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Medieval Commentary on the *Thebaid* and its Reception Preliminary Observations

The importance of the *Thebaid*, the epic masterpiece of Publius Papinius Statius on the conflict between Oedipus's sons over the throne of Thebes, outside of its intrinsic artistic merit, lies in its influence: since it was the main source of Theban mythology in the Medieval Latin West, its influence can be suspected wherever an author – Latin or vernacular – speaks of the troubled house of Oedipus. Despite the prominence of this text, the corpus of commentary that accompanied it remains to be investigated. Although there are, as far as we can tell, fewer commentary traditions on the *Thebaid*, and their relationships of mutual dependency are more evident, than in the medieval Vergilian or Boethian traditions, this paper can of course only offer some preliminary observations, including a typology of the commentarial forms and functions which the manuscripts hold. To specify their position in the history of medieval commentaries on classical Roman poets, I begin with a short reconstruction of the tradition that influenced their creation. After discussing the known commentaries, I will show how medieval commentary on the *Thebaid* was the one of the important filters through which Statius' masterpiece was received by the first vernacular romance.

1) The Servian Background

Any history of medieval commentary on classical poets must begin in late antiquity. All medieval commentary on school authors – that is, commentary which derives its formal qualities and its *raison d'être* from explicating a specific text, not an entire field as in the case of collections of *sententiae* and *summae* – takes one of three forms: (1) the *accessus*, an introduction to the author and to the specific work under consideration which, at least by the 9th century, represents a teacher's introductory lecture¹, (2) glosses or *scholia*, comments in the margins of manuscripts which aim to elucidate the text, and (3) what have been called ›continuous commentaries‹ (often called *glose* in medieval manuscripts which

¹ Alastair J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*, Aldershot 1988, pp. 14 f.

contain them)², that is, commentaries whose layout on the manuscript page³ does not distinguish them from the text commented upon.⁴ These three forms, as far as we know, are inextricable from one another in antiquity. Our earliest, fully-intact witnesses to their use in the Latin-speaking West⁵ are the *accessus* to and commentaries on Vergil's *opera omnia* by Maurus Servius Honoratus in the 4th century and the two introductions to Porphyry's *Isagoge* by Boethius in the late 5th century. In these early examples, the *accessus* is an integral part of the commentary which follows it. Of these late-antique sources, Servius is by far the most important for the exegetical tradition surrounding literary texts. The patterns of his *accessus* to Vergil's *Aeneid* and his style of commenting will be imitated by the medieval commentaries discussed here and, even where some enterprising scholar departs from the Servian standard, he indicates explicitly that he is doing so, paying verbal homage to the ancient master. The terms Servius's *accessus* sets are, although not with perfect consistency, taken up in medieval commentaries on poets, philosophical commentaries, commentaries on the Bible, and even in glosses on civil and canon law. He divides his *accessus*, or introduction, into seven parameters which Edwin Quain and subsequent scholars have referred to as *circumstantiae*⁶, translating a term (περιστάσεις) found for this type of schema among the ancient commentators on Aristotle's *Organon*. Of primary importance is the author's biography (*poetae vita*; later *auctoris*), in which, among the expected details, we find the famous story of Vergil ordering his epic to be burned upon his death. The anecdote provokes an ancient form

2 One also encounters the term *commentum*, although there were medieval attempts to disambiguate the two, the most famous of which is that of William of Conches in the prologue to his glosses on the *Timaeus*. In brief, *glossatores* expound the text primarily according to the letter, proceeding systematically and sequentially, whereas *commentatores* are primarily interested in the *sententia*, the deeper meaning. »Etsi multos super Platonem commentatos esse, multos glosasse non dubitemus, tamen quia *commentatores, literam nec continuantes nec exponentes, soli sententiae seruiunt*, glosatores uero in leuibus superflui, in grauibus uero obscurissimi uel nulli reperiuntur, rogatu sociorum quibus omnia honesta debemus excitati, super praedictum aliquid dicere proposuimus, aliorum superflua recidentes, praetermissa addentes, obscura elucidantes, male dicta remouentes, bene dicta imitantes.« (emphasis mine) William of Conches, *Glosae super Platonem*, ed. by Édouard A. Jauneau, Turnhout 2006, p. 57.

3 Lemmata drawn from the commented text were usually heavily abbreviated and often underlined by scribes, but the consistency of this practice varies between manuscripts.

4 I leave to one side the question of whether an *argumentum*, or summary of the text to follow, is a type of commentary, for if it contributes anything which is not to be found in the text itself, its contribution is merely in summarizing its source *selectively*.

5 Comments in some of them and analogues in contemporary and earlier Greek commentaries suggest that the practice was in place before the 4th century A. D.

6 Edwin A. Quain, »The Medieval *accessus ad auctores*«, in: *Traditio* 3 (1945), pp. 215-264; repr. New York 1986, at pp. 13 *et passim*; Harald Anderson, *The Manuscripts of Statius*, Vol. 3, Arlington, VA, 2009, pp. 1 *et passim*.

of textual criticism: Vergil, according to Servius, desired the destruction of his work because he had left some lines metrically imperfect, and Servius points some of them out.⁷ The *titulus operis* is relatively straightforward (*Aeneis* is derived from Aeneas). The *qualitas carminis* gives a succinct, ancient definition of the genre: it is a *metrum heroicum* because it has characters both human and divine, *continens vera cum fictis* (an important consideration to which we will return later). There is also a comment about the style of narration (*actus mixtus*): the poet speaks both in his own voice and through others. Finally, there is the style according to the ancient hierarchy: *genus humile*, *genus medium*, *genus grandiloquum*. Vergil uses the latter. The *scribentis intentio* follows. This *circumstantia* will prove to be very productive in later ages. Servius is rather modest: Vergil wants to imitate Homer and praise Augustus through his ancestors. The *numerus librorum* presents no difficulty as in the case of other authors, so Servius passes it over in silence. The *ordo librorum*, however, is a bit more controversial. Some, wishing for chronological consistency, have made Book II the first book, Book III the second, and Book I the third. But they do not understand the poet's art (*nescientes hanc esse artem poeticam*). Authorization for beginning *in medias res* is offered by Horace. Only the *explanatio* remains, which will constitute the body of Servius's line-by-line commentary.

The commentary itself is extensive and erudite. It is a veritable treasure trove of mythological, historical, and grammatical information, and it is overwhelmingly concerned with what is needed to comprehend the language of Vergil. More than half of the comments deal with language (the precise meaning of words and difficult constructions). Approximately one-third provide information about history, literary allusions, and religious customs.⁸ Very few deal with aesthetics or the psychology of the characters. Nevertheless, the grammarian allows himself some digressions from his general purpose. Philosophical commentary finds its way into the exposition in subtle ways. To take one example, at the end of Book I, when Dido urges Aeneas to tell the story of the »*insidias Danaum* [...] *casusque tuorum*« (I.754), Servius intrudes to add »*ut eventu Troia corruerit, non fati necessitate.*«⁹ There are also the seeds (but only the seeds) of symbolism as a hermeneutic and the occasional desire to attribute allegorical intent to

⁷ The following citations of Servius are from: Maurus Servius Honoratus, *Servii grammatici qui feruntur in Vergilii carmina commentarii*, Vol. 1-2, ed. Georg Thilo and Hermann Hagen, Leipzig 1881.

⁸ Jan M. Ziolkowski and Michael J. Putnam (eds.), *The Virgilian Tradition: The First Fifteen Hundred Years*, New Haven 2008, p. 630.

⁹ Servius (as note 6), ad *Aen.* IV.696, a long Servian digression on fate and just desserts which comes down on the side of conditional fate, fate which obtains because of the contingent *Troianae classis adventus* (emphasis mine) a contentious reading of the philosophy of the *Aeneid* if there ever were one!

the poet of Mantua. Romulus/Quirinus and Remus are *figurae* of Augustus and Agrippa.¹⁰ To the *physici* (those engaged in questions of natural philosophy), Vergil rightly refers to Venus as »et soror et coniunx« with reference to Jupiter.¹¹ For Juno is air and Jupiter is fire, siblings because equal in thinness, but spouses because, just as the husband is the head of the household, so too does fire rise above air. The two gates which are the exits of the Underworld in Book VI are likewise symbolic: the gate of horn hosts true dreams because horn is the color of the eyes which do not lie, whereas the gate of ivory allows false dreams to pass through it because teeth are like ivory and we lie through our teeth.¹² Finally, Hercules dragged Cerberus from the Underworld as a sign of his overcoming of all earthly lust, since Cerberus is a devourer of earth; in fact, *Cerberus terra est*.¹³

2) Late-Antique and Medieval Commentaries on the *Thebaid*

That the Servian approach to commentary won the day is shown by another key text originating in late antiquity.¹⁴ An individual identified in one of the commentary's glosses as Lactantius Placidus¹⁵ composed a line-by-line commentary on the *Thebaid* which assumed a canonical status similar to that of Servius in the Vergilian tradition. Like Servius, it is the work of a subtle and thorough philologist, although it is much less interested in explaining the grammar of the epic, a fact which led its most recent editor, Robert Sweeney, to conclude that it was intended for a »general readership« and not for the classroom.¹⁶ Also, like Servius, it occasionally succumbs to the tendency to symbolize. To take but one example, Tisiphone, summoned by a vengeful Oedipus to wreak havoc

10 Ibid., ad *Aen.* I.292.

11 Ibid., ad *Aen.* I.47.

12 Ibid., ad *Aen.* VI.893.

13 Ibid., ad *Aen.* VI.395.

14 The commentary's most recent editor, Robert D. Sweeney, presented the late 4th century as a reasonable estimate of the commentary's date. See Robert Dale Sweeney (ed.), *Lactantii Placidi in Statii Thebaida commentum*. Vol. 1: *Anonymi in Statii Achilleida commentum. Fulgentii ut fingitur Placidiadis super Thebaiden commentariolum*, Leipzig 1997, p. vii. But Luca Cardinali has since brought forward convincing evidence that the commentary (or, I would add, at least *some* of the ancient glosses, since it likely draws on material older than itself) was composed between the late 5th and the early 6th centuries of our era. See Luca Cardinali, »A proposito della cronologia e dell'origine di Lattanzio Placido: osservazioni sulla questione«, in: Concetta Longobardi, Christian Nicolas, and Marisa Squillante (eds.), *Scholae discimus: Pratiques scolaires dans l'antiquité tardive et le haut moyen âge*, Lyon 2014, pp. 287-304.

15 »sed de his rebus, prout ingenio meo committere potui, ex libris ineffabilis doctrinae Persei praeceptoris seorsum libellum composui Lactantius Placidus.« Sweeney (as note 13), p. 411, 575-578

16 »... in usum lectorum communium ...«, *ibid.*, p. vii.

on his sons, is really just *discordia*.¹⁷ Lactantius commentary lacks an *accessus* and an *argumentum* (brief summary) to Book I of the *Thebaid*, the existence or non-existence of which has generated much scholarly debate.¹⁸ There is no *vita auctoris*, no stated *intentio*, with which the reader can learn about the man behind the poem.

Before the main medieval commentary on the *Thebaid* appears in the 12th century, there were different recensions of the Lactantius commentary circulating in the margins of manuscripts of the *Thebaid*. In the 10th century, contemporaneous with the general 9th-to-12th-century upward trend in the production of manuscripts of Statius¹⁹, the lack of an *accessus* was remedied, as manuscripts begin to appear which feature an introduction beginning with the words *Queritur quo tempore*.²⁰ It is largely just a brief biography which uses, in true Isidorean fashion, etymology as a tool for describing the stylistic qualities of a work in order to strengthen the case for its *auctoritas*. Statius is Surculus Papinius Statius via confusion with one Statius Ursulus, a rhetor from Gaul mentioned by Jerome. Whereas Statius is his personal name, and Papinius his family name, he is called Surculus, »quasi sursum canens«.

This early tradition of writing new *accessus* – which, beginning in the 9th century, become both logically and actually separable from the marginal and continuous commentaries which they *sometimes* accompany in the manuscripts – continues into the 12th century, when someone whom scholars think was either Anselm of Laon or perhaps one of his students composed commentaries on Vergil and Statius which would go on to become the most widely distributed from the 12th to the 15th century, eclipsing even their venerable predecessors Servius and Lac-

17 Oedipus commands the Fury, »i media in fratres«, to which the commentator adds »signum est discordiae«. Ibid., p. 13, 277.

18 Two examples: Lowell Edmunds, on the basis of a gloss in the commentary (Ad I.64) seeming to announce the existence of an *argumentum* to Book I, along with the existence of a life of Oedipus which this argument should have contained in the Old French *Roman de Thèbes*, thought that it existed but had been lost; see Lowell Edmunds, »Oedipus in the Middle Ages«, in: *Antike und Abendland* 22 (1976), pp. 140-155, here pp. 140-148. An argument against its existence, rejecting the evidence of the gloss on I.64 on stylistic grounds, can be found in Anderson (as note 5), p. xxii.

19 Of 85 manuscripts copied from the 9th to the 12th century, two were copied during the 9th, nine in the 10th, nineteen in the 11th, and sixty-five in the 12th. See Birger Munk Olsen, »La réception de Stace au moyen âge (du ix^e au xiii^e siècle)«, in: Andreas Bihrer and Elisabeth Stein (eds.), *Nova de veteribus. Mittel- und neulateinische Studien für Paul Gerhard Schmidt*, Munich and Leipzig 2004, pp. 230-246, here p. 230.

20 50 out of 253 surviving manuscripts of the *Thebaid* contain this *accessus*, according to Anderson (as note 5), p. 4. The observations which follow are based on Anderson's edition of this *accessus* in the same volume.

tantius in popularity and influence.²¹ To date, these commentaries have not been edited or published in their entirety. In the *accessus* to the commentary on Statius (commonly called *In principio*)²², although he is cited by name, Servius's seven *circumstantiae* have been supplemented considerably. *Qualitas carminis* has been retained, but its subdivisions have been made into their own categories: *modus tractandi* (sometimes history, sometimes poetic fiction, sometimes allegory) and (sometimes) *quo genere stili utatur* (humble, medium, grandiloquent). In some manuscripts, *quem auctorem imitetur* has been separated from *scribentis intentio*²³, which is still a discussion of the author's likely particular, historical motivation for writing. Finally, the influence of Boethius's first commentary on Porphyry and perhaps Aristotle as mediated through Boethius has produced entirely new headings, *materia* (the poem's subject matter), *finalis causa* (its usefulness for you and me, elsewhere *utilitas*), and *cui parti philosophiae supponatur*²⁴, which is, as in all of the classical poets subject to commentary in the High Middle Ages, ethics.

These last two *circumstantiae* break new ground for the reading and interpretation of the poets in schools. The intellectual focus of the *accessus* genre has shifted since Servius. The *Thebaid* could of course be intended to win its author wealth and fame and nothing else, or to dissuade two brothers from conflict leading to mutual ruin²⁵, in which case its widespread medieval use is due to convention

21 Violetta de Angelis established, via a detailed analysis of cross-references between 12th-century commentaries on the *Aeneid* and *Thebaid* contained in their earliest witness (Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Ms. lat. fol. 34), that the two commentaries had the same origin and tentatively proposed Hilarius of Orléans as their compiler. See Violetta de Angelis, »I commenti medievali alla *Tebaide* di Stazio: Anselmo di Laon, Goffredo Babione, Ilario d'Orléans«, in: Nicholas Mann and B. Munk Olsen (eds.), *Medieval and Renaissance Scholarship* (Mittellateinische Studien und Texte 21), Leiden 1997, pp. 75-136.

22 Published in Anderson (as note 5), pp. 38-44.

23 »Quem actorem imitetur in fine operis sui ipsemet insinuat, dicens ›Uive precor nec tu diuinam Eneida tempta‹ et cetera.« (86rb) See also Anderson (as note 5), p. 41 for the identical testimony of other manuscripts on this point.

24 »Sex omnino, inquam, magistri in omni expositione praelibant. Praedocent enim quae sit cuiuscumque operis intentio, quod apud illos σκοπός uocatur; secundum, quae *utilitas*, quod a Graecis χρήσιμον appellatur; tertium, qui ordo, quod τάξις uocant; quartum, si eius cuius esse opus dicitur, germanus propriusque liber est, quod γνήσιον interpretari solent; quintum, quae sit eius operis inscriptio, quod ἐπιγραφὴν Graeci nominant... sextum est id dicere, *ad quam partem philosophiae cuiuscumque libri ducatur intentio*, quod Graeca oratione dicitur εἰς ποῖον μέρος φιλοσοφίας ἀνάγεται.« *In Isagogen Porphyrii Commenta*, ed. by Samuel Brandt, Vienna-Leipzig 1906, pp. 4 f. (emphasis mine).

25 »[...] cum tempore Domiciani Romam undique poetas confluere Stacius audierat, ibique ad maximos honores provehi, tandem Romam venit et qualiter populo Romano et imperatori placere posset diu apud se excogitavit.« OR »Quidam enim dicunt quod mortuo Uespasiano, filii eius Titus et Domitianus in tantam regni cupiditatem exarserunt ut fraternalis odium incurrerent. Ad quorum dehortationem auctor iste Thebanam proposuit describere historiam [...]«, *ibid.*, pp. 39 f.

and perhaps also something like intrinsic merit. But it could also be a reflection on the dangers which attend the will to political power, a timeless theme²⁶, and this intention is not necessarily incompatible with the first one suggested.

Subordinating a literary work to philosophy is not an obvious move from a 21st-century literary-critical perspective. In high-medieval literary *accessus*, all epic poems are classified under ethics. Edwin Quain showed its origin in a tradition of Peripatetic commentary on the *Organon* for which the issue of classification was a pressing one. Peripatetics and Stoics in the Roman Empire were divided among themselves over whether logic was simply a tool of philosophy (Peripatetics) or a part of philosophy, and therefore to be investigated in its own right (Stoics). For someone commenting on Aristotle's logical works, then, this *περίστασις* would be a starting point for serious argument.²⁷ But to claim that the failure to conform its intention to that of its origins means that this *circumstantia* is merely perfunctory for medieval schoolmen and has lost all meaning – as Quain does – is surely false. Bernard of Utrecht would remind us that all human knowledge is part of philosophy, including the knowledge of how to act well.²⁸ William of Conches is very specific in his justification for subordinating Boethius's *Consolatio* to ethics²⁹, and the *In principio accessus* describes the different branches of knowledge into which ethics can be divided.³⁰ This *circumstantia* may have been applied for different reasons by different masters, but it was not applied carelessly.

A typology of the sorts of commentary which the author-redactor of *In principio* practiced will give the reader a preliminary idea of the commentary's contents. *In principio* is extremely conservative, observing the Servian standard closely with the notable exception that the 12th-century commentary feels free to use the Bible as a reference when advancing interpretations of certain Greek myths. I will divide my examples from the text into five categories of commentary which often but not always exist as separate glosses and are introduced by their own formulaic phrases. This commentary has not been critically edited or

26 »Finis ad quem tendit talis est, ut uisis utriusque partis incommodis tale non aggrediamur officium per quod simile incurramus periculum.« Ibid. (I am here following the version contained in the Berlin manuscript for the sake of consistency, since the excerpts from the commentary which follow were transcribed from this witness.)

27 Quain (as note 5), pp. 37 f.

28 »Philosophia ergo est diuinarum et humanarum rerum cognitio, bene vivendi coniuncta studio, constans scientia ut in rebus certis, aut opinione ut in incertis, et aut inspectiva aut activa est.« R. B. C. Huygens (ed.), *Accessus ad auctores, Bernard d'Utrecht, Conrad d'Hirsau, Dialogus super auctores. Édition critique*, Leiden 1970, pp. 67, 231-234.

29 »... quia de moribus est sermo.« William of Conches, *Glosae super Boetium*, ed. by Lodi Nauta, Turnhout 1999, p. 55.

30 »Ethice autem due sunt partes, economica, qua proprie dispensamus familie (economicus enim dispensator interpretatur), <et politica>. Politica est scientia que ad regnum ciuitatum est necessaria (polis enim ciuitas interpretatur).« Anderson (as note 5), pp. 40 f.

published in its entirety.³¹ I am currently preparing a full edition. The quotations which follow are transcribed from Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Ms. lat. fol. 34, the oldest witness to the text.

The first form of commentary seems designed to teach students how to read with an eye on grammar and how to identify and name rhetorical devices. At the beginning of the epic, when Statius speaks of the alternating rule of the sons of Oedipus, the commentator clarifies a part of speech and its relation to another:³² Ad I.2: »[ALTERNATING RULE] FOUGHT OVER that is, warred over, [that] on account of which the brothers fought. A participle without an origin in a verb.«³³ Again, after Oedipus prays to Tisiphone that she should enact his desired revenge against his disrespectful sons, the Fury takes notice of him, and the commentator uses Latin grammar to explain why the poet was not more explicit about the object of his verb: Ad I.89: »[Tisiphone] GIVES HEED turns towards him. A preposition in a compound.«³⁴ Then there is rhetoric. The end of the *In principio accessus* is a discussion of the rhetorical structure of epic poetry:

This author, about to write the history of Thebes, in the manner of others who write correctly, proposes, invokes, and narrates. He proposes where he says »brotherly battle-lines« etc. He invokes where he says »Whence do you bid me begin, goddesses?« He narrates where he unfolds his narrative, namely in this place: »[Oedipus, having] already [probed] his impious [eyes] with his guilty [right hand]« etc.³⁵

When Statius asks the Muses where to begin his tale, a rhetorical device is introduced: Ad I.4: »ENTER that is, take up the beginning. Or ENTER that is, enter into – and that is aphairesis – that is, begin the narrative.«³⁶ Finally, Statius's syntax, convoluted at first to the modern or medieval student of Latin, is also given rhetorical explanation. Adrastus, king of Argos, when he wakes to the sound of Polynices and Tydeus fighting, remarks that none of his citizens would be so bold: Ad I.440: »UP TO THE POINT hysteron proteron. ›One

31 Simone Invernizzi, in an unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, produced an edition of the commentary on Books VII-XII on the basis of the four manuscripts which transmit it in the continuous format; »Le glosse alla Tebaide attribuibili a Ilario d'Orléans [libri VII-XII]«, 2011.

32 All of the translations into English which follow are my own, unless otherwise specified.

33 »DECERTATA id est debellata, propter quod fratres decertauerunt. Participium sine uerbi origine.« (86rb)

34 »ADVERTIT ad ipsum uertit. Prepositio est in compositione.« (87va)

35 »Actor iste, thebanam scripturus hystoriam, more aliorum recte scribentium proponit, inuocat, narrat. Proponit ubi dicit ›fraternas acies‹ et cetera. Inuocat ubi dicit ›Unde iubetis ire, dee?‹ Narrat ubi lectionem suam explanat, ibi scilicet: ›Impia iam merita‹ et cetera.« (86ra)

36 »IRE id est initium sumere. Uel IRE id est inire – et est afferesis – id est narrationem inchoare.« (86rb)

of my citizens would not dare to extend the boundaries of his quarrel up to the point that he translated his conflict into the madness of combat.«³⁷

The second function of commentary in *In principio* is helping the student grasp the basic, literal meaning of the text, what late-antique and medieval commentaries refer to as its *sensus*. Again, at the beginning of the poem, Statius tells us that Pierian fire causes him to »unravel« guilty Thebes. Lest the unsophisticated student be defeated by a metaphor, the commentator intervenes:

Ad I.2: TO UNRAVEL that is, to describe in an unravelling way. [The metaphor] is derived from thread which is rolled on a spindle. History is ›rolled up‹ before it is told, but, once told, it is unravelled. When history has been unfolded, in what order events occurred is soon declared. Or [the author] said ›to unravel‹ for this reason: that the whole affair was tangled up. For Jocasta was both the mother and wife of Oedipus and the mother and grandmother of her sons, and Oedipus was both the son and husband of Jocasta and the father and brother of his children. The author will go on to explain all of this.³⁸

Sometimes explaining the *sensus* involves reordering the syntax of Latin poetry to more closely resemble the syntax of the romance vernaculars. This restructuring is often introduced with the word *ordo*: Ad I.395-396: »TO WHOM Adrastus. The order is as follows: TO WHOM PHOEBUS PROPHESED THAT SONS-IN-LAW WOULD COME, A BRISTLING BOAR AND A GOLDEN LION, namely AN OMEN RUINOUS TO RELATE epehexesis.«³⁹

The third function of commentary (and one of the two preferred modes of Lactantius Placidus, the other being the *sensus explicandus*) is providing the reader with the historical, mythological, religious, and natural-philosophical background information needed to understand the poet's imagery. Sometimes the information needed is the brief retelling of a myth to which Statius merely alludes without explanation. The introduction to the *Thebaid* gives a variety of possible starting points for the narrative in a series of rapid-fire allusions to Theban history. Statius mentions

37 »IN VSQVE histeron proteron. ›Cuius meus litis sue finem adeo extendere non auderet, ut litigium transferret in furorem manuum.« (90rb)

38 »EVOLVERE id est euolute describere. Sumptum est a filo, quod fuso inuoluitur. Hystoria uero inuoluta est antequam narretur, sed narrata euoluitur, qua explicita quo ordine res geste sint mox declaratur. Uel ideo dixit ›euoluere‹, quia totum fuit inuolutum. Nam Iocasta et mater et uxor Edipi fuit et filiorum suorum mater et auia. Edipus uero filius Iocaste et maritus, filiorum suorum pater et frater, quod totum actor iste explanabit.« (86rb)

39 »CVI Adrasto. Ordo: CVI PHEBVS CANEBAT ADVENTARE GENEROS SETIGERVM SVEM ET FVLVVM LEONEM scilicet MONSTRVM EXITIABILE DICTV effehexesis.« (90ra)

Ad I.4-5: THE ORIGINS that is, the first beginnings OF A DIRE PEOPLE namely, the Theban [people]. For Agave killed her son, and Athamas, while insane, killed his own son, Learchus, and Oedipus, when his father had been killed, lay with his mother. Ethiocles and Polynices likewise fell by mutual wounds. Because of all of this, [Stattius] says ›guilty‹ and ›dire‹. ›SIDONIAN SEIZURES here are the origins. A fable is known in which Jupiter, having taken on the appearance of a bull, seized Europa, the daughter of Agenor, the king of Tyre and Sidon. Agenor sent Cadmus to seek her and forbade him to return without his sister. Cadmus sought her, did not find her, did not return, and founded Thebes while in exile. Thus the abductor of Europa was the founder of Thebes.⁴⁰

Sometimes the information needed is astronomical. In describing the speed of Tisiphone's response to Oedipus's prayer, Statius says that she was swifter

Ad I.92: AND [FASTER THAN] FALLING STARS [The author] spoke according to opinion. For the truth of the matter is that stars never fall but seem to fall. They are fixed in the firmament, because of which they are called stars from the verb for standing. The [apparent] falling of stars is of two kinds: wordly and heliacal, wordly when, because of the turning of the world, that is, the firmament – which is called ›the world‹ antonomastically – they are not visible to our eyes, heliacal, that is, solar, when they are obscured by the presence of the sun, but they do not then fall into the junctures of their orbits. Those who study natural philosophy say that, when wind or rain are imminent, the lower air usually collides with the higher air, and from this collision sparks shoot forth which resemble the falling of stars.⁴¹

Finally, sometimes what the reader needs is information about foreign and/ or ancient religious practices. After Jupiter declares that the Fates have decreed

40 »PRIMORDIA id est prima exordia DIRE GENTIS scilicet Thebane. Nam et Agaue filium interfecit et Athamas insanus filium suum Learchum et Edipus patre occiso cum matre concubuit. Ethiocles quoque et Pollinices mutuis cecidere uulneribus. Unde ait ›sontes‹, inde dicit ›dire‹. SIDONIOS RAPTUS ecce primordia. Nota est fabula quomodo Iuppiter in specie tauri Europam filiam Agenoris regis Tyri et Sidonis rapuit, ad quam querendam misit Agenor Cadmum et ei sine sorore reditum interdixit. Cadmus eam quesuit, non inuenit, non rediit, et in exilio Thebas edificauit. Sic igitur raptor Europe Thebanum fuit exordium.« (86rb)

41 »ET LAPSIS ASTRIS Secundum opinionem locutus est. Nam in rei ueritate astra numquam cadunt sed cadere uidentur. Fixa sunt in firmamento, unde et stelle dicuntur a stando. Duplex est stellarum casus: mundialis et Eliacus, mundialis quando uolutione mundi id est firmamenti – quod antonomasice mundus dicitur – nostris uisibus non apparent, Eliacus id est solaris quando solis presentia obscurantur, sed neque tunc cadunt, immo in iuncturis absidum occultantur. Dicunt physici quod uentis uel pluuiis imminentibus solet iste inferior aer collidi superiori, et inde quedam scintille profluunt que casum stellarum imitantur.« (87va)

to him that Thebes and Argos should be destroyed, Juno delivers a persuasive speech in an attempt to avert this destruction. In it, she asks him why he does not simply destroy every polity which cultivates the worship of Juno and leave untouched only those, like Egypt, which do not:

Ad I.265: AND THE MOURNING STREAMS OF THE BRONZE-SOUNDING [NILE] Osiris [was]the husband of Isis and the brother of the giant Typhon, by whom he was torn apart limb from limb. Isis, sounding trumpets around the Nile, sought him for a long time. According to Ovid, who said ›Osiris, never sufficiently sought‹ (*Metamorphoses* IX.693) he was not found. A thing is not sufficiently sought which is not found. According to Juvenal, who said ›it is a pleasure to proclaim what the people shout to Osiris when he has been found (*Satires* VIII.29-30), he was found. In order to imitate this grief of Isis, the Egyptians sounded trumpets around the Nile each year. It is for this reason that he says ›bronze-sounding‹.⁴²

The final two functions of medieval Statian commentary are, as far as I can tell, the least represented in the extant manuscripts, but they are significant, I think, for the history of commentary generally. The fourth function is a sort of textual criticism in which the readings of different manuscripts are compared (introduced by a couple of formulaic phrases taken from Lactantius, such as *quidam dicunt* and *quidam libri habent*) and the commentator's preference for one over the others is sometimes, but not always, given and justified. While the Argives prepare to go to war, the seers Amphiaraus and Melampus practice augury and notice ill omens for the coming war in the sky, such as the dominant presence of vultures and hawks:

Ad III.508-509: [A BIRD BETTER FOR AUGURIES DID NOT COME, BUT A VULTURE, AND HAWKS FROM ABOVE EXULTED IN THEIR] LOFTY PLUNDER that is, great [plunder], not that which they seize in the air but that which they seize on the earth. Certain books have WHICH [IS A] VULTURE (instead of BUT A VULTURE) and, in that case, read [this line] in the following way: ›a vulture, which is better for auguries than other birds, did not come.‹⁴³

42 »ET ERISONI LVGENTIA FLVMINA Osiris, maritus Isidis, frater Tiphonis gygantis, ab eo membratim est discerptus, quem Isis sonans era circa Nilum diu quesuiuit. Secundum Ouidium non est inuentus, qui ait: ›numquamque satis quesitus Osiris‹. Res non est satis quesita que non est inuenta. Secundum Iuuenalem est inuentus, qui ait: ›exclamare libet populus quod clamat osiri/ inuento‹. Ad hunc dolorem Ysidis representandum singulis annis circa Nilum era sonabant Egyptii. Ideo ait ›erisoni‹. (89ra)

43 »PRO ALTIS RAPINIS id est magnis, non quas in aere faciunt sed quas in terris fecerunt. Quidam libri habent QVI VVLTVR, et tunc ita leges: ›non uenit uultur qui est melior auguriis. quam cetere aues.‹« (99rb)

While the Seven Against Thebes and their armies are assembling at Argos, Statius gives us a vivid ekphrasis of Capaneus's armor:

Ad IV.172: STIFF because a hydra was depicted dying there. AROUND on the perimeter of the shield and in the middle of the water was a hydra. Or, on account of this: because he says ›stiff‹ he notes that a swamp (the dwelling place of the Lernaean hydra) is sluggish. Certain books have ›burning‹ but [that reading] should refer to the hydra burning, that is, spewing venom.⁴⁴

Finally, the last function of commentary is allegory, the revelation of philosophical truth under the letter of the text. It was obviously important to the commentator that, if Statius' epic should be subordinated to that branch of philosophy known as ethics, the proof of that classification should be made clear in its exposition. However, I should also note that this approach is *largely* – although not exclusively – limited to the commentary on Book I, as if the author of *In principio*, like Fulgentius and Pseudo-Bernardus Silvestris commenting on Vergil, found the approach to be unsustainable across the entirety of the work. The commentator's reading of the myth of Amphion and the walls of Thebes rests on the rocky ground of a pun:

Ad I.10: AMPHION BID THE MOUNTAINS APPROACH TYRIAN WALLS Zetus and Amphion were born from Jove, under the guise of a satyr, and Antiope, imprisoned on account of Dirce, whom Lycus had brought home as a wife to replace Antiope. Of the two, Zetus was a hunter, but Amphion was a musician, who is said to have constructed the walls of Thebes with the sound of his lyre. For stone willingly climbed atop stone and placed itself on a heap of the others. This was nothing other than that Amphion, whose name means ›circuitous‹, with his eloquence and wisdom taught hard-headed (›rocky‹) and uncultivated men how to live together as one.⁴⁵

In a move resembling that by which Hugh of St. Victor described the natural similitude between water and the grace of the Holy Spirit which justifies and

44 »TORPENS propter ydram ibi morientem est depicta. CIRCVM in circuitu clipei et in medio aque erat ydra. Uel propter hoc quod dicit, ›torpens‹, notat esse paludem pigram. Quidam libri habent ›torrens‹, sed referendum est ad ydram torrentem id est uenenum euomentem.« (101vb)

45 »AMPHION IVSSERIT ACCEDERE TIRIIS MONTES MVRIS Zetus et Amphion a Ioue in specie satyri geniti sunt de Antiopa inclusa propter Dirce quam superduxerat ei Licus. Quorum Zetus uenator fuit, Amphion uero musicus, qui sono testitudinis muros Thebanos dicitur constituisse. Lapis enim super lapidem sponte ascendebat et in aliorum congerie se locabat. Quod nichil aliud fuit nisi quod Amphion – qui ›circuitus‹ interpretatur – homines lapideos et incultos sapientia et eloquentia sua una docuit habitare.« (86va)

even necessitates their coming together in the sacrament of Baptism⁴⁶, our commentator interprets the gadfly which will stimulate Statius to poetic invention in the following way: Ad I.32: »WHEN I, STRONGER BECAUSE OF MY GADFLY that is, in spirit or wisdom. [The author] calls it a gadfly because of a specific likeness, for just as a gadfly pricks animals and sets them in motion, so the spirit [does to] the poet.«⁴⁷

This fifth function, namely the impulse to allegorize, is best known from its most extreme examples, such as Pseudo-Bernardus Silvestris' commentary on the first six books of the *Aeneid*. Although these sorts of commentaries do not seem to have been as widely distributed or as influential as their grammar-school counterparts (if the number of extant manuscripts is any indication), it would be remiss to pass them over while talking about medieval commentaries on Statius. The allegorizing tendency and the use of etymology to achieve it are taken to their logical extreme in another 12th-century commentary on the *Thebaid*. Present today in one manuscript, this work was falsely attributed to Fulgentius the Mythographer, although the influence of the 6th-century author on this work is clear (*Commentariolum super Thebaiden*).⁴⁸ Here we see the tendency towards etymological interpretation present since at least the 10th century in its most extreme and fully developed form. Poets are marvelous for wrapping truth in fiction with great skill, says the anonymous author in a passage which resembles some found in 13th-century Scriptural commentaries, and the poem is, metaphorically, a nut; the task of the intellectual adult is not to play with the shell – the literal words of the narrative – but to crack it and get at the mystical kernel of truth.⁴⁹ This very short treatise pushes the powers of even spurious etymology to its limits in order to present the *Thebaid* as a *psychomachia*. Thebes (Thebae) is »theosbe« or »dei bonum«, and it represents the human soul armed with the virtues.⁵⁰ Thus it is ruled by Laius, »lux ayos« or »lux sancta«.⁵¹ His

46 Hugh of St. Victor, *De sacramentis Christianae fidei*, ed. by Jacques-Paul Migne, *Patrologia latina* (176), Paris 1854, p. 318 (Book I, p. 9, c.ii): »Debet enim omne sacramentum *similitudinem quamdam* habere ad ipsam rem cuius est sacramentum, secundum quam habile sit ad eandem rem suam repraesentandam ... Est ergo aqua visibilis sacramentum, et gratia invisibilis, res sive virtus sacramenti. Habet autem omnis aqua ex naturali qualitate *similitudinem quamdam* cum gratia Spiritus Sancti; quia, sicut haec abluit sordes corporum, ita illa mundat inquinamenta animarum.«

47 »CVM EGO FORTIOR OESTRO id est spiritu uel sapientia. Oestrum uocat per similitudinem specialem, nam sicut oestrum animalia commouet et pungit, ita spiritus poetam.« (87ra)

48 Convincingly dated by Brian Stock, »A Note on *Thebaid* Commentaries. Paris, B.N., lat. 3012«, in: *Traditio* 27 (1971), pp. 468-471. The text has been edited by Sweeney (as note 13), pp. 607-704.

49 *Ibid.*, vv. 1-24.

50 *Ibid.*, vv. 52-59.

51 *Ibid.*, vv. 59-64.

son »Edippus«, so-named from *hedus*, a young goat, is a mischievous animal, as Ovid attests.⁵² In his youthful mischief, he kills his father without knowing his identity, which is to say that he drives the divine light from the human soul while not recognizing that the divine is the source of its being.⁵³ He then defiles Jocasta, or *iocunditas casta*⁵⁴, as youthful mischief is wont to do. Thus do his sons, Polynices (*polis* = multum and *nichos* = victor, therefore luxuria, to which many succumb) and Ethiocles (*ethos* = mos and *ocleos* = interitus, therefore morum interitus, therefore avaritia) embodied violations of the Golden Mean⁵⁵, struggle for control of Thebes, or the human soul.⁵⁶ The climax is the arrival of Theseus (*theos suus*), the king of Athens, who stands for God and who combats the Theban regent Creon (*superbia*, which is *cremens omnia*) – who refused to allow the deceased partisans of Polynices to be buried – at the prayerful bidding of the suppliant Argive women (a demonstration of *humilitas*), or human emotions.⁵⁷ As Theseus' arrival comes when the Argive women seek aid at Athens' altar of mercy (*clementia*), the victory of Theseus over Creon signifies the liberation of the human soul from vice by the *clementia* of God.⁵⁸

3) The Reception of *In principio*: First Discoveries

The 12th-century *In principio* commentary is the one which seems to have exerted the most influence over other types of literature, from verse epistles to theological tracts to Biblical commentary to Old French romance. Here is one example of a passage in the commentary which percolated throughout the Latin tradition. It involves a scene in the last book of the *Thebaid*, in which the widows of the Argive men who died in the war, distressed by the Theban regent Creon forbidding the burial of the bodies of the enemy dead, travel to Athens to seek a champion for their cause. They come upon a curious monument whose description is unlike anything else in Statius: the *Ara Clementiae*, the altar of Clemency, which is described at length. No expensive offerings adorn the altar, no image of the deity is to be seen, only the wretched are accepted as suppliants, and the powerful may not approach.⁵⁹ Even Oedipus would eventually find forgiveness here.⁶⁰ The

52 Ibid., vv. 71-74.

53 Ibid., vv. 77-79.

54 Ibid., v. 65.

55 »nascuntur et alia opera speciem uirtutis, sed non uirtutem habentia, quae sunt duo filii.« Ibid., vv. 83-84.

56 Ibid., vv. 85-92.

57 Ibid., vv. 168-173.

58 Ibid., vv. 174-177.

59 Donald E. Hill (ed.), *P. Papini Stati Thebaidos libri XII*, Leiden 1983, pp. 321 f. (XII.481-505).

60 »[...] mox hospita sedes/uicit et Oedipodae Furias [...]«, ibid., p. 322 (XII.510).

12th-century commentator sees in this passage an echo of the Judaeo-Christian understanding of God. He says:

When St. Paul had come to Athens to preach, he found Dionysius the Areopagite, a man most wise, whom, when he could not convince him, he led around the altars of the gods, asking to whom each belonged. He came at last to this altar and asked whose it was. Dionysius said to him: »It is the altar of the unknown god.« Then blessed Paul replied: »He whom you call ›unknown‹, he alone is known«, and he began his speech in the following way: »God is known in Judea« etc.⁶¹

Peter Abelard, in the third book of his *Theologia christiana*, while discussing this very altar, says the following:

Indeed, the great philosopher Dionysius the Areopagite is read to have shown the altar of this unknown god to Paul the Apostle at Athens, that city known for its learning. This is indeed, unless I am mistaken, that altar of mercy on which suppliants do not make burnt offerings, but only that offering of the Brachmani, namely prayers and tears. Clearly, this is the altar which Statius also recalls in his twelfth book, saying: »In the middle of the city was an altar, dedicated to none of the powerful/ gods, gentle Clemency there placed her abode.«⁶²

The parallel is made even closer when one considers Abelard's desire elsewhere sharply to distinguish between *miseriordia* and *clementia*, for example in his *Dialogus inter philosophum, Iudaeum et Christianum*; one is a virtue and the other can be a vice. In the *Theologia christiana*, Abelard not only associates the altar in Acts 17 with the one in *Thebaïd* XII but also takes up the *clemential miseriordia* equation exactly as it is found in a nearby *In principio* gloss (Ad I.48r): »[Statius] specifies the place to which the descendants of Pelops withdrew, namely the altar of mercy (*miseriordia*), which was in the middle of the city [...]«.⁶³ Anyone who

61 »[...] cum beatus Paulus athenas predicaturus aduenisset, inuenit Dionisium Ariopagitam, uirum prudentissimum, quem cum non potuisset conuincere, duxit eum per singulas aras deorum inquirendo cuius esset. Tandem ad hanc aram peruenit et inquisiuit cuius esset, cui Dionisius ›ara est ignoti dei‹. Tunc beatus Paulus: ›quem ignotum appellas, solus ille notus est, et sermonem suum sic inceptit: ›Notus in Iudea Deus‹, et cetera.« (112vb)

62 »Cuius quidem ignoti dei aram magnus ille philosophus Dionysius Areopagita Paulo apostolo apud egregiam studiis ciuitatem Athenas legitur ostendisse. Haec quidem, ni fallor, illa est ara misericordiae cui a supplicibus non immolabatur nisi illud Brachmanorum sacrificium, hoc est orationes uel lacrymae; cuius uidelicet arae et Satus in XII meminit, dicens: ›Urbe fuit media nulli concessa potentum/ Ara Deum, mitis posuit clementia sedem.« Peter Abelard, *Theologia Christiana*, ed. by E. M. Buytaert, Turnhout 1969, III.45, lines 569-577. The discovery of this parallel was originally made by De Angelis (as note 20), p. 123.

63 »VRBE FVIT locum determinat, ad quem secesserunt Pelopeides, scilicet ad aram misericordie, que in medio urbis erat ... (112va).«

has obtained a measure of the man from reading the *Historia calamitatum* can understand how powerfully an instance of Abelard cutting against the grain of his own thought can argue for his reliance on a source.

The early-14th-century Biblical *Postilia* of Nicholas of Lyra, while glossing this passage in Acts, also briefly recount the history of the Altar to the Unknown God. He says that mercy (*misericordia*) placed her seat in Athens, where an altar was consecrated to her, using Statius's diction almost exactly as it appears in the epic. Because mercy was not a being known to human beings as other gods were, this altar was dedicated to the unknown god.⁶⁴ Statius is thus seen to have grasped and correctly described something, even if in shadowy figure, of the true, Christian God. The school tradition of Roman epic has influenced the exegesis of the Bible.

The *Thebaid* and its commentary tradition also seem to have inspired the first surviving instance of that literary genre which would go on to become the most popular form of literary fiction in the Western world: the novel. The first Old French romance, the *Roman de Thèbes*, is an adaptation of the *Thebaid* to the cultural tastes and material conditions of 12th-and-13th-century France and Britain. Significant portions of the romance, however, deal with myths surrounding ancient Thebes which are not to be found in Statius. The most obvious example is the detailed life of Oedipus which serves as the romance's introduction, running to 554 lines in the earliest recension which survives today.⁶⁵ Three books⁶⁶ and an article⁶⁷ have attempted to find the source of this short biography in scattered details in Lactantius' commentary, as well as in accounts found in an expanded text of the Second Vatican Mythographer and free-standing lives in various individual *Thebaid* manuscripts, similarities among which are supposed to be explained by their use of a common source, the putative lost introduction to Lactantius' commentary mentioned above. All of these sources, however, contradict the account given in the *Thèbes* in one or more of the story's significant details, such as the order of events – whether Oedipus encounters his father while going to or from Delphi – the form of the Sphinx's riddle, or the content of Apollo's prophecy to Oedipus concerning his father. The only sources which have been published

64 David Anderson, *Before the Knight's Tale: Imitation of Classical Epic in Boccaccio's Teseida*, Philadelphia 1988, p. 163.

65 The »short« or »francien« version, edited by Guy Raynaud de Lage, *Le Roman de Thèbes*, 2 Vols., Paris 1966-1968.

66 Lewis Gary Donovan, *Recherches sur »Le roman de Thèbes«*, Paris 1975; Arianna Punzi, »*Oedipodae confusa domus*«. *La materia tebana nel Medioevo latino e romanzo*, Rome 1995; Sylviane Messerli, *Edipe enténébré. Légendes d'Edipe au XIIIe siècle* (Nouvelle Bibliothèque du Moyen Âge 64), Paris 2002.

67 Lowell Edmunds, »Oedipus in the Middle Ages«, in: *Antike und Abendland* 22 (1976), pp. 140-155.

to date which do not contradict the romance are a 14th-century *argumentum* to Seneca's *Oedipus* play⁶⁸ and the life of Oedipus given in a gloss on *Thebaid* I.46 in the *In principio* commentary, following a comment that this is where the story ought to begin.⁶⁹ The *vita* reads as follows in the Berlin manuscript:

Laius, the king of Thebes, since he had heard in oracles that he would be killed by his own son, forbade his wife, Jocasta, when she was about to give birth, to raise the child which she would bear, but ordered her that she should kill him. Jocasta, influenced by maternal devotion, spared her child, giving orders that his feet be pierced and that he be exposed in the woods, where he was found by the king Polybus, who, because he was sterile, gave orders that the child be brought up as his own son. When the child had become an adult, someone taunted him, claiming that he was not Polybus' son but was found in the forest. [Oedipus] went to take counsel with Phoebus and inquire whose son he was, who said »Go forth, and slay the man who first encounters you. Thus will you discover your father.« Then, when he had come to the city of Phocis, he encountered his father, Laius, in the entrance to the city and, not knowing that he was his father, killed him and snatched the diadem from his head. This done, he set out for Thebes, knowing that he was now the king of Thebes, but not that he had killed his father. He then unknowingly took his mother, Jocasta, as wife, with whom he fathered Ethiocles and Polynices, Antigone and Ismene. But when his mother was caressing him one night, as was the wife's custom, she discovered the scars on his feet, and she revealed to her son where he had received these punctures. When he recognized the sin which had been thus revealed, [Oedipus] blinded himself, and, having cast aside the crown of the kingdom, he entered a cave.⁷⁰

68 Transcribed by Arianna Punzi, in: dies. (as note 66), p. 226.

69 »facta propositione et inuocatione, actor narrationem inchoat, utens artificiali ordine, quia secundum naturalem ordinem sic potius inchoaret ...« (87ra)

70 »Laius, rex Thebarum, cum audisset in oraculis quod a filio suo interficeretur, partu imminente mulieri sue scilicet Iocaste interdixit tollere quod pareret, sed ut interficeret. Que materna ducta pietate filio parcens plantas eius perforari precepit et filium in siluam proici, ubi a rege Polibo est inuentus, qui, quia sterilis erat, eum pro suo precepit educari. Cui adulto improperatum est a quodam quod Polibi filius non erat, sed inuentus in nemore. Ueniens ergo consiluit Phebum cuius filius esset, qui ait: »Uade, et hominem qui tibi primus occurret interfice. Sicque patrem inuenies.« Cum ergo Phocidem ciuitatem deuenisset, patri suo Laio in ingressu ciuitatis obuiauit et eum patrem suum ignorans interfecit et diadema de capite eius arripuit. Quo facto Thebas proficiscens sciens quidem se regem Thebarum non autem patrem interfecisse Iocastam reginam sibi nesciens esse matrem duxit uxorem de qua Ethioclen et Pollinicen, Antigonem et Hysmenem genuit. Sed, cum mater eum muliebri mansuetudine de nocte palparet, pedum cicatrices inuenit et fossurasque filio ubi eas accepisset exposuit. Qui facinus quod patuerat recognoscens se exoculauit et corona regni deposita speluncam intrauit.« (87ra-b)

As in the prologue to the *Roman de Thèbes*, and unlike every other published medieval life of Oedipus – except for the aforementioned *argumentum* to Seneca, whose date is too late to have influenced a 12th-century romance whose short recension discussed here survives in a 13th-century manuscript – Oedipus consults Apollo *before* encountering Laius on the road. The specific wording of Apollo's oracle to Oedipus in the *In principio vita* is nearly identical to the one in the *Thèbes*; in fact, one looks very much like a straightforward translation of the other. One need only compare *In principio's* »Uade, et hominem qui tibi primus occuret interfice. Sicque patrem inuenies«, with the romance's »... Quant tu seras/ issuz de ci, si trouveras/ un houme que tu ocirras;/ ainsi ton pere connoistras.«⁷¹ Finally, there is the famous Sphinx's riddle, which asks for the identity of an animal which walks during one part of the day on a certain number of legs, then on a different number during another part of the day, etc. The number of legs varies widely according to the medieval version of the riddle which one consults. In the short recension of the *Thèbes*, the numbers follow the chiasitic pattern four, three, two, three, four.⁷² If we look at a gloss in our manuscript which is found slightly after the one containing the *vita* of Oedipus (ad I.67), we find an opinion about the form of the riddle: »Some say that the riddle was ›which animal first walked on four feet, then three, then two, then three again, and later again on four.‹ Oedipus solved it.«⁷³ Here, I will handily wield Ockham's Razor and claim that, where we do not have to posit any source except a manuscript of the *Thebaid* containing glosses from *In principio*, we should not posit a source of which the romancer had no need and for which we have no evidence of availability in the 12th century.

The preceding example⁷⁴ suffices to show that medieval commentary on the *Thebaid* was the one of the important filters through which Statius' masterpiece was received by the first medieval romance. Through its commentary tradition, then, the *Thebaid* could serve as a wellspring of poetic inspiration and creative enthusiasm, a role which it can – and should – continue to perform for us latter-day *moderni*.

71 Raynaud de Lage (ed.), (as note 65), vv. 203-206.

72 Ibid., vv. 317-330.

73 »Quidam dicunt hoc problema fuisse ›quod animal primum cum .iiii. pedibus iret, postea tribus, postea duobus, et postea item tribus, post iterum cum quatuor.‹ Quod Edipus soluit.« (871b)

74 I am currently compiling a list of other borrowings from *In principio* in the *Roman de Thèbes* as a part of my in-progress Ph.D. thesis.