we read/watch something that we know does not exist? In the case of horror fiction, this obviously involves monsters. We will not discuss this paradox as that would bring us way too far from our original purposes, but we will say this: Lovecraft believed that, despite the fact that as our knowledge of the world grows, the supernatural possibilities in it decrease, people have a sort of instinctual feeling that there still might be room in the world for something supernatural after all. It is very difficult to say to what extent the Romans actually believed (Greek) mythology (e.g. the Theban cycle which is the subject of the Thebaid) to be true. This is all very speculative and, therefore, of lesser importance and authority as we easily find ourselves on thin ice here, but it does seem that the world described in (Greek) myths is a world of the old days, and the Romans would rather not recognize as their own, at least not anymore (for example, a Roman would probably be more than a bit surprised if they were to actually encounter a sphinx on the road). So maybe this piece of instinct we all hold, according to Lovecraft, is something man has had for a very long time already. Maybe a Roman reader would indeed have need of something like that, (especially) in order to read an epic like the Thebaid.

1.2.6.1 Cosmic Awe

Additionally, Lovecraft appeared to have an answer to the paradox of horror as well. According to him, people would seek out the genre of supernatural horror (nowadays even called Lovecraftian Horror, which is but a subgenre of the horror we speak of in this thesis). This is what he calls “cosmic awe” (perhaps better known as “cosmic fear”, Lovecraft 1927) which he understands as the following:

“When to this sense of fear and evil the inevitable fascination of wonder and curiosity is superadded, there is born a composite body of keen emotion and imaginative provocation whose vitality must of necessity endure as long as the human race itself.”
After reading this, we see that Carroll rightly interprets that “[c]osmic fear for Lovecraft is an exhilarating mixture of fear, moral revulsion, and wonder”, but that “he does not state why it is important to uphold that feeling.” (p.162) Carroll does admit, however, that “in any case, it is clear that literary supernatural horror—which, by means of the morbidly unnatural (the repulsive), evokes cosmic fear—is attractive because this kind of awe responds to or restores some sort of primordial or instinctual human intuition about the world.” (p.163)

Yet moreover, Lovecraft also considered cosmic fear to be the defining characteristic of the genre, with which we (just like Carroll) cannot agree, because the genre he was discussing (i.e. supernatural horror) is only a part of the horror genre. A lot of genuine horror stories do not reach the levels of cosmic fear and awe Lovecraft attaches to “his” subgenre, or have no sort of awe whatsoever. Once again, we can quote Carroll on this as he states that “[a]we is one effect of (perhaps) relatively high achievement within the horror genre, not the very sign of the genre” and that “Lovecraft confuses what he regards as a level of high achievement in the genre with what identifies the genre.” (p.164) Since not all works of horror can make their audience experience cosmic fear, this cannot be the primary reason for the genre’s attractiveness. It is simply not fundamental enough.

1.2.6.2 Psychoanalysis

There are several theories from a psycho-analytical point of view, a few of which Carroll describes, that can be applied to the paradox of horror. Nonetheless, we will try to keep this part rather short because of a simple reason. All the “answers” that psychoanalysis provides for the paradox of horror are never conclusive for the entire genre, and often not even for the large part of it. As such, it is not unheard of for people to read far too much into stories and psychoanalysis is quite a dangerous place in that respect. This is our only substantial criticism to Carroll’s book, namely that he spends a lot of time discussing these psycho-analytical interpretations, yet in the end he basically disregards them as not comprehensive enough. Still, some of the ideas he mentions do indeed cover a significant part of the genre and might once again reveal a typical horror characteristic for our analysis of the Thebaid.

One of the primary theories Carroll mentions is that in horror stories, people discover deep and unconscious psychosexual desires. These are, basically, taboo, but this is how they succeed at, deep down, satisfying sexual interests and needs. It gives a more important function to the fear and disgust because it allows us to hide behind it. Of course, it would be absolutely ridiculous to try and find a latent sexual wish behind every single horrifying monster in the horror genre (Carroll p.169-71).

After starting off the subject with people busying themselves with horror as a result of sexual wishes, Carroll notes that there it can actually “be linked with a whole panoply of repression: to anxieties and infantile fantasies as well as sexual wishes.” (p.172) The most typical one (and possibly the most relevant to us in terms of the Thebaid) is what Carroll calls “the infantile conviction in the unlimited power of repressed rage—the belief in the omnipotence of thought ...” (p.172). However, even if we broaden the possible amount of repressed wishes or anxieties beyond the sexual realm, still not every single monster can be linked back to one of them.
There is still much that could be said about psychoanalysis and horror, but we have briefly dealt with the aspects that might prove to be of actual relevance to this thesis. Paying more attention to it would, at least on our end, be a waste of time. Let it be clear, though, that it is not our intention to make a value judgement about the merits of psychoanalysis in the study of (the paradox of) horror.

A final hypothesis (established to answer the paradox) that Carroll provides, before going on to answer the question himself with a more conclusive solution, is one in which some would state that people who take to horror do so because it is culturally or politically subversive. Just like Carroll, we can easily see that, while we know this to be true for some works, this is once more not comprehensive for the entire genre (p.177-8).

Stephen King does not speak of the subject as extensively as Carroll but does say something that we can just as easily accept as a possible answer to the paradox: “The answer seems to be that we make up horrors to help us cope with the real ones. With the endless inventiveness of humankind, we grasp the very elements which are so divisive and destructive and try to turn them into tools — to dismantle themselves.” (1981: p.16)

1.2.6.3 Fascination

So far, all the solutions we presented to the paradox of horror have been deemed to be at least true for a part of the genre but never comprehensive enough for its entirety. After all of this, Carroll finally posits his own theory as follows:

“All narratives might be thought to involve the desire to know—the desire to know at least the outcome of the interaction of the forces made salient in the plot. However, horror fiction is a special variation on this general narrative motivation, because it has at the center of it something which is given as in principle unknowable—something which, ex hypothesi, cannot, given the structure of our conceptual scheme, exist and that cannot have the properties it has.” (1990: p.182)

In other words, Carroll says that an audience will push through a horror story because of curiosity (cf. the discovery and confirmation functions, the drama of proof). This curiosity originates not only from the narrative itself, but also (and this is typical of the horror genre) from the monster, because it is a logical subject for curiosity in that it lies beyond the understanding of our real life. It is something we intrinsically cannot know and thus it is only human that we want to know, even if they are so scary and revolting. Carroll verbalises it in the following manner: “..., the disgust that such beings evince might be seen as part of the price to be paid for the pleasure of their disclosure” (p.184), and “[w]ith reference to art-horror the answer is that the monster—as a categorical violation—fascinates for the self-same reasons it disgusts and, since we know the monster is but a fictional confection, our curiosity is affordable.” (p.189) Thus, while curiosity is an element in a great deal of fictional stories and might, as such, be an answer to the more general paradox of fiction as well, the horror genre has a qualitative edge over other genres. Since, not only will a majority of plot structures in the genre (with discovery and/or confirmation movements) strengthen and exploit that curiosity, but also the monster itself, exactly because of its abnormal
nature (i.e. because it is so fearsome, so appalling and so unknowable), will be an extra source of fascination to the audience.

The theory’s shortcomings that Carroll points out himself are actually not that much of a problem for our research. First, he admits that his hypothesis “fails to cover non-narrative horror and horror fictions little concerned with the drama of disclosure” (p.187), but he hopes it can be expanded nonetheless. We do not expect the Thebaid to have much concern for said drama, nor does it contain the modern genre’s macro-structural intricacies. Yet still, we will find there to be merit in analysing the specific more “horrifying” scenes with an eye on the type of curiosity or fascination Carroll posits here.

In the end, Carroll wishes to distinguish between two theories: a universal and a general one. The first simply states that it is fascination that attracts people to horror and horror stories. The second postulates that “the most commonly recurring [...] exercises in the horror genre appear to be horror narratives of the disclosure sort,” in which that fascination and curiosity “are developed to an especially high degree.”(p.190). If we take to heart what we said in the previous paragraph, then it is clear that the fascination we will search for in the second part of this thesis is established more in his universal theory.

As a final remark, we would like to add that clearly this fascination/curiosity is the general, comprehensive basis we were looking for to answer the paradox, but, that it can be strengthened by other factors typical of horror stories. These can be found in psychoanalysis (as we discussed earlier), but it can even be so simple as the pure kick of the genre. This is more of a modern concept, but some people actually just watch (obviously more so than read) horror to show their courage. Additionally, if we look back to Lovecraft’s cosmic fear, we see that it is also a kind of fascination that is strengthened by several traits that are particular to that subgenre. Another way to look at it, and this will truly be our final comment on the paradox of horror and curiosity for now, is put forward by Stephen King, whose words fit Carroll’s more extensive theory and even add another dimension to it:

“Monstrosity fascinates us because it appeals to the conservative Republican in a three-piece suit who resides within us all. We love and need the concept of monstrosity because it is a reaffirmation of the order we all crave as human beings … and let me further suggest that it is not the physical or mental aberration in itself which horrifies us, but rather the lack of order which these situations seem to imply.” (1981: p.39)

1.2.7 Terror, Horror, Gross-out

This is where Carroll ends his theory. He concludes his book with some words on the more modern horror genre in film and television, which does not contain anything relevant to this research. Furthermore, there simply are not a lot of comprehensive horror theories out there for us to use, and none are as seminal and far-reaching as Carroll’s, which should be more than clear by now. Still, we have occasionally referenced to Stephen King’s Danse Macabre as well. While it was not King’s aim to create a theory on horror in that book (cf. his quote we started our prologue of this chapter with),
and his inductive reasoning practically always looks more to modern examples of horror novels and films, King does chance a more general stance that is quite popular in modern Horror theory, which is why we wished to add it to his chapter as well. In his Danse Macabre, we find:

“So: terror on top, horror below it, and lowest of all, the gag reflex of revulsion. My own philosophy as a sometime writer of horror fiction is to recognize these distinctions because they are sometimes useful, but to avoid any preference for one over the other on the grounds that one effect is somehow better than another.” (1981: p.23)

From this quote, and the rest of his book, we infer that King recognizes three feelings under the genre of horror: terror, horror and revulsion (also called “the gross-out”). In his viewpoint, gross-out is our emotional reaction to what is generally disgusting, horror to what is unnatural and unexpected, and terror to what we fear might be there or might happen in the moments before we actually know the answer (which is quite often what instigates the emotion of horror). According to King, the genre of horror can contain all three of these things. While it may look different from Carroll’s theory, it really is not. Essentially, the only difference is semantics. Whereas Carroll states the genre of horror elicits the emotion of horror and then goes on to say that the object of it is a monster that has to be fearsome, disgusting and unnatural, King just keeps these three emotions apart. In other words, Carroll’s horror as an emotion more or less contains King’s three distinctions all at once. The only other difference, perhaps, is that Carroll creates a firm theory, while King would rather not be too rigid and too constricting. King does not really wish to define.

Thus, in no way does King’s view disparage Carroll’s, nor is either one more “correct” than the other. But once again, it is clear that our choice to take Carroll’s theory as a basis was because we could never describe as comprehensive a theory as we did up to this point, and add our own understandings to it, if we had taken a work like Danse Macabre (that indeed has no intention of creating a theory) as our basis instead. Nonetheless, when we examine a monster in the Thebaid and discuss why it is threatening (1.2.1.1), unnatural and disgusting (1.2.1.2; 1.2.1.3), we could just as well refer to it in King’s terms and ask ourselves why it makes us react in terror, horror and repulsion respectively.

1.3 List of characteristics

1.3.1 General

We have now discussed horror and its characteristics effectively enough to establish a list of them so that we can apply it to some scenes of the Thebaid in our next chapter. The list below contains elements from Carroll’s comprehensive theory, some of which are absolutely essential to horror (such as the presence of a monster with a few equally essential traits) and others, while not pertinent to all of horror, still are to a duly large part of it (such as suspense and drama of the proof). While a large part of Carroll’s theory is applicable to horror in many mediums, it is important that this is not true for all of them, and the list should only be used on actual narratives (not on a painting, for example). This list was obviously made for a practical purpose and, thus, does
not contain some elements of Carroll’s theory that were immediately deemed as irrelevant to our thesis, such as the Overreacher Plot Structure.

**1.3.2 List**

| Table 2 |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. Monster     | - Threatening   | • physically,   |
|                | - impure       |   spiritually,  |
|                |                 |   psychologically, |
|                |                 |   morally,      |
|                |                 |   socially, ... |
|                |                 | • through fusion, fission, |
|                |                 |   magnification, massification or |
|                |                 |   metonymy      |
|                | - disgusting   |                 |
|                | - unnatural    |                 |
|                |                 | - avoidance of physical contact with it |
| 2. Mirroring Effect |
| 3. Complex Discovery Plot |
| 1. Onset       |                 | • not every single one is necessary, also in threes, |
| 2. Discovery   |                 |   twos and even purely one |
| 3. Confirmation|                 | • any function can be repeated any number of times |
| 4. Confrontation|                | NOTE: so long as they stay in the same relative order to each other. |
| 4. Suspense    | Two possible, opposed outcomes | - Moral |
|                |                 | - Evil |
|                | NOTE: mostly in horror, the evil outcome is more likely, more probable |
|                |                 | • shock could follow (though it can just as well be prompted with no suspense preceding it) |
| 5. Drama of proof |
| 6. Fascination/Curiosity |
| • generally: through structure and anomalous nature of monster |
| • more specified, monster evokes or exhibits: |
| - Cosmic awe |
| - Repressed wishes and anxieties |
| - Subversive nature |
Chapter 2
Elements of Horror in Statius’ Thebaid

“This inhuman place makes human monsters.”

In this chapter, we will finally apply the elements we discussed in the previous chapter to the Thebaid. We can already say for certain that, in order for us to find some genuinely horrifying elements, there will need to be some kind of monster related to it. We have mentioned before that a horrifying monster is normally “an extraordinary character in our ordinary world,” (Carroll 1990: p.16). The problem with this is that the context of the Thebaid is a mythical one: we are in a world of myths, gods and mythical creatures, and all of these are technically ordinary (and expected) characters in that world. Thus, in our theory, it would be difficult for a mythical creature to be an object of horror in a story like the Thebaid. However, the quote above from Stephen King’s The Shining was not taken just for show, as it became clear when reading the Thebaid that the horrific monsters in this story (the true sources of horror) could only be found among the human race. Since we have already explained that it is quite possible in the horror genre for the monsters to be of the human species(see 1.2.1.2) and truly horrifying at the same time, this should no longer be an issue.

Towards the end of his book, Carroll makes an observation about the horror genre that we have not yet discussed. He states that “[i]t is frequently remarked that horror cycles emerge in times of social stress, and that the genre is a means through which the anxieties of an era can be expressed.” (p.207), and indeed, King makes a similar notion in his Danse Macabre when he says that the times when the horror genre is most popular “almost always seem to coincide with periods of fairly serious economic and/or political strain” (1981: 25). While the Thebaid is still an epic, it contains some very gruesome and (as we wish to prove) horrifying elements, remarkably more so than other Latin epics from classical antiquity. We can only wonder if this might perhaps have something to do with the troubles of his time. Only about twenty years before Statius wrote the Thebaid, another work was written that was by many also seen as exceptionally cruel, bloody and disturbing, namely Lucan’s Pharsalia, about the civil war between Julius Caesar and Pompey the Great (thus, taking place in our ordinary world). While we will not include and discuss the Pharsalia in our thesis, we know through various accounts that during the writing of his epic, Lucan had had a falling out with emperor Nero. Thus, we know the larger part of his work was written in a time when he was no longer content with the political climate of Rome.

1 Quote from Stephen King’s The Shining (1977)
Earlier scholars first considered Statius’ *Thebaid* to be flattering towards and justifying emperor Domitian (who reigned during the writing of the epic). However, more recent studies aim towards another view, stating that the works indeed contain a critique towards his contemporary political situation, towards the violent and strict Flavian dynasty. In his book, *The Mythic Voice of Statius: Power and Politics in the Thebaid*, William J. Dominik makes a strong case for a reading of the *Thebaid* in which Statius did indeed deem the political situation of his time to be unfavourable.\(^2\) Naturally, we once again moved onto a stretch of rather thin ice and should not tarry too long. Most likely, we will never truly know how Statius thought about the politics of his time. But even if we cannot say for sure if there was a politically negative undercurrent in the *Thebaid* (about which much convincing material has already been written), the epic does tell us that the man had no positive view on war, on the contrary.

Now, let us finally return to the heart of the matter. We have said it many times already: we do not wish to prove that the *Thebaid* is a work in the horror genre, as this is an impossible and futile venture. The many battles that are described may be exceptionally bloody, gruesome and cruel, but the primary object of this epic will not be a monster, nor will the prime emotion it is supposed to elicit from its audience be horror. What we will do is focus on everything we have done so far to get a grasp on horror (i.e. everything we did in order to create the list in 1.3.2) and examine a few characters from the *Thebaid* over the course of the epic in search of the previously discussed horror elements. In other words, we wish to see whether the epic, that in a first reading of it already seems to hold something instinctively horrifying, does indeed contain some of the characteristics we appointed to the horror genre.

The choice to specifically have characters as our focus is only logical considering our theory of horror, so heavily based on Carroll’s entity-based theory, is so dependent on the notion of “the monster”. Accordingly, proving an epic such as this contains truly horrifying elements will be more or less the same as proving certain entities (i.e. characters) to be a monster as close to the modern sense of the word as possible. After careful consideration, our choice has fallen on four characters (two of which will be handled together) because, on the one hand, they have the largest chance of being justifiably horrifying at some points in the story, and, on the other, have an ample amount of appearances throughout the entire epic. For the sake of orderliness, we will discuss these characters apart from one another and discuss their part in the story chronologically. Again for logical reasons, Eteocles and Polyneices will be discussed in the same part, not only because they are brothers, but especially since their final scene is together and all horrifying effects we discover there will most likely be related to the both of them. There are some other characters (Capaneus, Hippomedon, etc.) we left out simply because their analyses would resemble the ones we have made too closely, and they appear far less frequently in the epic. Each section will discuss the parts of the story relevant to our analysis and then go on to focus on the horrifying elements in them. We will make use of the Latin text and add the English translation (Ritchie, Hall & Edwards, 2007) of the fragments with which we are concerned in the footnotes. All translations used in this chapter come from this work.

\(^2\) Also, for example, Hardie (1993) and Henderson (1991)
2.1 Tydeus

Now, Eteocles and Polyneices are without a doubt the *Thebaid*’s main heroes. Yet if we would have to add one more name, then that would most definitely be Tydeus. Though slighter in frame than most other heroes, he is still immensely powerful and takes down many a soldier that would be so foolish as to stand in his way. There is, however, more to him than just an ardent fighter in Polyneices’ favour. There are a lot of elements surrounding his character that are very interesting from our point of view, which we will now examine more closely, especially those regarding to him as (becoming) a horrifying monster in his own respect.

His very first appearance in the story, when both Polyneices and he seek shelter from the storm before the gates of Argos, is already marked by some remarkable character traits:

\[
\text{hic uero ambus rabiem fortuna cruentam attulit: (1.408-9)}\]

Only just having arrived there and seen one another, with not even a single word spoken between them, they rush headlong into a fight, both heroes filled with a bloodthirsty rage. Luckily, just as they are about to draw their weapons, clearly intent on killing the other, Adrastus, king of Argos, stops them and makes them see reason. Both men seem to realise their error and Tydeus even comments as follows:

\[
\text{pariter stabulare bimembres}
\]
\[
\text{Centauros unaque ferunt Cyclopas in Aetna compositos. sunt et rabidis iura insita monstris fasque suum (1.457-60)}\]

This is where Statius lets Tydeus make quite an interesting statement. After recovering from his earlier mindless violence, he alludes to the fact that even the Cyclopes and Centaurs are able to live together without grabbing at each other’s throats. In other words, if even those monsters are capable of that, then surely so must they. Thankfully, no harm was done, and thus, they did not stoop to a level lower than even that of those ancient monsters. But Tydeus statement does not put them above that level, and their rabid behaviour combined with this mention of Cyclopes and Centaurs is not something Statius did without meaning. We could even ask ourselves: had Adrastus not stopped them, wouldn’t the two of them have gotten into a more serious fight with their weapons drawn? If that were the case, and we do not find this that farfetched, by Tydeus’ own reasoning, they would indeed already have been worse than those monsters. While, admittedly, it

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3 Ritchie et al (2007), p.11: “But at this point Fortune brought down bloodthirsty rage on both of them: ...”

4 p.12: “They say that the two-formed Centaurs stable together and the Cyclopes settle down together in Etna. Even for ravening monsters there are natural laws and their own code of conduct: ...”
did not come to that as they were both still open to reason, this does set a remarkable tone for the rest of the epic.

From this alone, Tydeus is of course not a horrifying monster in the modern sense of the word at all. There are other redeeming qualities to him that deserve to be mentioned as well. In these first few books, while Tydeus’ volatile and aggressive character may be visible on multiple occasions, he shows many human, rational traits as well. For example, after their first encounter, he grows closer to Polyneices and seems earnest in his “friendship” with him. In book two, when Polyneices asks him for his help with dealing with his brother, Tydeus immediately complies, speaking ill of the bad, tyrannical kind of rule he attaches to Eteocles. He eagerly leaves for Thebes as an envoy, even though he is not the most gifted speaker, and seems truly disgusted by Eteocles’ want for political power. When Eteocles indignantely denies his brother the right to rule, Tydeus steps out angrily after some more heated words. Once again, Statius compares him, as he is leaving, to another chthonic monster, the Calydonian Boar.

It does not take long for that comparison to ring true. As an envoy, Tydeus’ safety would normally be secured, but Eteocles sends fifty men to take him down nonetheless. Statius first focuses on the cowardice of Eteocles’ move, but then goes on to something else entirely. He notes how close to the place of their ambush the terrible Sphinx once killed so many, already foreshadowing somewhat what is to happen, creating even more suspense quite close to our modern understanding of it. Eventually, he even speaks of the fifty men as if they are already doomed (peritura cohors, 2.524). Immediately after that, Tydeus enters the scene and notices the men ahead of him. He calls them out undaunted, and even when he realizes he is heavily outnumbered, challenges them all. He quickly moves up to the higher ground where the Sphinx once resided and takes up a boulder with inhuman strength to throw it down on his enemies:

Oeneae uindex sic ille Dianae
erectus saetis et aduncae fulmine mala,
cum premeret Pelopea phalanx, saxa obuia uoluens
fractaque perfossis arbusta Acheoia ripis,
iam Telamona solo, iam stratum Ixiona linquens

te, Meleagre, subit (2.469-74)\(^5\)

It quickly moves up to the higher ground where the Sphinx once resided and takes up a boulder with inhuman strength to throw it down on his enemies:

qualis in aduersos Lapithas erexit inanem
magnanimus cratera Pholus. stupet obuia leto
turba superstantem atque emissi turbine montis
obruitur (2.563-6)\(^6\)

Once again, Statius makes the comparison to a Centaur (Pholus), and more importantly recounts how those soldiers standing in the direct line of that boulder freeze in their place as they behold the

---

\(^5\) Ritchie et al (2007), p.31: “Just so the famous avenger of Oenean Diana with bristles erect and a flash of curving tusks, when the Pelopean phalanx was pressing him hard, rolling rocks into his path, and tree-trunks broken from the gouged-out banks of Achelous; leaving first Telamon, then Ixion, sprawling on the ground, he bears down on you, Meleager: …”

\(^6\) p.33: “like great-souled Pholus when he lifted up the empty wine-bowl against the opposing Lapiths. The host directly in the path of death are frozen with horror to see him towering over the mand are overwhelmed by the whirling force of the monolith he has discharged from the mountain:”
sight above them. When those men lie dead on the ground, we see the reactions of the rest of the column:

fuga tremefactum protinus agmen
excutitur coeptis. (2.569-70)\textsuperscript{7}

quorum ut subitis exterrita fatis
agmina turbatam uidit laxare cateruam (2.576-7)\textsuperscript{8}

Despite the fact that they still outnumber Tydeus by a large amount, they are all trembling in fear, baffled by his impossible strength and bearing. When they attempt to regroup, he stands fast to face them once again:

non aliter Getica (si fas est credere) Phlegra
armatum inmensus Briareus stetit aethera contra, (2.595-6)\textsuperscript{9}

Yet again, Statius chooses to compare Tydeus with a powerful mythical creature, namely the giant Briareus, one of the three Hecatonchires, whom in the Vergilian tradition followed by Statius fought against the Olympian gods. Similarly, Tydeus smites all who oppose him. When Chromis finally tries to rally his Theban comrades again (2.613-28), he too is taken down in horrible fashion, namely by a spear searing right through his mouth, still opened from only just having uttered his final words of encouragement. As a reader, we cannot but feel some pity for the Theban attackers now as we watch them die one by one in dismay. Statius goes even further when immediately thereafter he mentions how the two illustrious sons of Thespius die together as one of them (Periphas), lamenting the death of his brother in tears, is stricken in the back by a spear, impaling both him and his brother together (2.629-43). Tydeus shows no mercy and litters the ground with bloody corpses until finally his powers seem to drain. Again, he is compared to an animal, this time a lion after having mauled too many sheep. Franchet D’Espèrey comments on this comparison as follows: *C’est donc comme lui [Tydeus] aussi, dans ce carnage, s’était repu du sang de ses ennemis.* (1999) Tydeus comes very close to the wild animal, lusting for blood, but his limbs become tired and the goddess Athena counsels him to stop and depart, leaving only one alive. Over the entire fight, he was still capable of speech, ruthlessly challenging the attacking soldiers and reprimanding them for their leader’s evil and cowardice. He offers the battle trophies to the favoured Athena and resumes his way to Argos.

This entire scene that makes up a large part of the second book is filled with elements of modern horror theory of which we spoke earlier. The reference to the sphinx before the battle is given purpose by Statius in the story when Tydeus physically takes its place on the hill on which it once stood. Apart from this, the numerous comparisons of him with powerful animals or mythical creatures only make him less and less human. Tydeus may have started out as the hapless victim of a cowardly ambush, but he quickly turns into a force of nature that refuses to die out. That the feat he achieved here is above the capabilities of a mere human is evident. Besides, heroes with divine lineage such as him are known to have such strength, but we must ask ourselves whether this is still

\textsuperscript{7} Ritchie et al (2007), pp.33-4: “in instant flight the panic-stricken column is shaken in its resolve,”

\textsuperscript{8} p.34: “When he [Tydeus] saw the column terrified by the sudden fate of these men and breaking its ranks in disorder,”

\textsuperscript{9} p.34: “Not otherwise at Getic Phlegra, if one may credit the story, did Briareus stand a colossus against a heaven of arms,”
truly the work of a hero. Tydeus ruthlessly destroys the soldiers in bloody gore, with a power equal to that of the many monsters Statius constantly reminds us of. Tydeus is in no way the victim anymore, as, in the end, the Theban soldiers never stood a chance against him. As soon as they witness his power, they freeze in place. They fear him. That it is they and not he who ought to be read as the victims becomes even clearer when we read some of the specifically ruthless and tragic deaths described by Statius. Surely, this cannot but remind us of what we stated on modern horror theory: the victims of a monster show clear signs of horror when they come into contact with it and are powerless to overcome it, no matter how big their chances seem. As such, horror lies in the reaction, the emotion of others to it.

There may not have been a horror theory at the time, but Statius is very much aware of the soldiers’ reactions and wants his readers to be as well. One cannot but feel sorry for the dying Thespian brothers as the spear bores into them, which respectively brings us to something resembling the Mirroring-effect, discussed in 1.2.2. Naturally, saying Statius thought about it in such a modern manner would go too far, but he clearly seems conscious of his decisions, of what he decided to write into the scene and how he ends up portraying Tydeus by doing so. In the end, we must admit that during the entire fight Tydeus always speaks his mind, be it in near animalistic fury and even cruelty. After all is said and done, Athena still favours him since he fought for his life incredibly outnumbered and succeeded. If we look at it this way, we must conclude that for now, he is not yet a “true” monster, as he still shows human and heroic traits. Yet in spite of that, we cannot ignore the many striking horror elements in this scene and, moreover, the fact that it was Statius’ decision to write all of this in the way that he did.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. Tydeus departs from the battlefield leaving a strong impression on the reader. In short, he is heroically fearless and immensely powerful, but also a brutal, blood lusting killer striking fear in his victims who deserve compassion to some extent. When Tydeus leaves, we keep all of this in mind, but he does not leave as a full-on monster, on the contrary even, he enters Argos as a hero. The following books, Tydeus does not appear as often. When he is mentioned, though, he is still the powerful hero he always has been, and, just like Polynices, he is angry with Eteocles and most of all craving war and battle. In book five, he ardently speaks against king Lycurgus when the king wishes to have Hypsipyle killed (5.660-79). Thus, it seems that Tydeus, at least when he is far removed from battle, is quite capable of reason and humanity, trying to convince the king to spare her in his own, admittedly somewhat rude, way. Tydeus simply does not get any opportunities to unleash that anger yet because he is not so mindless as to do so upon an ally. Violence and ruthlessness do not get a chance for now, and this only makes suspense grow as we know of what he is capable. When war is finally upon them in book seven, we await in anticipation another show of awesome strength on Tydeus’ part, and we receive quite a show indeed.

Jocasta tries to dissuade Polynices and the Argives from attacking Thebes and indeed many seem to be affected by her words. It is Tydeus who, in his anger (7.538: ... hic iustae Tydeus memor occupat irae) and want for revenge, reminds them all of what Eteocles did to them and relights the fires of war. The battlefield is utter chaos and becomes more gruesome by the minute, even opening up to the Underworld when Amphiaras dies at the end of book seven.
We even temporarily leave the battlefield as we go down with Amphiaraus when he descends into the Underworld. The horrifying elements of this particular scene will be discussed in a later chapter as they deserve further attention. Yet it is important to note what Pluto states here, which is basically a prophesy (an order even) of what will happen on the battlefield.

sed quid ego haec? i, Tartareas ulciscere sedes,
Tisiphone; si quando nous asperrima monstris,
triste, insuetum, ingens, quod nondum uiderit aether,
ede nefas, quod mirer ego inuideantque sorores.
atque adeo fratres (nostrique haec omina sunto
prima odii), fratres alterna in uulnera laeto
Marte ruant; sit qui rabidarum more ferarum
mandat atrox hostile caput, quique igne supremo
arceat exanimes et manibus aethera nudis
commaculet: iuuet ista ferum spectare Tonantem. (8.65–74)\(^{10}\)

We sense another imminent climax as suspense builds up in the sense that the coming of a monster is revealed in Pluto's prophesy. In the abominations he wishes Tisiphone to bring about, he includes the brothers, but, more notably, he speaks of one who will, in the manner of savage beasts, consume the head of his enemy. A reader's attention is immediately grasped, knowing that this will surely come to pass. We wonder who will be the one to perform such a horrible act and when exactly. This easily fits into our modern understanding of suspense, in which a question arises, and we eagerly await the outcome. Here, we see Pluto's prophecy and we strongly anticipate what will come.

With our current knowledge of the characters, and already knowing that it will not be one of the brothers who will eat a foe's head, Tydeus seems like a very possible option. He has been compared to a multitude of animals already, and we have seen his bloodlust and want for battle at work, and the horror he elicits in his enemies. Admittedly, we've seen a much less aggressive and ruthless Tydeus in the last chapters, but we know what he is like in battle. As tension rises and the battle becomes more and more brutal, so do the circumstances, growing more and more apt for the Tydeus we have seen before. Every person who dies could be the one whose head will be eaten, so basically, with every death, a reader could anticipate Pluto's prophesy coming true. Finally, nearing the end of book eight, when Tydeus receives more attention in his ardour and ruthless fighting and killing, the shocking event finally comes to pass. Statius swiftly leads us across the battlefield from one death to the next until, at long last, he halts on one hero in particular, Tydeus. We follow him as he kills all who cross his path, and here too, he is compared to wild animals:

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\(^{10}\) Ritchie et al (2007), p.150: "But why am I telling of these things? Go, Tisiphone, and avenge the abode of Tartarus: if ever you have been most harsh in your strange monstrosities, produce an abomination ghastly, unprecedented and vast, never before looked on by heaven, for me to marvel at and the Sisters envy; And in addition let the brothers – let this be the first harbinger of my hatred – let the brothers rush to kill each other in exultant battle. Let there be one who in the fashion of wild beasts hideously eats his enemy’s head, and one who bars the dead from the last fire, polluting the air with unburied corpses: let the fierce Thunderer take pleasure in looking on these things."
Aided by Pallas, Tydeus even defeats the powerful Haemon who immediately starts losing strength and confidence as soon as he is no longer backed by Hercules. Lucky for him, Tydeus’ spear only grazes his shoulder. But Haemon no longer wishes to fight him. He was set up as a strong warrior slicing his way through the ranks of Argos, yet here, he cowers away from Tydeus:

\[
\text{uelut primo tigris gavisa cruore} \\
\text{per totum cupid ire pecus, (8.474-5)}^{11}
\]

Haemon no longer even dares be near and look at Tydeus’ bloodied face, almost as if, we dare say, he is ultimately afraid of this man who seemingly no one can defeat. Even to us readers, Tydeus must already make a horrifying sight. Again, Statius momentarily turns to another Theban hero only to have him face Tydeus as well, and by now, we know very well how this will end. He ruthlessly kills the far too young and brave Atys and does not even deign to despoil his body.

\[
\text{innumeris ueluti leo forte potitus} \\
\text{caedibus imbelles uitulos mollesque iuuenca} \\
\text{transmittit: magno furor est in sanguine mergi} \\
\text{nec nisi regnantis cerui} \\
\text{cercu} \\
\text{tauri. (8.593-6)}^{13}
\]

The animalistic comparisons grow stronger as Tydeus grows more furious and ferocious, and again, Statius makes us feel pity for his victims. Very much so even, as the scene shifts away from the battlefield to a near-death Atys who is brought to the Theban women’s quarters to allow his betrothed to see him one last time, to close his eyes when he exhales his final breath. We immediately turn back to the clear horror of war Statius wishes us to witness, and the focus falls unto Tydeus once again.

\[
\text{Tydeos illa dies, illum fugiuntque tremuntque} \\
\text{clamantem (8.663-4)}^{14}
\]

The Theban soldiers all run away from him, trembling in fear, reminding us strongly of what happened in book two, when Tydeus was ambushed by fifty soldiers and killed all but one. Tydeus even literally refers to this moment himself, once again striking fear in all his enemies because he simply seems unbeatable in his inhuman strength and unforgiving in his raging ruthlessness, so much that they flee at the mere sight of him. We said of a truly horrifying monster that it must be threatening, impure and repulsive. This Tydeus is already unquestionably threatening and repulsive (reminiscent of the “avoidance of physical contact”), but he has not yet reached his climax. As such,

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11 Ritchie et al (2007), p.161: “as a tigress revelling in the first blood is eager to go through the whole flock,”

12 pp.162-3: “he however no longer dares to stand his ground, or to come anywhere near or to endure the appearance of bloody Tydeus:”

13 p.164: “just so does a lion, happening to have achieved countless kills, pass by bull-calves unfit for fighting and gentle heifers: he rages to welter in mighty blood and to fall on the neck of the king bull alone.”

14 p.166: “To Tydeus belongs that day, he is the one they flee from and tremble at as he shouts out:”
our long-lasting anticipation is finally rewarded in true, horrible fashion. We knew it was coming, but in no way can we really be ready for it.

Eteocles, the person who Tydeus hates more than anyone, appears and attacks him from afar. He easily deflects it and returns a lance with great strength. Naturally, he does not hit Eteocles as he must still face his brother. Eteocles retreats and a furious Tydeus tries to get close to him. The Thebans try to stop him but Tydeus slices his way through them in blind fury, intent on their hated commander; an image which Statius again strengthens with another simile:

\[
\text{sic densa lupum iam nocte sub atra} \\
\text{arcet ab apprenso pastorum turba iuuenco;} \\
\text{improbus erigitur contra, nec cura uetantes} \\
\text{impetere: illum, illum, semel in quem uenerat, urguet.} \\
\text{non secus obiectas acies turbamque minorem} \\
\text{dissimulat transitque manu; (8.691-6)}
\]

Tydeus is beset on all sides, deep within the Theban ranks, surrounding himself with blood and bodies, but all weapons are aimed at him. He is wounded, bleeds as his armour breaks, but he keeps going with the same strength as if mortal weapons hardly harm him. As a reader, we are not surprised that Pallas, still supporting him, leaves to ask Jupiter for Tydeus to receive immortal glory in his death. Tydeus, meanwhile, carries on his clear aristeia, raging on with continuous strength despite his injuries, until he is finally, climactically even, taken down by Melanippus’ spear. We knew he would die eventually, but Tydeus is no mere human and refuses to die so soon. With his final strength he still succeeds to throw a spear of his own, taking down Melanippus himself. His fellow Argives try to protect him and, by this point, the anticipation drives a reader wild. Tydeus asks not for help or honour. His furious mind, still in the fire of battle, asks that Melanippus’ head be brought to him. Statius does something incredibly remarkable here. As Tydeus savagely and hatefully watches the head in his hands, we still await the moment he will consume it, instantly reminded of Pluto’s prophesy in the case we had forgotten. But instead of just letting Tydeus do so, the focalization shifts abruptly to Pallas Athena, proudly returning from Jupiter with the promise of immortal glory for her dying champion. But she will only meet an unexpected, ghastly sight:

\[
\text{atque illum effracti perfusum tabe cerebri} \\
\text{aspicit et uiuo scelerantem sanguine fauces} \\
\text{(nec comites auferre ualent): stetit aspera Gorgon} \\
\text{crinibus emissis rectique ante ora cerastae} \\
\text{uelauere deam; fugit auersata iacentem,}
\]

\[15\] Ritchie et al (2007), p.167: “Just so a dense throng of shepherds, as black night is now falling, wards off a wolf from the bullock he has seized: but he rises up against them relentlessly, unconcerned to attack those who are obstructing him; him, the one for which he had once come, does he harass. Not otherwise does he [Tydeus] ignore the lines standing in his way and the lesser throng, passing them by;”
And so, like that, tension and anticipation lift to finally make place for horror as the inhuman monster Tydeus has become, rears its ugly head, resorting to ravenous cannibalism. We too are met with this inhuman sight through the eyes of Pallas Athena. We witness her shock, her abhorrence to the gore-drenched hero gorging himself on a bloody head that even his comrades cannot pull away from him (even on the verge of death, he still has strength enough to do that). As we discussed earlier, one of the more outstanding characteristics of modern horror is the mirroring-effect. Here we receive Pallas’ reaction, and ours, as the reader, runs parallel with it. We do not react exactly the same as we knew what was coming, but we share her shock nonetheless, and her sense of disgust. Nor is Tydeus simply forgiven or forgotten at the end of this book, as book nine opens with the dismayed reactions of the soldiers who witnessed what he did. Statius’ choice of wording here is astonishing. He leaves us in suspense until the utter final moment as only then Tydeus’ transformation into a horrifying monster is complete. Moreover, Statius masterfully reinforces this climax to the highest level by showing us the utterly dismayed Pallas Athena, the strong warrior-goddess who has faced many monsters without as much as a wince, and is now made to run like a frightened girl by a mere human-become-monster.

We cannot but admit that Statius intently harnesses suspense and horror here, that he knew exactly what he was doing, even if there was no such thing as what we now perceive as modern horror (theory). The suspense, which, again, must be said, is not exclusive to the horror genre, but definitely very typical of it, lasts until the very last moment, until our anticipated event happens. Over the entire epic (and most of all in book eight), Statius even shows us little parts of the monster Tydeus will become that keep up that suspense. After Pluto’s prophesy, we see Tydeus as a ruthless warrior once again, out for the blood of his foes, fighting sensibly at first, but very quickly blinded by anger and bloodlust, running into his enemies like an enraged bull leading himself to his death, however, not dying until we see him in all of his monstrous “glory”.

In this respect, we could even connect this to Carroll’s horror plot theory, to some extent. In the parts we discussed of the Complex Discovery Plot, the onset was the part in which we often only see parts of the monster. We see what it is capable of as we do here in Tydeus’ case over the entire epic. We knew how powerful he was, how ruthless and now, at the end of book eight, this finally comes to an incredible climax in which the reader finally sees the impure monster he is through his inhuman act. In other words, the onset that sets him up as the monster he’ll become is a slow build-up with many comparisons to animals, and shows of unbridled, fearsome and even inhuman strength and anger. In this “onset”, however, Tydeus always has a human component to him as well. It is only at the end, in this scene, that we somewhat receive the discovery/confirmation and confrontation part of the Complex Discovery Plot all at once, when Tydeus finally confirms the monstrous elements from the onset when Pallas Athena, and we too, are confronted with it.

16 p.169: “Lo and behold, she sees him drenched with gore from the shattered brain and defiling his throat with living blood – nor can his comrades wrench it away from him. The Gorgon reared up viciously, shooting out its hair, and the horned serpents standing upright before her face veiled the goddess: turning her back on him where he lies she flees away, and does not rise up to the stars before the mystic torch and innocent Ilissos have purified her eyes with an abundance of water.”
As a final conclusion, we wish to note that Tydeus has already been studied more closely by several scholars. Some would go so far as to disregard his inhumanity entirely, but others, more often and more significantly, focus on his unrestrained anger, wrath and power. We too must notice how, while reading the first books, Tydeus comes across as an aggressive warrior, but a man nonetheless, who loves victory in battle more than anything else. We need to stress that this is, of course, not enough to put him on the subhuman (or perhaps superhuman) level of the monster. Yet surely, we cannot disregard his excessive anger described by Statius. The manifold comparisons to animals and even monstrous creatures in his moments of inhuman feats and furious fighting portend what is to come for our hero. It is not illogical to state that Statius was very conscious of what he was doing here, how he was setting up Tydeus to turn more and more monstrous. Over the course of the story, through what Statius lets Tydeus say and do, through all the comparisons and shows of brute, unbridled and even inhuman strength and fury, Tydeus slowly devolves into an animal, a monster, as despite some of the humanity he retains up until the end, he ultimately completely loses it the moment Melanippus’ bloody flesh touches his lips and Athena flees away from him in ostensive horror.
2.2 Amphiaraus

Now we would like to discuss an entirely different kind of character, one whose talents and nature are, unlike Tydeus, not completely immersed in warfare and bloodshed:

\[\text{id uoluens non ipse pater, non docte future} \]
\[\text{Amphiaraei uides, etenim uetat auctor Apollo. (1.398-9)} \]

Amphiaraus is first mentioned (albeit briefly) in book 1 of the *Thebaid* as a favoured seer of Apollo in the city of Argos. In book 3, we finally see him take on a more active role in the epic when Adrastus, uncertain of whether to wage a war on Thebes, decides to move the choice to his two trusted seers, Amphiaraus and Melampus. After the sheep entrails portend ominous things to happen, the two prophets choose to examine the sky for signs instead. But things seem grim once again as Amphiaraus points out, in eerie detail, what horrible things might happen if they choose the war path, when he spots a large group of swans (representing Thebes) being attacked by seven other predatory birds.

\[\text{trepidos sic mole future} \]
\[\text{cunctaque iam rerum certa sub imagine passos} \]
\[\text{terror habet uates; (3.547-9)} \]

As they observe the dreadful manner in which these birds kill and die, they regret having taken to such council and are both, as Statius puts it, genuinely terrified by the image above them. The fact that this small avian battle is already enough to gravely unsettle these two men, only makes the actual fights they mirror between Argos and Thebes, later in the epic, all the more portentous and gruesome. Amphiaraus is, in fact, so disturbed by this that the Argives’ want for war that he curses his very gift of foresight and hides away, refusing to speak to anyone of what he saw, and thus keeping the city in wait. It takes twelve days, a large mass of people waiting outside his door, and Capaneus’ belligerent speech for Amphiaraus to finally leave his home and speak to the people. In his speech, he is still clearly stricken by his visions and talks of the desolation war will bring. Even so, Amphiaraus is already aware his attempts to dissuade the people of Argos are in vain, as he powerless knows that the future he saw is already determined. All of this is vital in showing us what kind of person Amphiaraus really is. He is a wise man, favoured by his king and Apollo, and hateful of war and the things it brings about. Statius distinguishes his character even further by putting him opposite Capaneus, literally described as a madman (*furentem* 3.618), who would like nothing more than the hated war and incites the masses against Amphiaraus’ wisdom and advice.

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17 Ritchie et al (2007), pp.10-11: Pondering it, neither does the father himself understand it, nor you, Amphiaraus, well-versed in the future, for its author Apollo forbids.”
18 p.53: “Thus alarmed at the burden of what is to come and having already endured in an unambiguous vision the entirety of things in store, the seers are gripped by horror.”
When Argos then decides to wage war, Amphiaraus is pulled in as well through the machinations of fate and his treacherous wife, Eriphyle. At this point in the story, we see a new part of Amphiaraus as he gets to lead the mighty Spartans. Statius describes how formidable he looks in his full array, and, truly, the descriptions so far genuinely seem to depict him as what we expect of a true hero, especially when we consider that he knows what will happen if he leaves for war, not only to Argos, but also to himself. Yet even knowing his own fate, he will still honourably fight for Argos.

Furthermore, as mentioned before, Amphiaraus also plays an important role in book 5 when Tydeus speaks in favour of Hypsipyle, defending her life. While Tydeus speaks very strongly in his typical straightforward manner, it is Amphiaraus and Adrastus who are able to fully soothe the angry Nemeans and bring them into the fold. At first, it may seem odd that Amphiaraus would be the one to convince the Nemeans to join their fight, considering his aversion to war, yet this is still made clear in his speech:

..., atque utinam plures innectere pergas,
Phoebe, moras, semperque nouis bellare uetemur
casibus, et semper Thebe funesta recedat. (5.743-5)¹⁹

Here, Amphiaraus explicitly wishes that Phoebus would keep the fighting and their inevitable downfall at bay for as long as possible. The following book only further promotes Amphiaraus’ physical power and his connection to Apollo, as he wins the chariot race both through skill and the help of his god.

As of now, Amphiaraus has shown to be wise, powerful, beloved by his god and king, and skilled in both foresight and chariot handling. In book 7, the curtain will finally fall for this character who in our eyes has been nothing but a positive influence, a good man, and a hero who would like nothing more than to prevent the war and bloodshed, but knows he cannot and, thus, tries all he can to help Argos. After all of this, saying Amphiaraus is an honourable man would be an understatement, but then, why is he so important in this thesis? How can this man, of all people, be a source of horror to us or be attributed horrifying elements by the author when he acts so exemplary? Naturally, one part of the answer lies in the comparison to all the other “heroes” in the epic, as Amphiaraus stands in stark contrast to men like Tydeus and Capaneus. This becomes the most evident when his end is finally near, and Amphiaraus receives the greatest of honours from Apollo in the form of an aristeia:

Amphiaraus equis ac multo puluere uertit
campum indignantem: famulo decus addit inane
maestus et extremos obitus inlustrat Apollo. (7.691-3)²⁰

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¹⁹ Ritchie et al (2007), p.100: “Would indeed that you might continue, Phoebus, to weave further delays and that we might always be forbidden to fight by fresh mischances, and that you, deadly Thebes, might always recede from us.”

²⁰ p.145: “and in a cloud of dust he churns up the resentful plain; grieving Apollo lends an empty lustre to his servant and makes his final end glorious.”
The difference with other heroes only further expands at the end of the next book when Tydeus receives his own *aristeia* from Athena. Statius makes a clear distinction between the more ideal hero who dies valiantly and the more monstrous one who has turned into madness incarnate and dies without honour. In this respect, Franchet-D’Espèrey (1999: 125) explains Amphiarau’s character very aptly when she compares him to Laocoon, stating: “On peut, en revanche, voir en Laocoon et Amphiarau deux figures fratriales car ils représentent tous deux cette résistance honorable mais vaine.” By writing in this manner, Statius makes a statement in that the true hero fights with all his might in a war he actually does not want to fight, but does so out of a sense of honour and responsibility, while heroes like Tydeus, who do so out of love for battle, are the wicked ones, and for that reason, they are surrounded by all the horrifying elements we have discussed in the previous part.

The one thing we had not seen Amphiarau do until his last moments, which we expect most classical heroes to do at some point, is fight. This is, however, no surprise considering he is in the first place a seer and not a warrior, and above that, a character who hates the very war he must partake in. Yet it is in his first and final battle in the epic that the dissimilarity with Tydeus is finalized. Over the course of the epic, Tydeus turned more fierce and bloodthirsty in every encounter. It may seem odd for a peaceful man like Amphiarau to even receive an *aristeia* at this point, and we can clearly deduce this from what Statius writes here (at which we will take a closer look later), but in the end, even if Amphiarau is strengthened so much that he seems to crave the fighting and the war even for just a moment, his situation significantly differs from Tydeus’.

With Apollo’s help, Amphiarau skilfully kills many opponents in battle. Even as it turns more gruesome, it never fully takes on the tone it has in the epic’s other fights. The men he kills are nowhere near as pathetically portrayed as those we discussed killed by Tydeus. All of this comes much closer to what we expect a typical *aristeia* to be like, a final glorious moment in battle for the true hero, and not the utter perversion of Tydeus in book 8. But moreover, there is another subtle difference, remarked upon by Franchet-D’Espèrey (1999:204) in that Amphiarau, as opposed to Tydeus, Capaneus, Eteocles, Polyneices, etc., is not once compared to an animal or a mythical creature in the epic. Franchet-D’Espèrey states that the only similes Amphiarau really receives happen during his *aristeia*, but never include anything bestial or monstrous. She concludes by saying about those comparisons: “Elles expriment donc la violence, mais pas la déshumanisation.”:

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sic ubi nubiferum montis latus aut noua uentis
soluit hiems, aut uicta situ non pertulit aetas,
desilit horrendus campo timor, arua uirosque
limite non uno longauaque robora secum
praecipitans, tandemque exhaustus turbine fesso
aut uallem cauat aut medios intercipit amnes. (7.744-9)
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21 Ritchie et al (2007), p.146-7: “Just as when the cloud-wrapped side of a mountain is loosened by newly arrived winter with its storms, or its old age has been defeated by decay and not endured, it crashes down on to the plain, a terrible object of fear, sweeping away with it down no single track fields and men and ancient oaks and finally, worn out by weary rolling, either hollows out a valley or blocks rivers in mid-course.”
Above is one of the few comparisons concerning Amphiaraus. It shows him fighting like a force of nature rather than a beast or a chthonic monster, as we saw previously with Tydeus. It can be no coincidence that in an epic containing so many similes and metaphors of that sort, Statius not even once used them to describe Amphiaraus. In other words, Statius must have made the conscious decision to depict Amphiaraus like this, even further contrasting him to those other characters who ultimately devolve into menacing savagery and inhumanity, some of the key features of a monster in more modern horror.

Naturally, we did not discuss Amphiaraus to this degree merely for reasons of contrast with other characters. While this already reinforces our claim that Statius knowingly used certain tactics to make specific heroes seem more horrifying and others not at all, setting up some as war loving and, ultimately, rabid and monstrous (or heroes-degrading-into-monsters) and others as honourable and primarily peaceful (sadly, all of whom die or lose everything), it is not the only way that shows he knew very well what he was doing. Truly, Statius’ mastery of using horrifying effects to characterise these heroes only further increases at the start of book 8 when he is somehow able to turn a completely un-horrifying character like Amphiaraus (at least in the reader’s opinion) into a source of horror as well. Even if his aristeia took on a more dreadful tone than the rest of his part in the story, we could never be horrified by a character like Amphiaraus because he has been continuously established as a positive, human character according to our standards and world view. For this to work, Statius literally needs to move him to an entirely different world, which he does at the start of book 8 as we follow Amphiaraus into the Underworld.

Not only does Apollo allow his favoured seer to pass into Tartarus by being swallowed up by the earth itself, he does so while Amphiaraus is still unharmed, and technically speaking, still alive:

..., Stygiis mirantur in oris
tela et equos corpusque nouum; nec enim ignibus atris
conditus aut maesta niger aduentabat ab urna,
sebelli sudore calens, clipeumque cruentis
roribus et scissi respersus puluere campi.
 necdum illum aut trunc a lustrauerat obuia taxo
Eumenis, aut furuo Proserpina poste notarat
coetibus adsumptum functis; quin comminus ipsa
Fatorum deprensa colus, uisoque pauentes
augure tunc demum rumpebant stamina Parcae. (8.4-13) ²²

We read that he still looks fresh out of battle: his body had not been burned, he had not yet been purified, nor admitted to the company of the dead. Even the Parcae did not expect him and only now

²² Ritchie et al (2007), p.149: “They are amazed at weapons and horses and a fresh body on the shores of the Styx: for it was not after committal to the blackening fire nor as ash from the grieving urn that he arrived, but hot with the sweat of battle, his shield spattered with bloody drops and the dust of the sundering plain. Not yet had Eumenis met him and purified him with her branch of yew or Proserpine marked him on the dark doorpost as one admitted to the company of the dead: rather, the very distaff of the Fates was instantly taken off guard, and the Parcae were startled at the sight of the augur and it was only then that they broke off his threads.”
cut his thread to officially end his life. In short, to all eyes, Amphiaraus looks just like he did before, a man alive, even if he is now, in principle, among the dead.

We have travelled into a world that is not our own, and in normal circumstances, this foreign location could have the ability to horrify us with all its threats and abnormalities. But Statius does not let this happen, he flips the tables on the very Underworld as it turns out that it is not us who fear them, but they who fear Amphiaraus. Concerning horror, theoretically speaking, if a mirroring effect were to take place here, as a rule, it can only happen through a positive character. However, the only positive character available to us is Amphiaraus who is not the victim of horror, but the source. Now, an acknowledgement we must always make is, evidently, that Statius did not consider things in terms of our modern theoretical perspective on horror. Yet nonetheless, he does the most peculiar thing in this scene, by completely turning around not only our expectations, but our very emotions. We do not fear this new, dark world with its deplorable inhabitants, on the contrary, Amphiaraus, who so far in our eyes came closest to the human and heroic ideal in this epic, becomes a source of horror to those that would ordinarily horrify us: the denizens of Hades and the god himself.

In the Underworld, the dead and such are not at all a strange sight, they are what is considered normal in that infernal place. In this scene, its residents become the victims of something that quite literally does not (yet) belong to their domain, as Amphiaraus and the light of the world above disturbs and scares them to no end:

\[ Vt \text{ subitus uates pallentibus incidit umbris} \]
\[ \text{letiferasque domos orbisque arcana sepulti} \]
\[ \text{rupit et armato turbauit funere manes,} \]
\[ \text{horror habet cunctos, ...(8.1-4)\textsuperscript{23}} \]

Statius immediately starts the book by making clear we have entered the secret, buried world where the shades of the dead find their home, and how horrified they are by Amphiaraus’ sudden “forced entry”. Again, the Latin word *horror* is merely an emotion of fear and repulsion, and cannot and must not be simply equated to Carroll’s “art-horror”, horror as a genre, or our modern understanding of the word. Our analysis is not a simple matter of pointing out that Statius describes the beings of the underworld as experiencing *horror*, and that, thus, this is reason enough to claim that he knew what horror was and how to consciously use such elements in his narrative. To make a valid statement, we must now investigate whether the horror in this entire scene, and not just in this sentence, stands up to what we concluded horror consisted of in the first part of this thesis.

What becomes instantly clear, and which we have touched upon lightly already, is the element of fear. If we take Amphiaraus as the monster in this scene, he does indeed clearly strike fear in his victims, i.e. the residents of Hades:

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\[ \text{23 Ritchie et al (2007), p.149: “WHEN THE SEER fell abruptly among the pallid shades and burst into the deathly abodes and secret places of the buried world, alarming the ghosts with his armed corpse, a thrill of horror gripped them all.”} \]
First of all, not only the mere shades (manes) are frightened, but also the Parcae and even Pluto himself are effected by Amphiaraus’ arrival. From lowly creatures to the utter height of the subterranean hierarchy, the bright and seemingly still alive seer makes all experience fear to a certain degree. This, in itself, is already done very well by Statius because it build up to a climax, namely, Pluto’s shock and resulting anger. It substantiates the intensity of this fear as the reader first realizes the lowliest creatures are effected, but then also sees the powerful Parcae and even a god in alarm. But the question is: is that fear truly horrifying or not? Does it come close to what we would expect of a more modern horror?

The first step would be to see how valid our source of horror is as a monster to its victims. As we mentioned above, one thing this scene will always forego is a mirroring effect of the audience with the victims because we simply do not share or relate to the emotions of the Underworld’s otherworldly populace. If anything, we take the place of Amphiarus and see through his eyes how all of them are, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, alarmed by him. Nonetheless, we can still notice how Statius describes their reactions to Amphiarus. First of all, we can immediately conclude that the seer is definitely threatening to them on a physical level because he is standing there in full armour, blood-spattered, and fresh out of battle, but even more so, he is also threatening on a higher level:

... quis rupit tenebras uitaeque silentes
admonet? unde minae? (8.35-6)²⁷

The light of the world above and the life still visible in him are a threat to the minds of those in the Underworld because these are things they should never see again. It reminds them of what they have lost and it burns them to the very core. It is exactly in this manner that Amphiaraus is unnatural and impure to them as well because he is not truly of the dead yet, his thread had not even been cut until he was already there. He is as different, as alien, to their world as a zombie or a demon would be to ours. It might go against what we deem normal in our world, but we are not in our world, and at that precise moment, Amphiaraus is the most unnatural thing in the entire

²⁵ p.150: “rather, the very distaff of the Fates was instantly taken off guard, and the Parcae were startled at the sight of the augur and it was only then that they broke off his threads.”
²⁶ p.150: “But when the barrier against the upper world was breached, he [Dis], unaccustomed to feeling fear, was greatly alarmed by the rising stars and, shocked by the gladdening light, exclaimed:”
²⁷ p.150: “Who has disrupted the darkness and reminded the silent ones of life? Whence these threats?”
Underworld, an aberration with which they should never have been confronted. On top of that, Pluto even literally acknowledges him as a threat (mina) to him and his realm in his livid reaction.

In tandem with the horrifying fear Amphiaraus elicits, we should also mention the element of shock, something that is, as we said before, not restricted to horror, but very much empowers it. The light that accompanies Amphiaraus (oborta sidera, iucundaque ... luce (8.32-3)) from the world above, and the vision of life in his figure send a wave of shock through the bowels of the Underworld. No one saw it coming, and if we would but try and put ourselves in the place of one of the shades, it is not hard to imagine their experience to be somewhat close to the “jump scares” we see in modern horror movies and videogames, as they are simply going about their usual “underworldly” business when all of a sudden their very “sky” breaks open with a bang to reveal the horrible light and life now lost to them. Another way through which a monster can show its impurity, also pointed out by Carroll, is metonymy, through which a character's monstrosity could be further elaborated. In this manner, Amphiaraus' unnaturalness, more specifically, is indeed further shaped through the things that surround him, not only his armour and chariot, but even more so the light of day. Even when the ground closes again, he is still standing there resplendent and reminiscent of that very light. The entire event is so unusual that all the shades turn their heads in shock to see what is going on, possibly fascinated by something for the first time in a long while, and then immediately turn away in fear. It might go too far to connect this to Lovecraft’s cosmic awe, but after close examination, the horror they feel must come very close to what we might expect in a modern horror novel, even if the mirroring-effect, that is imperative for the reader to experience, is lacking.

There is another topic we must examine some more in this scene: Pluto. The god’s initial shock has already been confirmed, and while we already know even a god is not safe from horror (cfr. Athena’s reaction to Tydeus at the end of book 8), Pluto is not nearly as frightened as his subjects are, as his fear quickly subsides to make place for righteous anger. He is livid by this obnoxious breach into his realm and this leads to his resentful reaction in which he foretells, promises even, a kind of echo of what Amphiaraus already prophesied many books ago. Pluto, however, recounts the horrors that will come to pass on the world above in a much more detailed fashion. This is the point in the story where suspense and anticipation step into a higher gear. Case in point, Pluto quite directly states that someone will eat the head of his enemy and that the brothers will rush against each other in an unprecedented abomination. If we did not already know these things would happen (and chances are large that a Roman reader did already know more or less), we do now. In modern horror, we often already know what will happen before it does; when the innocent girl hides in a closet from the axe-wielding psychopath, we expect him to disappear for a moment and then reappear just when she thinks she is safe and go on to brutally chase or murder her. Even though we know this will happen, the anticipation still hits us with full force, and the same is true here. We anticipate events we already expect all the more strongly now, building up to the climax of Tydeus’ death which we have discussed in great detail already. In conclusion, Pluto’s words fulfil Statius’ reversal in this scene as it is not only the end of the Underworld’s horror confronted because of Amphiaraus, but also a promise to the world above, and the reader, that, while we were not horrified here, we will be later. In a way, Pluto retaliates by showing us that the living will be the next victims of horror.
In conclusion, it should come as no surprise that we spent this much attention to Amphiaraus and his part in the epic in this thesis about horror, in spite of the fact that his personality comes nowhere near monstrosity in our opinion. We have already discussed how Statius set up Tydeus as a hero who turned more and more rabid and degraded, becoming a monster to the Argives, the Thebans, the gods and us, but Amphiaraus, on the other hand, lacks all of those horrifying traits, and it is here that we can see Statius’ masterful handling of horrifying attributes and effects. In a sudden shift as he enters the Underworld, Amphiaraus, still the same in our mind, receives all sorts of characteristics (within himself and through metonymy of his surroundings) that make him a monster to those who we ourselves would objectively deem more worthy of that term. The light and life in and about him does not fear us, but Statius at the very least understands their effect on the beings of the Underworld and clearly attaches the (human) feeling of horror to them. We have pointed out more than once that we do not experience it ourselves because there is no mirroring-effect, but we do recognize it in Statius’ descriptions. This reinforces the notion that he was indeed conscious of the physical aspects of experiencing horror and the effects this could have. Again, we cannot say he thought of them as a sound theory, for this barely even exists today, but through the completely different handling of a character like Tydeus on the one hand, and Amphiaraus on the other, his decisions must have been deliberate at the very least.

Now, up until this point, we have mostly focused on how Statius did this, but not so much the reason why. This has to do of course with Statius’ very own alignment to war, which, as we discussed in the introduction to this thesis’ second part, is not very positive, and herein lies the answer to our question. While the scene in the Underworld further proves Statius knew how to use horrifying effects and did so consciously and accordingly, it did less to lead us to an answer why.

Effectively, in the previous part about Tydeus, we did not nearly talk enough about the reason why Statius chose to surround a character like him with all those horrifying characteristics and elements, or why his character and storyline were built up like that, but an analysis of Amphiaraus helps clarify this. Ultimately, it all revolves around war and Statius’ hatred of it. The good characters like Amphiaraus are the ones who shun war and try their best to avoid it. They are portrayed as honourable and lack the horrifying elements and build-up we see with the immoral characters like Tydeus, who want for war and fighting above anything else. In the end, though, not just those war craving “monsters” are destroyed, but also Amphiaraus, and Adrastus, lose everything as they are unable to stop anything in the face of ruthless, warmongering, and bloodthirsty men. In short, they are equally powerless in the face of war.

We promised we would take a closer look at the way in which Statius describes Amphiaraus’ aristeia, and this is finally the right time. Amphiaraus might be more of an ideal hero in our world, and a monster in the Underworld, but his last moments in our realm, above the ground, are also his most fearsome:
tunc uero ardenti non uilla obsistere temptant
signa, ruunt solo terrore, et uulnere citra
mors trepidis ignaua uenit, ... (7.740-2)\textsuperscript{28}

His foes are rightfully afraid of him because through the support of Apollo, nothing can harm Amphiaraus and they kill all who stand in their way. Even now, we must admit that he is still nowhere near as monstrous as Tydeus. The scene might be somewhat more shocking, but as we said before, Amphiaraus’ enemies are nowhere near as movingly portrayed as Tydeus’, nor does Statius compare him to a beast or a monster. The scene makes him a source of fear to men, but not of horror because it misses that vital notion of impurity and unnaturalness. To a reader, these are supposed to be Amphiaraus’ most fearsome (again, not horrifying) moments, the moment in which we feel the least connected to him and there is textual evidence that supports that Statius himself dislikes seeing the seer like this:

\begin{verbatim}
ardet inexpleto saeui Mauortis amore
et fruitur dextra atque anima flagrante superbit.
hicne hominum casus lenire et demere Fatis
iura frequens? quantum subito diuersus ab illo
qui tripodas laurusque sequi, qui doctus in omni
nube salutato uolucrem cognoscere Phoebo! (7.703-8)
\end{verbatim}\textsuperscript{29}

We receive an explicit mention of how unlike himself Amphiaraus is acting in his \textit{aristeia}. We believe that this once again clearly reveals Statius’ disgust of war, but also of the ideal of the \textit{aristeia} itself (the perverted version of it that Tydeus later brings appears to support that statement), because even this honourable character now seems to lose himself in the fighting, just before he will lose his own life. In other words, despite having been more of a moral and praiseworthy hero than any of the other characters, and having received this “glorious” end from Apollo, Statius seems to portray it as much less glorious because it is quite literally drenched in the blood and death of war. What this scene, and in particular the excerpt above, demonstrates, is how war can make terrors of even the best of men. Even if, ultimately, Amphiaraus retained his honour and wits to the very end, thanking Apollo and asking to just let him die in peace, this is the one moment in the entire epic where Amphiaraus stands in a more negative light. As he is swallowed up by the earth, his positive influence finally extinguished, we enter book 8. We could rightfully call this the book of horror in this epic, because, through our analysis of both Tydeus and Amphiaraus so far, we have seen that from start to end it shows great usage of horrifying effects by Statius: beginning with the “horror-reversal” in the Underworld, going on to fill us with suspense and anticipation through Pluto’s reaction, and finally, leaving us, the reader, truly horrified after all when Athena flees the sight of Tydeus.

\textsuperscript{28} Ritchie et al (2007), p.146: “Then indeed no contingents dare to stand in the way of his [Amphiaraus’] ardour but collapse from terror alone, and without a blow struck a coward’s death comes upon the panic-stricken man.”

\textsuperscript{29} p.145-6: “He burns with an insatiable desire for savage war, revels in his strength and glories in his ardent spirit. Is this the man so often engaged in mitigating men’s fortunes and depriving the Fates of their authority? How different he has suddenly become from the man who was learned in following he guidance of tripods and laurels and, with salutation to Phoebus, in knowing the meaning of the birds in every cloud.”
2.3 Polyneices and Eteocles

Lastly, we will examine the two main characters of the epic, the two brothers who are already in the very first book doomed to die at each other's hand from the moment Tisiphone and the gods hear Oedipus' plea. It is evidently not a coincidence that Statius decided to let his work begin with the word *fraterna*. Looking at both characters, the opening seems to equally vilify them in the opinions of Oedipus and Jupiter because of the way they have treated their father and their kingdom, each lusting for the time when they can independently rule it. Polyneices' first appearance already shows how his mind is regularly filled with thoughts of being the master of Thebes, but he also shows great resilience against a raging storm as he searches for shelter in the night. Here, Statius first compares him to a sailor on a cold sea (1.370-7), which seems like a brave and (more importantly) human comparison. However, only a few verses further, we receive an entirely different simile:

\[
\text{saetigerumque suem et fuluum ... leonem. (1.397)}\]

Apollo, speaking to king Adrastus in his sleep of a dreadful fate coming to his doorstep, talks of Tydeus and Polyneices respectively as a wild boar and a yellow lion. We have already discussed the scene that follows in which they immediately confirm those beastly comparisons when they mindlessly attack each other. After these ominous beginnings, though, Polyneices' characterization somewhat follows Tydeus' in the sense that he too shows his more honourable and human side to Adrastus as he allows them into his home.

In book 2, we get Eteocles' first appearance. Up until now, we have not heard many good things of the current king of Thebes, yet we find him just innocently resting in his bed. However, that serenity is quickly broken when, through Jupiter's order, he is visited by the spirit of his dead grandfather, Laius, who speaks to him in the form of the blind seer Tiresias and fills his heart with fear and hatred of his brother. He compares Eteocles to an idle seaman as he is simply lying there, doing nothing, while he should be readying himself for when his brother besets him like a storm. More than anything, this comparison tells us that before this night, even if Eteocles was not the best ruler and was already envious of his brother's time on the throne, he had no real plans of war. It is only when Laius then shows his true face and spatters the king with his blood that he is quite literally befouled with deep-seated anger and hatred, suddenly springing up from his bed:

\[
\text{qualis ubi audito uenantum murmure tigris}
\text{horruit in maculas somnosque excussit inertes,}
\text{bella cupid laxatque genas et temperat ungues,}
\text{mox ruit in turmas natisque alimenta cruentis}
\]

This prompts a lengthy comparison to a startled tiger, agitated in anger and ready for a fight. When we then compare the two brothers, there are clear parallels between them at the start of the epic. As we said, Statius started by vilifying them both, went on to show them as somewhat normal (Polyneices facing a storm and Eteocles sleeping), but then depicted them as angry beasts, both deserving an animalistic simile to match their actions. The difference so far is that Eteocles’ comparison to the tiger was much more detailed and the scene at his bed much more horrific than the, albeit violent, initial encounter shown by Polyneices and Tydeus. Also, while Statius leaves the scene at Thebes with Eteocles in his bedroom, still bristling in cold-blooded anger, we leave Polyneices not as a beast bent on war, but a man in the friendly court of an ally. Thus, Eteocles appears the more hateful and vile of the two so far. Even though these two heroes are still men, the ugly beasts they have within have already reared their heads once. In a way, this can be reminiscent of more modern horror stories in which the monster has only shown but a small part of it, a small extent of its power.

After this, Polyneices actually takes a step away from conflict through his marriage and by choosing the path of diplomacy when it is decided that Tydeus will go to Thebes as an envoy to speak to Eteocles in Polyneices’ name. The scene immediately shifts to that fierce encounter at the Theban court, which we have already discussed considering Tydeus, but not Eteocles:

... ast illi tacito sub pectore dudum
ignea corda fremunt, iacto uelut aspera saxo
comminus erigitur serpens, cui subter inanes
longa sitis latebras totumque agitata per artus
convocat in fauces et squamea colla uenenum (2.410-4)

From the moment Tydeus started speaking, Eteocles has been seething in anger, and Statius fittingly compares him to a venomous snake. In his response, Eteocles reprimands Tydeus for his rudeness and tells him he will not abdicate the throne to his brother who should be more than content already with the wealth and honour of Argos that his recent marriage brought him. His anger and irrationality are only further fed by Tydeus’ indignation which leads him to devise a brutal and cowardly plan:

... (sanctum populis per saecula nomen)
legatum insidiis tacitoque invadere ferro
(quit regnis non uile?) cupid. quas quaereret artes

---

31 Ritchie et al (2007), p.22: “Just as a tiger, when hearing the sound of hunters, has bristled its striped back and shaken off lazy sleep, is eager for the fight; it opens its jaws wide and unsheathes its claws, then charges into the companies and in its bloody mouth carries off a man still breathing as food for its cubs; so, inflamed with rage, is the ruler avid for battle with his absent brother.”

32 p.29: “but for a long time deep in the other’s silent breast his fiery heart has been raging, as when a serpent vexed by a thrown stone rears up close at hand: deep in its roomy lair the prolonged thirst racking its entire length summons up venom into its jaws and scaly neck:”
Eteocles shows us how much of a snake he truly is by ordering some of his men to ambush Tydeus as he travels back to Argos. It was an indisputable crime to harm an envoy, which Statius distinctly points out, also adding how that custom (and anything else really) seems to be but a trifle matter to a tyrant like Eteocles. The king of Thebes only adds insult to injury when he sends not one but fifty men to perform this vile act. It cannot become any clearer who the most evident antagonist is of the epic at this point in the story, as, to appease his insatiable rage, Eteocles gives in to both madness and moral deprivation. In horror stories, especially those in which the monster is technically a human (e.g. a psychopath), these two factors often play an important role in establishing its impurity and inhumanity, and it does not surprise us that this is the path Eteocles is on.

After he sent his men to kill Tydeus, Eteocles lies restless in his bed, not so much contemplating the immorality of his crime, but rather wishing he had done it sooner, i.e. killed Tydeus when he had the chance. Matters only deteriorate when the sole survivor of Tydeus’ massacre, Maeon, returns to Thebes.

Maeon gives Eteocles a piece of his mind. He cannot live with the fact that he survived the carnage and wishes to regain his honour by killing himself. But before he does so, he makes sure to tell Eteocles that he should not have started this war, even calling him *funeste* in the process, meaning he holds Eteocles accountable for the fifty deaths, possibly even more so than Tydeus. When he does finally take his own life, Statius describes it mournfully and honourably, mentioning that even the Theban nobles present were moved. Eteocles, however, responds in a very different manner:

![Maeon gives Eteocles a piece of his mind.](image)

The terrible king’s anger increases as he denies Maeon the burial rights he more than deserves. While many citizens leave the city to search for the victims of Tydeus’ ruthless might to bring their bodies back to Thebes, which is also quite poignantly described by Statius, Eteocles does nothing more than wallow in his fury and further increases not only the madness and irrationality of his own mind, but also incurs the hatred of his own people.

This too makes us far more sympathetic to Polynoeices’ cause, as Tydeus is his friend and the insult done to him deserves some sort of retribution. This is yet another reason to go to war for

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33 Ritchie et al (2007), p.31: “and the name of ambassador, held sacred by peoples through the ages, he thirsts to assail – what is there not base in the eyes of tyrants? – by ambush and the silent steel. What schemes would he devise if you, O Fortune, were to deliver up his brother to him! O the morally blind machinations of the guilty! O ever craven crime!”

34 p.40: “it is an unholy war that you have set in motion, death-dealer, and a conflict not approved by the omens.”

35 p.41: “But the abominable king’s raging anger cannot stop at this: he forbids him to be consumed in the fire and in his impiety vainly denies the peace of a tomb to his unwitting shade.”
Polynoeices and he wishes to utilise that reason to convince people. As Amphiaraus was a character who contrasted Tydeus very well, highlighting his ruthlessness, there is another positive character who does the same to Polynoeices in this scene. When Polynoeices attempts to rouse the people’s anger and implicitly pleads them to go to war, Adrastus speaks up to calm everyone down and to halt their thoughts of conflict for now. But it shall eventually be to no avail as the seeds of war have already been planted in both sides, both through Eteocles, Tydeus and Polynoeices’ restless yearning for it, and the gods’ devices that started it all.

The following book recounts the military prowess of Argos and how discouraged and unwilling the Thebans are as they prepare for war nonetheless. The cities of Boeotia will come to their aid because they are allies, but in no way because of Eteocles personally. Statius here compares him to a wolf who has just ravaged a sheep pen, its jaws still covered in bloody wool, and who then makes its escape from the shepherds (4.363-8), as now Eteocles has become a beast not only to his enemies, but also his own people. The war is put on the backburner until book seven and neither Eteocles nor Polynoeices make any notable appearances, at the very least important to our analysis. We do finally witness the strength of Thebes and its allies, and Eteocles himself speaks to them and directs his armies as an actual leader, appearing much less unreasonable than before. Along these lines, both brothers receive a moment of humanity again before the battle truly breaks out: Eteocles by taking up the responsibility of leading his armies, and Polynoeices, in far greater extent, when his mother, Jocasta, comes to their encampment to convince him to stop the war and to demand his rule in conversation rather than bloodshed:

... sic flexa Pelasgum
corda labant, ferrique auidus mansueuerat ardur.
ipse etiam ante oculos nunc matris ad oscula uersus,
nunc rudis Ixmenes, nunc flebiliora precantis
Antigones, uariaque animum turbante procella
exciderat regnum: cupit ire, et mitis Adrastus
non uetat; ... (7.532-8)36

Jocasta seems successful in her attempts to mollify not only her son, but all of the soldiers who hear her plea as well. Naturally, their peace of mind does not last long as Tydeus speaks in response,reminding everyone of Eteocles’ falseness and treachery, and, thus, planting the seeds of discord in them yet again. We do not read Polynoeices’ exact reaction, but the battle promptly begins anyway when the Argives kill two tigers sacred to the Thebans. Consequently, Polynoeices’ small moment of clarity and want for peace is completely overshadowed by the conflict and death that follows, turning it nearly completely void. His mother must flee the camp as things turn more hostile, and, as far as we know, Polynoeices does nothing to facilitate her going. The first battle is won by the Thebans and since Amphiaraus is the focus of it, the brothers again do not receive much attention other than confirming their respective prowess on the battlefield. The second fight too hardly

36 Ritchie et al (2007), p.141: “so the hearts of the Pelasgians was swayed and brought down, and their greedy lust for battle is assuaged. Himself too, before their very eyes, turned to kiss now his mother, now the innocent Ixmenes, now Antigone beseeching him more tearfully, and in the conflicting tempest distracting his mind any thought of ruling the kingdom had fallen away from it: he is longing to go, and the gentle Adrastus does not forbid it.”
mentions them and focuses more on the terrible deaths on both sides, culminating in Tydeus’ *aristeia* and death.

In book nine, this finally brings forth a reaction from the brothers again. While Eteocles, understandably, condemns Tydeus’ bestial act and uses it to incite his own troops, Polyneices’ responds in a very different manner.

> ... ipsi etiam minus ingemuere iacentem
> Inachidae, culpantque uirum et rupisse queruntur
> fas odii; ... (9.2-4)

Here, Statius first mentions that even the Argive forces find fault in Tydeus’ act, and not long after we get Polyneices’ reaction. In more than fifty verses, we read how he completely freezes when he hears the news and cannot hold back the tears. He reaches his friend’s body and falls down beside it and commences an emotional monologue, bemoaning Tydeus’ death and his own survival so much that he wants to kill himself. For a moment, Polyneices loses all interest in the war and is lost in his depressed thoughts. On the one hand, this scene could make us pity him for losing a friend, which seems to move Polyneices more than anything else in this entire epic. On the other hand, though, while this makes him seem more human, it is also strange that Polyneices does not speak a word of the atrocity Tydeus committed.

While book nine does not display the brothers that much directly, we do actually receive an accurate view on the both of them through the opinions of the Thebans themselves:

> ... 'ueniat pactumque hic computet annum,
> Cadmeosque lares exul patriasque salutet
> infelix tenebras; cur autem ego sanguine fraudes
> et periura luam regalis crimina noxae?'
> inde alii: 'sera ista fides, iam uincere mauult.' (10.584-8)

The citizens of Thebes themselves are conflicted: some want Polyneices to come take up his rightful rule and hate Eteocles for his wrongdoings, while others believe it is too late and Polyneices only wants to conquer it through battle. What we read from this is that, above all, the people of Thebes just want the fighting to stop, but recognize that both brothers crave the war too much. Even if some Thebans choose Polyneices over his brother, he is but the lesser of two evils.

Finally, in book eleven, things come to a close for them. Tisiphone asks the help of another Fury, Megaera, to ensure that Polyneices and Eteocles will face each other in single combat to decide the war.

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37 Ritchie et al (2007), p.170: “Even the sons of Inachus themselves grieve less for the fallen warrior, finding fault with him and complaining that he has broken the laws of hatred.”

38 p.209: “Let him come and make up here the count of his promised year, and let the poor exile greet his Cadmean home and his father’s blindness. And why should I pay with blood for the cheating and treacherous mischief of our king’s wrongdoing?” At that others said: ‘It is too late for honouring that pledge; now he [Polyneices] would rather conquer in battle.’”
The Furies have not even reached their targets and Jupiter already says the duel will be so unspeakably wretched that he does not want any of the gods to witness it. We witnessed Athena’s horror when confronted with Tydeus. We know that even the gods are not safe from that experience, and Jupiter appears to realize that as well, making sure in advance that they will all avert their eyes.

When Megaera then fills Polyneices with such rage and hatred, he finally snaps. His thoughts that were only just about his poor wife, and his own sadness and fear, are now fixed on but one thing: slaying his brother and drawing his own final breath in his blood (11.153-4: ... scelus et caedem et perfossi in sanguine fratris/expirare cupit ...). Thus, even the fear of losing his own life has been removed in favour of dying as long as he can take his brother with him. At this moment, it seems madness and bloodlust have taken over as nothing else in life is worth more than that to Polyneices. Yet we must admit that even now there is still a hint of humanity to be found in him as he seems earnest in both his speech to Adrastus and in his sadness. What is more, the Furies, in the guise of a soldier, immediately provide Polyneices with his horse and arms to make sure Adrastus does not have any chance to still dissuade him. In other words, even the Furies, who have been one of the most important instigators of the horrifying and lamentable events in this epic, believe that there is still a chance that Polyneices might be convinced by Adrastus and thus act to wholly prevent such a thing from happening.

In Thebes, Eteocles is attending an offering, successfully keeping his fear in check when word of his brother reaches his ears:

... turbatus inhorruit altis
turbaeque tamen gauissus in ira est.
sic ubi regnator post exulis otia tauri
mugitum hostilem summa tult aure iuuencus
agnouitque minas, magna stat feruidus ira
ante gregem spumisque animos ardentibus efflat,
nunc pede torus humum, nunc cornibus aera findens,
horret ager, trepidaeque expectant proelia ualles. (11.249-56)

In a heartbeat, his apprehension turns into hatred and he rejoices like a savage bull yearning for the challenge. In the following fifty verses, he is also compared to a pestilence or a plague on the earth (11.274) and, again, to a poisonous snake (11.310-2). In a final attempt, Jocasta speaks to Eteocles to

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39 Ritchie et al (2007), p.222: “But now a duel unspeakable is approaching, and a battle unprecedented on wretched earth. Turn away your eyes: in the absence of the gods let them dare such deeds, and let them be unobserved by Jove:”
40 p.225: “the agitated king shuddered with profound hatred, and yet in the midst of his rage he rejoiced. Just so when the king-bull, after peaceful interval afforded by an exiled bull, has heard at the furthest range of his hearing the bellowing of his enemy and recognised a challenge, he takes his stand before the herd in a fever of mighty rage and snorts out his courage in a burning foam, now savagely cleaving the ground with his hoof, now the air with his horns: the fields tremble, and the quaking valleys await the battle.”
stop him, as Antigone, their sister, speaks to Polyneices. Both men are halted again, anger fading especially in Polyneices’ case. But when Eteocles’ rage is too great and he rides out to face his brother, Polyneices too burns with hate again and nothing can stop them. The moment we have anticipated for so long is finally at hand.

The war gods leave the battlefield as they simply cannot watch what is about to happen, but that is not true for the god of the Underworld:

\[\text{ipse quoque Ogygios monstra ad gentilia manes}
\text{Tartareus rector porta iubet ire reclusa.}
\text{montibus insidunt patriis tristique corona}
\text{infecere diem et uinci sua crimina gaudent. (11.420-3)}\]

Pluto opens the gates so that all shades can witness what is about to happen. We saw during Amphiaraus’ analysis that the god had promised retribution for the breach into his realm and that will happen now in a truly monstrous act that will outdo the crimes of all Hades’ inhabitants. As they come up to the surface, they darken the skies and infect our world with theirs, giving the scene of the crime an otherworldly nuance. Yet even now, Adrastus, honourable as his is, attempts to stop them. He dares to ride in between them but the brothers’ hatred of each other gives room to madness and makes them blind to anything else. Even Polyneices who has always respected him and cared for him like a son to a father sets off towards Eteocles, and Adrastus has to flee for his own life, leaving nothing but the two of them on a battlefield that is turning more and more grim and unearthy. Since no human can put a stop to it, Fortune and Piety come down in a final effort to break off the fighting:

\[\text{uix steterat campo, subita mansuescere pace}
\text{agmina sentirique nefas; tunc ora madescunt}
\text{pectoraque, et tacitus subrepsit fratibus horror. (11.474-6)}\]

For just a moment, Piety turns all men back to reason and morality, and the difference is staggering. The brothers, temporarily back to their old selves through the effects of Piety, see the terrible nature of their plans, and cannot hold back their tears. But this lasts for but a moment as they revert to the hate-filled beasts they have become as soon as Tisiphone drives Piety away. Their rage is bolstered again and all they want is to battle. The blood of Eteocles’ horse colours the battlefield as they both fall to the ground where a melee starts:

\[\text{... coeunt sine more, sine arte,}
\text{tantum animis iraque, atque ignescentia cernunt}\]

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41 Ritchie et al (2007), p.230: “But the lord of Tartarus himself, throwing open his gates, orders the Ogygian shades to go to witness the monstrous doings of their kin. On their ancestral mountains they take their seats, and in their sombre circle they darken the day, rejoicing that their own crimes have been surpassed.”

42 p.231: “Scarcely had she alighted on the plain when the armies were calmed by the sudden peace, and there was a perception of the monstrous nature of the deed. Then the faces and breasts of the brothers were wet with tears, and a silent horror crept upon them.”
Urged on by nothing but fury, their hatred for each other is so great that they fight without style or skill, like two boars tussling angrily in close combat. We have read a great deal of non-human similes of this sort and now the moment has finally come when they have truly devolved into them.

The Furies realise that they are no longer needed as the fury of men now far outmatches theirs. Accordingly, the power of Eteocles and Polynieces now supersedes that of the monstrous Furies and it is finally enough to end the fight. After many unnoticed wounds, Polynieces mortally injures his brother. As Eteocles realizes this and feels himself weakening, he plots his last treacherous act. When Polynieces approaches his seemingly unmoving body to salvage his arms, Eteocles, having feigned death, uses the last of his strength to push his blade into his unsuspecting brother to end the war at last.

In our recounting of the story so far, we have already sporadically discussed horror, but with the whole picture in mind, we will now finally be able to give a more complete analysis. Similar to Tydeus, the brothers are not simply monsters from the start, but become so through a process over the epic. The question now is if they can be called horrifying monsters. The answer is not as straightforward as it was with Tydeus. While it is true that both Eteocles and Polynieces are threatening throughout the epic, both physically in battle and more rationally towards their people and in their maddened mind-set, other characters never truly flee the sight of them until the very end. Tydeus had already had a moment in book two where he was so frighteningly powerful and ruthless that mere men fled his sight, but Jocasta and Adrastus (among others) constantly face the two brothers to stop them, even when the gods already wisely turn their heads. It is safe to say that at the very end, this is no longer true as many feel disgust at what they have become and Adrastus’ words have no effect as he must escape with his own life. However, the avoidance of physical contact that is often so typical of monsters in modern horror is not as clearly defined as we have shown it to be for Tydeus. Of course, more paramount for them to be truly horrifying is that they must be impure and abnormal, which they truthfully are through their inhuman amount of hatred and the lengths they will go to kill the other.

By itself, this might not be a high enough level of abnormality to make them monstrous, but we cannot ignore that their impurity is often further accentuated and amplified by the large amount of bestial similes that are given to them over the course of the epic, and through strong metonymy. As we mentioned, the ghostly blood that spatters Eteocles in book two makes for a gruesome sight already, but metonymy reaches a new height at the final battle where Pluto allows the very Underworld to rise to the surface, darkening the skies. At that moment, they are surrounded by the

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43 Ritchie et al (2007), p.233: “They join battle without discipline, without finesse, with only their animus and fury, and through their visors they see the blazing hatred and search out one another’s expressions with embittered glances.”

44 p.233: “Nor is there now need of Furies: they only marvel and stand by with applause, and they are grieved that the furies of men have more power than they.”
gloom of the skies, the blood on the ground and the dust in the air. Pluto and the shades are even part of their audience, and therefore, through metonymy, Polyneices and Eteocles appear even more otherworldly and un-human. They genuinely belong more to the Underworld than Amphiaraox ever did.

In terms of plot structure, we witness them devolving into these monsters very much like we did Tydeus, but this is still not at all as set off as in modern horror because it is still in all ways an epic. We can, however, as we did in our discussion of Tydeus, establish a parallel with some parts of it. In modern horror, in the onset, we get but a glance of the monster that will later be revealed and that is exactly what Statius has done here, because the monsters within temporarily recede again, especially in the beginning after Eteocles’ hatred is first awakened by the spirit of Laius, and Polyneices mindlessly battles Tydeus. This too builds up then to the monsters we finally see at the ending, which lies somewhat in the vein of the confirmation and confrontation phases of Carroll’s Complex Discovery Plot.

All things considered, the horrifying elements surrounding Polyneices and Eteocles often mirror those we saw concerning Tydeus. However, there is a difference in the nature and intensity of their horror. Even if theirs is not as evident as Tydeus’ more ruthless one, we must admit that the brothers supersede Tydeus’ threat and impurity because they are not only ruthless, but also consumed by an inhumanly large amount of burning hatred, the likes of which the world has never seen before, as even in death, when they are burned together, the flames of the pyre split off from one another, not abiding the other’s close presence:

... cernisne ut flamma recedat
concurratque tamen? uiuunt odia improba, uiuunt. (12.440-1)\(^5\)

The horror they demonstrated was so great that the very gods themselves divert their faces in advance, that men cannot stay near and can only watch helplessly, and, finally, that the Underworld itself comes up from under the ground to create some sort of ancient hell on earth setting in which the outcome is settled.

\(^5\) Ritchie et al (2007), p.251: “Do you not see how the flames draw back from one another and yet join together in battle? Their impious hatred still lives, it still lives.”
Conclusion

In the first chapter of this thesis, mostly through close examination of Carroll’s seminal work on horror, we established several important elements of horror in order to see whether some of these applied to Statius’ first century epic, the Thebaid. Horror is a genre specifically named for the emotion it is supposed to elicit from its audience. Thus, we needed to find what exactly it is in the genre that horrifies us. We started with what is probably the key element of a horror story: a horrifying monster. A monster is only horrifying when it makes us feel fear and disgust, and at the same time is abnormal (i.e. does not fit in the ours and the character’s view of the world). Often, characters would try to avoid physical contact with it as well. Next, we stated that the audience’s reactions often mirror run often parallel to those of a character, but does not necessarily copy it.

We then went on to explain the most common horror plot structure according to Carroll and its different movements. These four movements (onset, discovery, confirmation and confrontation) could also occur by themselves, per two or per three, so long as they stay in the correct relative order. Often in a horror plot we would also get suspense when we got a question with two possible outcomes of which the immoral one was normally the most probable to happen. The suspense would then endure until the actual outcome, at which point we could also experience shock (which is like suspense another emotion that often coincides with horror, but not exclusively). Connected to the discovery and/or confirmation movements of a horror plot, we also find drama of the proof to be very typical, which is when the character is getting evidence in the onset and finally realizes what it means at the moment of discovery, or when they have to prove the existence of the monster to others so that they will help him. What is often dramatic about this is that it often takes so much time that we know that the monster is getting stronger, and will thus be more difficult to defeat.

Finally, in the first chapter, we tackled the paradox of horror. There were several incomprehensive (yet interesting) solutions to it such as cosmic awe in the work of Supernatural Horror, and repressed wishes and anxieties hidden behind the monsters of a great deal of stories. Eventually, we settled on Carroll’s much more universal fascination/curiosity for the plot and the monster in it. This fascination pertaining to the attractiveness of many genres, but even more strongly to horror exactly because of the monster is supposed to be unknowable, which is of course why we are intrigued in spite of the threat it poses and the disgust it evinces. All of this led us to establish a list of these characteristics that would be efficient to use on the Thebaid, which brought us to chapter two.

When we finally applied our knowledge from chapter one to Statius’ epic and some of its chief characters, we quickly noticed that there are indeed several horror elements in the Thebaid. We
have said countless times that it is still an epic work following an epic structure. As such, while it was no problem to find a monster, the horror elements we noticed the least were unsurprisingly the ones pertaining mostly to plot structure, also because the more general plot structures we identified with horror are far too modern constructs. We might recognize small parts of an onset-confrontation movement, however, when we look at Tydeus, Polyneices and Eteocles. At the beginning of the epic, they already show, for a moment, a part of what will eventually turn out to be the defining characteristic of their monstrosity: ruthlessness in the case of Tydeus, and hatred in that of the brothers. Nonetheless, there is never a true discovery phase of the monsters in this epic, and there are, logically, too many parts in it lacking anything relating to horror, parts that we did not discuss of course. There might just be an instance of shock connected to the moment in which the horror is at its strongest, when the final form of them as a monster is shown at last, but it never goes beyond that. Even so, it was worthwhile to add these modern structures and its parts to our research. The difference in time is no counterargument to this mention, as in what little we have of classical literature, we can find an even better example than the Thebaid. In this respect, we find it worth briefly mentioning Petronius’ Satyricon, in which, during the banquet of Trimalchio, a man speaks of his encounter with a werewolf. Not only does he expressly explain his reactions to the monster, but the plot structure here even contains a discovery movement. This small piece of Latin literature is truly exceptional in that respect and deserved, in our opinion, some minor notification in this thesis at the least.

Additionally, we proved that, at least in the case of Tydeus and the brothers, they contain enough horrifying elements to stand up to a more modern definition of a monster (Amphiaraus too, momentarily in the Underworld and its inhabitants). Naturally, they are nowhere near the more prototypical monsters we have today, and on too many occasions they are also very clearly human in their acts and emotions. Considering the time the epic was written, though, and the fact that Statius could never have had the intention to create horrifying monsters as we know them today, we must admit that the examined characters contain several elements that we have explained in chapter one of this thesis, and that the large assembly of these is undeniably remarkable. For one, all of the characters we discussed, mostly focused at the end of their life when they reach the pinnacle of their monstrosity, stand up to the definition of a truly horrifying monster, considering they are both threatening and impure to their victims. More so, we even experience something very close to a kind of mirroring-effect with a positive character who comes in contact with the monster in question. This mirroring-effect is the most distinct in book eight when we witness Athena’s reaction to Tydeus, but we can also speak of one, admittedly to some lesser extent, in Adrastus’ case when he is faced with the two brothers at their final battle. It is also here that we recognize yet another horror element: the avoidance of physical contact. Soldiers fleeing the sight of one of our heroes might not be a clear enough instance of this as it normally solely depends on threat on the physical level (which is not enough), but, at the very least, the manner in which Athena shrinks away from Tydeus is a clear example of this. For Amphiaraus, all of this is of course slightly different. In our eyes, he is neither threatening nor impure, and there is no positive character we can connect to in the Underworld. Then again, in analysing his victims, we still recognize their genuine horror towards him. The fact that Statius is able to project the effects of horror on the creatures of the Underworld (some of whom could very well be a monster to us when imagined in our world), shows us that he must be conscious of them and his use of them to some degree.
When we focus on the notions of threat and impurity more closely, we even notice that they go quite far. The “monsters” of the epic were all physically threatening, most of all the inhumanly ruthless Tydeus, but also on a higher level, as we noticed that the very hatred of the brothers was beyond anything any human could have ever imagined, and Amphiaraus’ mere presence of life and light threatened the Underworld’s status quo. This linked nicely to the concept of impurity, which often went hand in hand with inhumanity, i.e. a ruthless bloodlust or hatred not belonging to the human world (and therefore inconceivable to us), or, in Amphiaraus’ case, a human, living brilliance not belonging to the Underworld. Along these lines, we are easily reminded of Carroll’s words about what a monster is, namely “an extraordinary character in our ordinary world,” (1990: p.16). What distinguishes Statius, then, from other epics about grand battles in this respect is exactly these horrifying elements. We can be fairly certain that most Romans had a good idea of what bloodied corpses would look like, either because of a military career or the rabid popularity of the Colosseum in that time. Even though Statius already makes those scenes extra gruesome (as we have pointed out in multiple examples), he adds something more horrific to them than we are used to in other epics, something that the Roman audience would not find so self-evident, which is of course typical of horror. He adds an unnatural component, and thus, something unexpected, whether by a man eating another man’s head, or the underworld coming up to the surface as one of the more important metonymies we pointed out, or many other instances we have adequately discussed.

Something we still must acknowledge, though, that is often true for modern horror, but not ever the case here, is that a monster is normally confronted by a positive character. While it is true that Adrastus does oppose the brothers, and Amphiaraus at one point Capaneus in conversation, there is never an attempt to stop the monsters when they have fully shown themselves. This is so because there is simply never a need, since the very moment they become a true monster is the moment they die (with the exception of Amphiaraus who is already dead). There is no need for anyone to defeat Tydeus, for example, because he is already dying of the wounds he received during his own crazed fighting, nor is anyone needed to stop Polynice and Eteocles because they will already destroy each other. The fact that Statius’ monsters all seem to destroy themselves in a way makes them even more powerful as no other seems to be able to end them. This theme of “creating your own downfall “is much more typical of another genre, namely tragedy, which is no surprise as the Thebaid was based on a Greek tragedy and, therefore, the contents of the story are already of the tragic sort. Of course, the presence of tragic elements in the epic does not oppose that of horrifying ones, which we have hopefully more than made clear by now.

Although they are not restricted to the horror genre, the Thebaid also contains anticipation building up to a climax in those final scenes with many horrifying elements, and additionally some shock as well. As we have mentioned before, it is of no import that we already know what will happen in the epic, both though the story being known and the constant prophesies that are given, and the same must have been true for a Roman of that time (probably even more so). Yet with even a superficial look at modern horror, we immediately see that we often already know what will happen there too, yet we are still scared and horrified regardless. There is, however, a clear difference between anticipation and Carroll’s definition of suspense. There is a large chance he would say that what we expect to happen in the Thebaid gives rise to anticipation rather than suspense because in his idea of suspense, it is only true when there are two opposite outcomes, but we expect the worst of them to happen. Through Statius’ indications and, more importantly, the
theme of fate and prophesy in a classical epic like this, there really is only one possible outcome. This might still have the power to shock us, and we might experience anticipation, but suspense, in Carroll’s narrow definition, is something we do not really find in the *Thebaid*. Naturally, this also explains why we never really dealt with any “drama of proof” either, because it is based on an indecisiveness on both our account and the one of the characters. Since we already have almost all the proof: nothing really has to be discovered of that sort in the epic. We only have to wait for it to happen. We will stay true to Carroll’s definitions as we have done over this entire thesis, but it is still interesting to note that in Roland Barthes’ more general approach to suspense (in which we also find what we called anticipation), we would be right to call it suspense here in the *Thebaid* too, though this is more of a matter of semantics.

Our attention to the paradox of horror turned out to have its merits as well. Admittedly, cosmic awe and psycho-analysis turned out to be a step too far for our research. Some readers might possibly have found some form of cosmic awe in Amphiraurus’ trip to the Underworld, and one might even be able to make a case for the psycho-analytical repression of wishes and anxieties in terms of, for example, the physical power that Tydeus’ rage gives him, but we do not wish to put too much weight on these things. What we would like to focus on is something else we touched upon in our discussion of the paradox of horror: the possibly subversive nature of a work of horror. Again, the *Thebaid* might not be a work of horror, but it does contain many horrifying elements. We mentioned in the introduction that Statius might have had a negative disposition towards the rule under which he was living, and while there is ample material supporting this, we do not wish to make any further assumptions. However, after reading the *Thebaid*, there is one thing in this respect of which we can be certain that Statius disliked it: war.

Statius clearly shows his dislike for war a lot in the epic, showing all its horrors. In the very introduction of this thesis, we noted that from a modern perspective, horror as a literary genre elicits horror as an emotion to something unthinkable. War, in itself, would thus be a type of horror in a broader sense that does not fit into this definition as it is very much thinkable and has always been a reality. But this also supports that the elements of horror Statius inserts must indeed go beyond the “mere” horrors of war to be horrifying, and that is precisely what we have researched. Not only has he shown war at its most gruesome, but he actually goes so far as to show the truly unthinkable in it, i.e. many things that are not part of our reality, like the actual opening of the underworld, the eating of Melanippus’ head, etc. It is no coincidence that these elements keep returning in our thesis. Statius appears to use exactly all these things that we can rightly call horrifying as a tool to criticise war even further. A point he keeps making in all his characters is that war warps the men who crave it and hate it alike. In the end, it destroys nearly everyone. We could see this in Lucan’s *Pharsalia* as well, but Statius is still a very good example as he is able to do it in an older world, one of heroes and gods with whom he can go much farther than Lucan. Looking to future works again, a use of darker elements to vilify war is something we find a lot in modern works, a good example being *Apocalypse Now*. While these stories are more predominately dramas, the addition of horrifying elements is not impossible, on the contrary. We see that, throughout the *Thebaid*, war is something to be lamented, and is done so on numerous occasions by many different characters (e.g. the Thebans when they talk about preferring Polyneices on the throne), and even Statius his own voice sounds through when he asks, for instance, how different Amphiraurus has become during his *aristeia*. However, Statius goes beyond mere lamentation by adding horror.
We started out by saying that the *Thebaid* is and will always be of the epic genre. Obviously, Statius did not want to create a horror story (which is rather impossible since it did not exist yet), but he used a remarkable amount of horrifying elements that must at least make him some sort of forerunner in the use of them. We recognize several monsters and we can authenticate them as horrifying even if they are human at their core. While we do lack several elements we also discussed, that this is only to be expected, as most of these are more strongly connected to modern horror plot structures that did not exist at the time either, and are not found in the *Thebaid* as it is and always will remain an epic of the first century. Aside from that, it also contains a great deal of tragic components that fit the theme very well too. But even so, Statius adds horrifying elements to this mix as well, consciously and effectively brandishing them to turn men monstrous not only because of the war they are fighting, but also to damagingly symbolize it. Thus, in other words, in the *Thebaid*, the horror that war spawns is but a portion of the tragedy it brings about, and Statius uses those horrifying elements to condemn it even further in a time when many would have thought something like this unthinkable in a story.
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