From Dutiful Name-Dropping to Warm Esteem: Dante’s Statius between De Vulgari Eloquentia, Convivio III and Convivio IV.XXV

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ABSTRACT
Dante’s inclusion of Statius among De Vulgari Eloquentia’s catalogue of Latin poets and his use of Statius’s Thebaid in Convivio III–IV are well-known. Yet critical literature overlooks the significant development in Dante’s treatment of Statius over the course of the two opere minori. This article argues that Dante’s qualitatively different approach to Statius between De Vulgari Eloquentia, Convivio III, and Convivio IV. XXV both sheds light on Dante’s reading programme in exile and acts as a prelude to Dante’s engagement with Statius in Inferno and creation of Stazio-character in Purgatorio. Close analysis of Dante’s changing engagement with Statius between De Vulgari Eloquentia, Convivio III and IV. XXV suggests Dante first encountered Statian epic in extracted form, stimulating Dante’s interest such that he read the Thebaid in entirety. Dante’s use of Statius in Convivio thus signals the beginning of Dante’s intense engagement with Statian epic that culminates in the Commedia.

KEYWORDS
Dante; Statius; Convivio; De Vulgari Eloquentia; the Commedia; the Thebaid

Introduction

Dante’s Commedia (c. 1307–21) provides the clearest testament to his esteem for the Latin poet Statius.1 Scholarly discussion of Dante’s Statius thus tends to focus on Dante’s masterwork, and particularly on those aspects of the Commedia where that esteem is most evident – Inferno’s Statian characters and episodes and Stazio-character’s presence in Purgatorio.2 Yet Dante first mentions Statius in De Vulgari Eloquentia (c. 1302–05), first cites Statius’s epic poem the Thebaid in Convivio’s (c. 1304–13) third book and, by its fourth, freely uses exempla from the Thebaid to illustrate vergogna, a virtue of adolescenza, humankind’s first

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1 Dante Alighieri, Commedia, ed. by Giorgio Petrocchi, 2nd revised edition, 4 vols, Le Opere di Dante Alighieri, Edizione nazionale a cura della Società Dantesca Italiana (Florence: Le Lettere, 1994).

2 On Statian intertextuality in Inferno, see, for example, George F. Butler’s two articles on Dante’s giants (‘Statius, Lucan, and Dante’s Giants: Virgil’s Loss of Authority in Inferno 31’, Quaderni d’italianistica, 24 (2003), 5–21; ‘Statius and Dante’s Giants: The Thebaid and the Commedia’, Forum Italicum, 39 (2005), 5–17) and Robert Hollander’s two articles on the Ugolino episode based on Tydus’s cannibalism in the Thebaid (‘A Note on Inferno XXXIII, 37–74: Ugolino’s Importunity’, Speculum, 59 (1984), 549–55; ‘Ugolino’s Supposed Cannibalism: A Bibliographical Note and Discussion’, Quaderni d’italianistica, 6 (1985), 64–81). For a more sustained analysis of Statius’s Thebes in Inferno see Ronald Martinez, ‘Dante, Statius and the Earthly City’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of California, Santa Cruz, 1977). On Stazio-character in Purgatorio, see, for example, Giorgio Brugnoli, ‘Stazio in Dante’, Cultura Neolatina, 29 (1969), 117–25; Giorgio Padoan, Il pio Enea, l’empio Ulisse: Tradizione classica e intendimento medievale in Dante (Ravenna: Longo, 1977), pp. 125–50; Teodolinda Barolini, Dante’s Poets: Truth and Textuality in the Comedy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 256–86; Luca Carlo Rossi, ‘Prospettive filologiche per lo Stazio di Dante’, in Dante e la “bella scola” della poesia: autorità e sfida poetica, ed. by Amilcare A. Iannucci (Ravenna: Longo, 1993), pp. 205–24; and more recently, Peter Heslin, ‘Statius in Dante’s Commedia’, in Brill’s Companion to Statius, ed. by William J. Dominik, Carole Elizabeth Newlands, and Kyle Gervais (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 512–26; and Amand Weppel, ‘Dante’s Stazio: Statius and the Transformations of Poetry’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Notre Dame, 2016). Ettore Paratore’s 1976 Encyclopaedia Dantesca entry ‘Stazio’ remains useful in both contexts.

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These Statian moments in *De Vulgari Eloquentia* and *Convivio* have been widely noted, particularly in commented editions of the two treatises like those referenced in this article. Nevertheless, they have enjoyed minimal critical attention, beyond Edward Moore’s count of *Convivio’s* Statian resonances, Teodolinda Barolini’s succinct discussion of Dante’s use of Statius in both *De Vulgari Eloquentia* and *Convivio*, Amanda Weppler’s brief mention of the Statian references contained in Dante’s two treatises, and the cross-references to *Convivio IV* in Valter Leonardo Puccetti’s recent essay on Dante’s Statius.4

No scholar has yet discussed Dante’s use of Statius in *De Vulgari Eloquentia* and *Convivio* in any depth, nor considered the development in that use and its broader significance to studies of Dante’s intellectual formation.5 This is surprising given the continuing interest in the intertextuality of Dante’s oeuvre with that of his predecessors, including the classical poets, and in the evolution of that intertextuality.6 Nevertheless, Ulrich Leo’s fascinating observations in his now classic article regarding Dante’s changing use of the classical poets in general between *Convivio I–IV, xxiv* and IV. *xxv* onwards prove informative.7 While Leo prefers Vergil to Statius when focussing on specific authors, the model Leo proposes for Vergil is also ripe for discussion vis-à-vis Statius, particularly in light of the recent scholarship on both Statius himself and Dante’s readings of him. This article responds to that challenge.

This article argues for the existence of a meaningful, qualitative difference in Dante’s approach to Statius between *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, *Convivio III*, and *Convivio IV, xxv*, which has not previously been noticed. This developing and increasingly enthusiastic approach to Statius both tells us much about Dante’s reading programme in exile, and acts as a prelude to Dante’s intense engagement with Statius in *Inferno* and his creation of Stazio-character in *Purgatorio*. Firstly, through consideration of Statius’s absence from Dante’s classical canon in the *Vita Nuova* (c. 1283–c. 1295), a brief discussion of Statian epic’s availability in medieval Florence and of Dante’s schooling there, this article suggests that Dante did not encounter Statian epic to any significant extent prior to his exile.8 Subsequently, through analysis of Dante’s listing of Statius among his catalogue of quintessential Latin poets in *De Vulgari Eloquentia II*, vi. 7, this article asserts the significance of that list to our understanding of Dante’s encounter with Statius and with classical poetry more widely during his exile. Finally, through exploring Dante’s use of the *Thebaid* in *Convivio III* and IV, this article marks how that use develops from *Convivio III*’s translation of Latin into Italian to the confident paraphrasing and warm regard of *Convivio IV, xxv*. Studies that discuss Dante’s use of the *accessus* to Statius, while primarily focussing on Dante’s biography of Stazio-character in *Purgatorio xxii*, prove instructive here.9 This affirms the insights this developing use of Statius in Dante’s minor works gives us regarding Dante’s reading

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3 Dante Alighieri, ‘De Vulgari Eloquentia’, ed. by Pio Rajna, in *Le Opere di Dante* (Florence: Società dantesca italiana, 1960) and *Convivio*, ed. by Franca Brambilla Ageno, Le Opere di Dante Alighieri, Edizione Nazionale a cura della Società Dantesca Italiana, 3 vols (Florence: Le Lettere, 1995). Quotations from these texts throughout this article are drawn from these editions. Statius, *Thebaid*, ed. and trans. by David R. Shackleton Bailey, 2 vols, Loeb Classical Library, 207 and 498 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). Quotations and translations from the *Thebaid* throughout this article are drawn from this edition.

4 Edward Moore, *Studies in Dante*, with new introductory matter ed. by C. Hardie, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969 (1896)). i, pp. 243–55; Barolini, pp. 190–93; Weppler; and Valter Leonardo Puccetti, ‘Quale Stazio per Dante’, in *I classici di Dante*, ed. by Paola Allegretti and Marcello Ciccolo (Florence: Le Lettere, 2017), pp. 215–39.

5 On Dante’s intellectual formation more generally, see, for example, Anna Pegoretti, ‘Filosofanti’, *Le Tre Corone*, 2 (2015), 11–70; and Zygmunt G. Barański, ‘On Dante’s Trail’, *Italian Studies*, 72.1 (2017), 1–15.

6 On the ongoing need to pay ‘serious attention’ to Dante’s oeuvre’s ‘intertextual make-up’ to establish ‘the substance of [Dante’s] knowledge, while tracing its shifting and evolving character’, see Barański, p. 7. For recent discussions of Dante’s classical canon, see, for example, Winthrop Wetherbee, *The Ancient Flame: Dante and the Poets* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), and *I classici di Dante, passim.*

7 Ulrich Leo, ‘The Unfinished *Convivio* and Dante’s Re-Reading of the *Aeneid*, Mediaeval Studies, 13 (1951), 41–55.

8 Dante Alighieri, ‘Vita Nuova’, ed. by Michele Barbi, Le Opere di Dante (Florence: Società dantesca italiana, 1960).

9 See for example, Brugnoli; Violetta de Angelis, ‘Magn[a] questio preposita coram Dante et domino Francisco Petrarca et Virgiliano’, *Studi petrarchieschi*, NS 1 (1984), 103–209; and Rossi.
programmed in exile and his ongoing engagement with Statian epic. This article thus establishes that Dante’s use of the Thebaid in Convivio represents only the beginning of his intense study of that epic, which culminates in the Commedia.

**Statius’s Absence from Vita Nuova XXV. 9’s Classical Poetic Canon**

Prior to departing Florence for exile, Dante almost certainly lacked any real familiarity with Statius’s poetry. Statius is markedly absent from Dante’s first catalogue of his classical poetic forebears and thus from Dante’s first overt attempt to claim auctoritas through alluding to his intellectual inheritance from these great auctores. In this first catalogue, as Dante justifies his and his fellow dicitori di rima’s appearing to make ‘Amore essere corpo’ (VN XXV. 2), Dante stakes their claim to poetic auctoritas, affirming that the dicitori di rima ‘non siano altro che poete volgari’ and thus benefit from greater licence than prose-writers (VN XXV. 7). Accordingly, Dante argues that just as the poete address inanimate objects, both real and imagined, ‘si come se avessero senso e ragione’ and concepts lacking substance speak in their texts ‘si come se fossero sustanzie e uomini; degno è lo dicitore per rima di fare lo somigliante’ (VN XXV. 8). Yet despite Statius’s renowned allegorical personifications of abstract concepts, particularly in the Thebaid, Dante provides no examples from Statian epic to substantiate his claim. Instead he uses exempla from Vergil, Lucan, Ovid, and Horace to support his assertions and even mentions Homer (whom he did not know in its original Greek) (VN XXV. 9). The lack within Vita Nuova XXV’s catalogue of any paradigm from Statius is striking. Moreover, Dante does not appear to have translated or paraphrased any lines from Statius’s poetry or to allude directly to that poetry either in the Vita Nuova’s poems or anywhere else in Dante’s accompanying self-exegesis. Instead, Dante relies throughout the Vita Nuova on that same ‘canone ridottissimo di auctores’ that he cites ‘con onore’ in chapter XXV.

Dante’s ignorance of Statian poetry prior to his exile and consequent omission of Statius from the Vita Nuova’s hall of classical poetic fame probably resulted from the dearth of Statian manuscripts in Dante’s Florence and the limitations of Dante’s youthful education in the classics. It is highly unlikely that Dante knew Statius’s collection of occasional verse, the Silvae, as prior to Poggio Bracciolini’s ‘rediscovery’ of the collection in 1417, it did not circulate widely. While Violetta de Angelis believes that Statius’s authorship of the collection may have been known in Italy prior to this, the Silvae does not appear to have been present in Dante’s Florence, and Dante seems never to have known the collection. Dante’s attribution of a Toulousan birthplace to Stazio-character some years

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10 On medieval notions of authorship and auctoritas, see, for example, Alastair J. Minnis, *Medieval theory of authorship*, 2nd edn (Aldershot: Wildwood House, 1988); and Albert Russell Ascoli, *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 3–64.

11 On Dante’s reservation of the term poeta for the classical poets until VN XXV and its use in that chapter to claim auctoritas for vernacular poetry, see Ascoli, p. 68, n. 2. On Dante’s claim to poetic auctoritas throughout the Vita Nuova, see Michelangelo Picone, ‘La teoria dell’auctoritas nella Vita nova’, Tenzione, 6 (2005), 173–91.

12 On these abstract personifications, see, for example, Denis Feeney, *The Gods in Epic: Poets and Critics of the Classical Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Paperbacks, 1993), pp. 364–91.

13 On Dante’s ‘canone ridottissimo di auctores’ and his challenge to their auctoritas in the Vita Nuova, see ‘L’auctoritas nella Vita Nova’, p. 176.

14 On Dante’s education in the classics, see for example, Charles T. Davis, *Dante’s Italy and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), passim; and Barański.

15 Statius, *Silvae*, ed. and trans. by David R. Shackleton Bailey, Loeb Classical Library, 206, Corrected Edition (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

16 On the marginal note referring to the Silvae in a manuscript known to be in Italy by the fourteenth century (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (BAV), MS Barb. lat. 74), see ‘Magna questio’, pp. 179–80. On the possibility that the Paduan Lovato dei Lovati knew the Silvae, see Ronald G. Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients: The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 95–100.
later (in Purg. xxi, 89), rather than Neapolitan as Silvae III. 5 tells us, and Stazio-character’s failure to mention the Silvae when listing his oeuvre (Purg. xxi, 92–93), seem to confirm Dante’s lack of acquaintance with the Silvae.17

Dante almost certainly would not have read the Thebaid in his natal city either. Dante’s Florence did not have a university and inventories of the libraries of the three mendicant studia (‘schools’) demonstrate that their scarce holdings of classical poetry did not include Statius’s epic retelling of the ‘Seven Against Thebes’ myth, even had Dante been able to access the texts contained in these libraries.18 Moreover, Robert Black found no twelfth- or thirteenth-century copies of the Thebaid in his study of Latin school texts contained in Florentine libraries, and the two fourteenth-century copies he identified long post-date Dante’s exile.19

It is nearly as unlikely that Dante encountered the Achilleid during his time in Florence.20 The epic, which narrates Achilles’ youth, education, and departure for the Trojan War, appears to have enjoyed some popularity as a school text in parts of twelfth-to-thirteenth century Europe. It appeared in the so-called Liber Catonianus collection of texts with Cato’s Distichs, Theodulos’s Eclogue, Avianus’s Fables, Maximianus’s Elegies, and Claudian’s De raptu Proserpine.21 However, despite Marcus Boas’s confirmation that twenty-four manuscripts of the Liber Catonianus contain some lines of the Achilleid, only three of these seemingly originate from Italy.22 Black lists one late twelfth-century Italian manuscript of the Achilleid of a school type in a Florentine library and no thirteenth-century copies of either Statian epic.23 The six fourteenth-century copies of the Achilleid that Black identified probably post-date Dante’s exile in 1302.24

Moreover, in the Vita Nuova, Dante appears to use extracts of Vergil, Ovid, Lucan, and Horace drawn from florilegia of classical poetry or grammar texts.25 Medieval grammarians used such extracts to instruct students through detailed examination of syntax and to introduce them to literary analysis.26 Such texts were then used throughout a medieval reader’s life to provide models of excellence in Latin composition and versification.27 Thus, rather than complete texts, medieval readers often knew citations, excerpted auctoritates collected in reference volumes, including florilegia, sententiae, encyclopedias, and other compendia.28 Dante draws many of the quotations he utilises from such compulsory volumes.29

17 On the controversial suggestion that Dante knew the collection, see Aulo Greco, Il Canto XXII del ‘Purgatorio’, in Lectura Dantis Scaliger: Purgatorio (Florence: Le Monnier, 1971), pp. 831–61, (pp. 853–54) and contra Paratore. On Dante’s replication in Purg. xxi, 89 of St Jerome’s confusion of the poet Publius Papinius Statius with the orator Lucius Statius Ursulus from Toulouse, see Brugnoli, p. 118.

18 On the three studia and their libraries see Charles T. Davis, ‘The Early Collection of Books of S. Croce in Florence’, Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society, 107.5 (1963), 399–414; Dante’s Italy, pp. 149–57; Charles T. Davis, The Florentine Studia and Dante’s “Library”, in The Divine Comedy and the Encyclopaedia of Arts and Sciences, ed. by Giuseppe Di Scipio and Aldo Scaglione (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1988); and Giuseppina Brunetti and Sonia Gentili, ‘Una biblioteca nella Firenze di Dante: i manoscritti di Santa Croce’, in Testimoni del vero. Su alcuni libri in biblioteche di autore, ed. by Emilio Russo (Rome: Bulzoni, 2000), pp. 21–55 (p. 21). On the lack of evidence of Dante’s enrolment in any of the studia and his consequent inability to access their libraries or attend their private lessons, see Anna Pegoretti, ‘Filosofanti’, Le Tre Corone, 2 (2015), 11–70 (pp. 11–12); and Barański, pp. 11–12.

19 Robert Black, Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy: Tradition and Innovation in Latin Schools from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 186–217.

20 Statius, Achilleid, ed. and trans. by David R. Shackleton Bailey, Loeb Classical Library, 498 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

21 On the Achilleid’s popularity in medieval Europe, see Marcus Boas, De librorum Catonianorum historia atque compositione, Mmicosyne, NS 42 (1914), 17–46; Paul M. Clogan, The Medieval ‘Achilleid’ of Statius (Leiden: Brill, 1968); and Harald Anderson, The Manuscripts of Statius, 3 vols (Arlington, VA: self-published, 2009), ii, p. 31.

22 See Wepller, pp. 10–14, cross-referencing Boas with Anderson’s provenance for these manuscripts (The Manuscripts of Statius, ii, passim).

23 Black, p. 190.

24 Ibid., p. 217.

25 On Dante’s probable use of florilegia of classical poetry rather than his reading of entire poems apropos VN XXV. 9, see Leo, pp. 58–59.

26 Witt, p. 8.

27 On such excerpts’ use in medieval education in grammatica (Latin language), see Paul F. Gehl, A Moral Art: Grammar, Society and Culture in Trecento Florence (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 96–106, and Black, pp. 64–172.

28 Barański, p. 12.

29 Ibid., p. 7.
However, his failure to utilise any exempla from Statius or to reference Statian poetry more implicitly in the Vita Nuova suggests that Dante probably had not yet encountered extracts of Statian epic in such compendia by this time or, if he had, that he was not able to attribute them to Statius.

**Dante’s Exile, Statius, and the De Vulgari Eloquentia**

Instead, Dante’s first encounter with Statian epic almost certainly occurred during the early years of his exile. Dante names Statius for the first time only in the Latin treatise De Vulgari Eloquentia, as he instructs his readers regarding suitable models for each mode of writing.30 Before listing Orosius, Livy, Pliny, and Frontinthus as suitable prose models, Dante avers:

Nec mireris, lector, de tot reductis authoribus ad memoriam: non enim hanc quam supremam vocamus constructionem nisi per huiusmodi exempla possimus indicare. Et fortassis utilissimum foret ad illam habituandam regulatos vidisse poetas, Virgilium videlicet, Ovidium Metamorphoseos, Statium atque Lucanum.

[Nor should you be surprised, reader, if so many authorities are recalled to your memory here; for I could not make clear what I mean by the supreme degree of construction other than by providing examples of this kind. And perhaps it would be most useful, in order to make the practice of such constructions habitual, to read the poets who respect the rules, namely Virgil, the Ovid of the Metamorphoses, Statius, and Lucan].

Dante may have read these texts in Verona’s Biblioteca Capitolare, during his diplomatic mission to the city for around 10 months in 1303 to 1304.32 Alternatively, Dante may have encountered Statius during his time in Bologna, where Fenzi and Tavoni believe Dante began the De Vulgari Eloquentia, with Tavoni even asserting that Dante wrote it for the city.33 It is also possible, but less likely, that Dante came across Statius’s poetry in the private library of one of his wealthier friends during these early years of his exile.34

Dante probably first read excerpts of Statian epic in a florilegium, grammar, or other compendium of classical poetic extracts, rather than encountering the full text of the Thebaid or Achilleid. Florilegia circulating in the Middle Ages often included extracts of Statius’s poetry, with Birger Munk Olsen listing five florilegia in manuscripts originating in Italy between the eleventh and fourteenth century containing Statian excerpts.35 Even if the florilegia Dante knew in Florence did not contain Statian extracts, his new post-exile circles could have introduced him to the same kinds

30On the dating of this treatise, which internal evidence suggests was written during the early years of Dante’s exile, see, for example, Maria Corti, Scritti su Cavallieri e Dante: La felicità mentale Percorsi dell’invenzione e altri saggi (Turin: Einaudi, 2003), pp. 145–66; Mirko Tavoni, “‘Introduzione’ to ‘De Vulgari Eloquentia’”, ed. by Mirko Tavoni, in Dante Alighieri, Dante Alighieri: Opere I, ed. by Claudio Giunta, Guglielmo Gorni, and Mirko Tavoni (Milan: Mondadori, 2011), pp. 1067–116; Enrico Fenzi, ‘Introduzione’, in Dante Alighieri, De vulgari eloquentia, ed. by Enrico Fenzi, Luciano Formisano, and Francesco Montuori, Nuova edizione commentata delle opere di Dante, ii (Rome: Salerno, 2012), pp. xix–xlii; and Enrico Fenzi, ‘Dal Convivio al De Vulgari Eloquentia’, in Il Convivio di Dante, ed. by Johannes Bartuschat and Andrea Aldo Robiglio (Ravenna: Longo, 2015), pp. 83–104.

31Translations of the treatise throughout this article are taken from Steven Botterill, De Vulgari Eloquentia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

32On Dante’s mission to Verona, see Marco Santagata, Dante: Il romanzo della sua vita (Milan: Mondadori, 2012), pp. 156–58. On Dante’s possible encounter with these texts in Verona’s Biblioteca Capitolare, see Tavoni, pp. 1100–01; and Fenzi, p. xxi.

33On Dante’s time in Bologna and the De Vulgari Eloquentia, see Fenzi, p. xxiv; Tavoni, pp. 1114–16. On Dante’s time in Bologna, and the improbability of Dante having begun Convivio in these early years of his exile, see Gianfranco Fioravanti, “‘Introduzione’ to Convivio”, ed. by Gianfranco Fioravanti, in Dante Alighieri, Dante Alighieri: Opere II, ed. by Gianfranco Fioravanti, Claudio Giunta, Diego Quaglioni, Claudia Villa, and Gabriella Albanese (Milan: Mondadori, 2014), pp. 5–79 (pp. 13–16).

34On Dante’s connections who might have possessed their own libraries, including Brunetto Latini and Francesco da Barberino, see Dante’s Italy, p. 143. On Lovato dei Lovati and his Paduan coterie’s potential collection of classical poetic texts, see Witt, pp. 95–100.

35Birger Munk Olsen, ‘Les classiques latins dans les florilèges médiévaux antérieurs au XIIe siècle’, Revue d’histoire des textes, 9 (1979), 47–121 (pp. 66–68 and 70–72); Birger Munk Olsen, ‘Les classiques latins dans les florilèges médiévaux antérieurs au XIIe siècle (suite)’, Revue d’histoire des textes, 10 (1980), 115–64 (p. 119); and Birger Munk Olsen L’étude des auteurs classiques latins aux Xle et Xlle siècles, 4 vols (Paris: CNRS éditions, 1982–2014) ii, Florilèges, pp. 521–67, 861–62, 867, and 871–72. On florilegia containing excerpts of the Thebaid circulating in the Middle Ages more generally, see Dominique Battles, The Medieval Tradition of Thebes: History and Narrative in the ‘Roman de Thèbes’, Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Lydgate (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 1–18.
of collection mentioned by Munk Olsen. As we saw in Vita Nuova XXV. 9, Dante knew how to use these texts and this familiarity may well have eased him into knowledge of this new classical author. In De Vulgari Eloquentia II. vi. 7, Dante similarly calls Statius only by name, without epithet or elaboration.\textsuperscript{36} Yet Dante mentions neither the Thebaid nor the Achilleid in the De Vulgari Eloquentia; the treatise contains no other express references to Statius or his poetry, and Dante neither translates nor paraphrases a single extract of Statian epic. Conversely, Dante mentions Vergil three times and quotes Vergil most frequently of all the poets. Dante even cites Horace although he omits him from the regulati poetae (DVE II. iv. 4).\textsuperscript{37} Accordingly, it seems likely that while Dante was aware of Statius’s poetic qualities and may well have encountered him in one of these compendia, Dante was not yet familiar with Statius’s poetry to any great extent.

Moreover, Dante’s recommendation to use Vergil, Ovid Metamorphoses, Statius, and Lucan as poetic models; their description as regulati; and Dante’s reference to reducing them to memory, suggest he encountered the poets grouped together in some form of educational text, used to provide poetic and/or moral instruction.\textsuperscript{38} This may well have been a florilegium, with three of the five Italian florilegia identified by Munk Olsen as containing extracts of Statius also containing extracts of Vergil, Ovid, and Lucan, inter alia.\textsuperscript{39} Alternatively, Dante may have found the poets grouped together in a compilation of moral sententiae.\textsuperscript{40} For example, one scholar has copied ‘Prouerbia Stacii’, alongside prouerbia from Ovid, Vergil, Lucan, and other classical authors in a thirteenth-century manuscript now kept in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.\textsuperscript{41} Statius’s Thebaid also appears to have been grouped with the poetry of Vergil, Ovid, and Lucan among the maiores, the classical authors reserved by the medieval ‘curriculum’ for more advanced study of Latin.\textsuperscript{42} Later in Dante’s lifetime, Statius’s grouping with Vergil, Ovid, and Lucan seems to have become almost a commonplace. Indeed, an extant letter from the Commune of Bologna in 1321 appoints Dante’s own correspondent Giovanni del Virgilio to teach ‘versificaturam et poesim et magnos auctores, videlicet Virgiliun, Statium, Luchanum et Ovidium’ [‘the writing of verse and poetry and the great authors, that is to say, Vergil, Statius, Lucan and Ovid’].\textsuperscript{43} This demonstrates the regard in which medieval readers held Statian epic and its use as a model in Latin composition. It suggests that Dante ’name-drops’ Statius here to demonstrate both Dante’s own erudite auctoritas and the auctoritas of the vernacular of which he writes, since it was worthy of emulating such lofty paradigms. After all, as we saw, Dante had already begun to challenge the classical poets in the Vita Nuova.

De Vulgari Eloquentia II. vi. 7’s catalogue of literary models thus makes evident the beginnings of Dante’s own esteem for Statius and his epic poetry. Statius’s position before the chronologically earlier Lucan is remarkable, although Vergil naturally holds pole position, closely followed by Ovid Metamorphoses. This new enthusiasm for Statius seems to have prompted Dante to begin reading the Thebaid in entirety. Dante’s lengthy exile gave him ample opportunity to do so.

\textsuperscript{36}On VN XXV. 9’s treatment of its classical poets, see Leo, pp. 58–59.
\textsuperscript{37}Barolini, p. 191.
\textsuperscript{38}On the use of extracts of classical poetry and memorisation in learning Latin and in providing moral instruction, see Gehl, passim; and Black, passim. On Statius’s use as a poetic model, see Battles, pp. 3–4 and as a moral guide, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{39}BAV, MS Ottob. lat. 1354 (eleventh century); Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Z. L. 497 (mid-eleventh century); and Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, lat. 7517 (late twelfth century). See, L’étude des auteurs classiques latins, II (1985), ‘Florilèges’, C.41 pp. 860–61, C.52, pp. 871–72, and C.72, pp. 875–76; and Les classiques latins dans les florilèges, 1979, no. 11, pp. 67–68, and no. 17, pp. 71–72, and 1980, pp. 119 and 151.
\textsuperscript{40}On medieval students’ listing of moral sententiae compiled from classical texts, see Black, p. 320.
\textsuperscript{41}BAV, MS Reg. lat. 1562, fols 34–57; ‘Prouerbia’ including ‘Prouerbia Stacii’ (fols 52v–53v).
\textsuperscript{42}On the division between auctores minores and maiores in an educational context see Gehl, pp. 53–54 and Black, pp. 173–74. On the study of the Achilleid among the minores and the Thebaid among the maiores, see Birger Munk Olsen, ‘La réception de Stace au moyen âge (du IX au XII siècle)’, in Nova de veteribus. Mittel- und neulateinische Studien für Paul Gerhard Schmidt, ed. by Andreas Bihler and Elisabeth Stein (Munich: Saur, 2004), pp. 230–46. On Statius in the Middle Ages more generally, see Robert R. Edwards, ‘Medieval Statius: Belatedness and Authority’ in Brill’s Companion to Statius, pp. 497–511.
\textsuperscript{43}Translation mine. See Black, p. 174.
**Convivio III: ‘Stazio Poeta’ and Dante’s Statian Translations**

Dante’s use of Statian epic in *Convivio III* suggests that Dante may have written it at roughly the same time as the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*. Dante may even have written the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* in the intervening period between writing *Convivio III* and *Convivio IV*’s later chapters, as Maria Corti suggests, although the delay between *Convivio*’s final two books is not entirely endorsed by scholarship. *Convivio III. viii.* 10 provides the treatise’s first verifiable indication that Dante had read any Statian epic, since it contains Dante’s first express citation of the *Thebaid*. Nevertheless, Dante’s use of Statius in *Convivio III* does not suggest that Dante had yet read anything more than the extracts of Statian epic included in a *florilegium*, grammar text, or other compendium.

Dante’s use of Statian quotations in *Convivio III* tells us much about his growing enthusiasm for and engagement with Statius, but also indicates his still limited knowledge of Statian epic. Just as Dante uses classical poetry to furnish exempla in *Vita Nuova* XXV. 9, thereby supporting his claim for auctoritas, in *Convivio III. viii.* 10 Dante draws upon Statius to illustrate how the eyes can display one’s inner sentiments, including shame. Dante explains that it is ‘si come dice Stazio poeta del tebano Edipo, quando dice che “con eterna notte solvete lo suo dannato pudore”’. This translates *Thebaid* I. 47–48 (‘merserat aeterna damnatum nocte pudorem’ [‘he sunk deep his shame condemned to everlasting night’]), although Dante substitutes the verb ‘merserat’ with ‘solvette’, the Italian equivalent of ‘solverat’ [‘he had dissolved’, *translation mine*].

Dante’s use of the *Thebaid* here illustrates several interesting aspects of Dante’s engagement with Statius and with classical poetry in general prior to *Convivio IV. xxv*. Firstly, Dante calls Statius merely ‘Stazio poeta’ (*Cvo III. viii.* 10) without adding the epithet ‘dolce’ as he does in *Convivio IV. xxv.* 6. This perhaps suggests that while he respects the Latin poet already, Dante does not yet regard Statius as warmly as he later comes to do. Alternatively, it could mean that Dante was not yet familiar with Juvenal’s description of the sweetness of Statius’s voice in *Satires* VII. 82–87. Secondly, Dante mentions the name (Oedipus) and the location (Thebes) succinctly and without further elaboration – a contrast with his later use of the *Thebaid* in *Convivio IV. xxv*. Finally, Dante gives the text in Italian and not in Latin. If we follow Leo’s theory, these aspects are characteristic of Dante’s use of Vergil, Lucan, and Statius in general in *Convivio I–IV. xxiv*, resemble Dante’s use of the classical poets in *Vita Nuova* XXV. 9 and as noted earlier, may even suggest that Dante did not source the quotations in *Convivio I–IV. xxiv* from the original texts. This would accord with Zygmunt G. Barański’s view that Dante draws many of the quotations he utilises from synthetical and compendial volumes. While none of the *florilegia* listed by Munk Olsen contain *Thebaid* I. 47–48, Oedipus was a widely known exemplum in the Middle Ages of the punishment befalling those who committed sexual transgression, primarily thanks to Statius’s *Thebaid*. Accordingly, it is possible that Dante found this section of the *Thebaid* extracted in some sort of compendial work. Yet Dante’s substitution of the Italian equivalent of ‘merserat’ with that of ‘solverat’ perhaps suggests his desire already to emulate but not imitate his classical forebears. (A more cautious view might be that Dante’s substitution resulted instead from a variation in the Statian manuscript tradition, due to the Latin verbs’ similar scansion, although Shackleton Bailey’s well-regarded edition of the *Thebaid* lists no variant for ‘solverat’.)

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44 On *Convivio*’s dating in general, see, for example, Fioravanti, ‘Introduzione’.
45 On the theory that Dante wrote *De Vulgari Eloquentia* in the intervening period between writing *Convivio I–III* and *Convivio IV*’s closing chapters, see Corti, pp. 145–66; and ‘Dal Convivio al De Vulgari Eloquentia’, p. 84 and n. 2.
46 Juvenal, ‘Satires’, in Juvenal and Persius, ed. and trans. by Susanna Morton Braund, Loeb Classical Library, 91 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
47 Leo, pp. 58–59. This theory would also coincide with the possible break in Dante’s composition of *Convivio* referenced earlier.
48 Barański, p. 7.
49 On Statius’s Oedipus and the punishment of sexual transgression, see Edward Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks Before the Blind: Medieval Constructions of a Disability* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), pp. 129–30.
Dante also appears to be forming a distinctive picture of the *Thebaid*’s women, whom Statius portrays as epitomes of virtue and ‘perfect specimens of womenkind’ on a ‘traditionally’ Roman model. Convivio III’s second Statian translation suggests that Dante is already developing a fascination with these unfortunate women’s tragic loyalty and virtue and they later appear in Virgilio-character’s catalogue of the souls in Limbo (Purg. xxii, 109–14). As Michelangelo Picone notes, the virtues these women possess later become Christian ones, and these women resonate with the Christian archetype of the *mater dolorosa*, ‘della donna che partecipa con dolore incommensurabile, ma anche con amore infinito, al sacrificio del proprio figlio’. No Statian woman illustrates this archetype better than Hypsipyle, who leaves Archemorus, the babe in her care, in the grass while she shows the Argive troops where to find water but returns to find him killed by a serpent (*Thebaid* IV–V). In Convivio III. xi. 16, after drawing first upon Vergil (*Aeneid* II. 281), Dante utilises Hypsipyle’s lament for the tragically deceased infant to illustrate the rhetorical device whereby ‘[per] alguno fervore d’animo, talvolta l’uno e l’altro termine de li atti e de le passioni si chiamano e per lo vocabulo de l’atto medesimo e de la passione’. Dante avers that the device is ‘si come dice Stazio nel quinto del *Thebaidos*, quando Isifile dice ad Archimoro: “O consolazione de le cose e de la patria perduta, o onore del mio servigio’” (Cvo. III. xi. 16). This translates *Thebaid* V. 609–10: ‘Archemore, o rerum et patriae solamen ademptae servitique decus’ [‘Archemorus, solace of my lost estate and country, pride of my servitude’].

Dante’s use of Statius’s *Thebaid* as an exemplar alongside Vergil’s masterpiece demonstrates the growing depth of Dante’s regard for Statian epic. However, again Dante merely names Statius and the textual locus; gives the characters’ names briefly; provides the text in Italian not Latin; and offers no further elaboration. Again, this implies Dante may have found these extracts in a *florilegium* or even a grammar text. After all, providing extracts of classical poetry as paradigms of grammatical principles or rhetorical devices as Dante does here was a *florilegium*’s defining purpose, as we saw earlier. Hypsipyle’s lament for the dead Archemorus at *Thebaid* V. 608–15 often appears among the extracts included in such *florilegia* and is highlighted frequently by medieval readers in manuscripts of the *Thebaid*. For example, the so-called ‘Cambridge Songs’, a mid-eleventh-century *florilegium*, includes *Thebaid* V. 608–16, while a *florilegium* found in a twelfth-century manuscript now found in Florence’s Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana contains *Thebaid* V. 608–15.

Given Hypsipyle’s heartrending tale, it is little wonder that Dante uses her lament not only as an exemplum in Convivio III, but becomes so engaged with her tragedy that he mentions her in *Inferno* xviii, 88–93, *Purgatorio* xxii, 112, and especially *Purgatorio* xxvi, 94–99, which expressly references Archemorus’s heart-breaking death and its near fatal consequences for Hypsipyle. Dante’s encounter with such moving and powerful extracts of Statian epic may well have prompted him to begin reading the *Thebaid* in full.

**Convivio IV. XXV: Dante’s surprising use of the *Thebaid***

By the time Dante wrote *Convivio* IV. xxv, his enthusiasm for Statian epic was gaining pace as he began to read the *Thebaid* from its beginning. Several manuscripts originating from or present in medieval Italy are listed among the more than 160 extant manuscripts of the *Thebaid* mentioned by Dominique Battles and the more than 253 extant manuscripts containing Statian material listed by

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50David Vessey, *Statius and the Thebaid* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 292.
51Michelangelo Picone, ‘Canto xxii’, in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis: Purgatorio*, ed. by Georges Güntert and Michelangelo Picone (Ravenna: Longo, 2001), pp. 333–51, (pp. 350–51).
52On Hypsipyle as *mater dolorosa*, see Puccetti, pp. 220–22.
53On *florilegium* containing Hypsipyle’s lament, see Battles, p. 3. Munk Olsen lists seven *Thebaid* manuscripts that highlight this passage, *L’étude des auteurs classiques latins*, ii, pp. 521–627.
54Cambridge, University Library, MS Gg.5.35-III, fol. 439v; Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS Plut. 38.7, fol. 58r. See Munk Olsen, *L’étude des auteurs classiques latins*, II (1985), Florilèges. C.11 (Carmina Cantabrigiensia) and C.17, p. 532, and C.31, p. 535.
Harald Anderson. The slightly later author Boccaccio had his own copy of the *Thebaid*. Sadly no trace of Dante’s library now remains and his oeuvre gives no express indication of when or how he read the *Thebaid*. Nevertheless, given Dante’s mounting excitement about Statius, it is unsurprising that by the time Dante wrote the *Commedia* he had such high regard for the *Thebaid* and its author that he used Statius’s Thebes as a model of hell and placed its author as Dante-pilgrim’s secondary guide in *Purgatorio*.

Dante’s increasing esteem for Statius is clear in *Convivio* IV. xxv, when Dante uses the *Thebaid* to provide exempla to illustrate vergogna, a virtue of adolescenza, the first of humankind’s four stages of life. Dante uses examples from Vergil, Ovid, and Lucan to illustrate the virtues of the remaining three stages: gioventute (*Cvo* IV. xxvi. 1–15), senettute (*Cvo* IV. xxvii. 1–21), and senio (*Cvo* IV. xxviii. 1–19), now using classical texts to claim not just poetic, but also philosophical auctoritas. Yet Dante’s stressing of the importance of adolescenza as ‘porta e via per la quale s’entra nella nostra buona vita’ (*Cvo* IV. xxiv. 9), before his description of this stage of life’s prevailing virtues (obedienza, soavitade, vergogna, and adornezza corporale, *Cvo* IV. xxiv. 11), augments our sense of Dante’s regard for Statius. Interestingly, in *Convivio* IV. xxiv. 12 Dante also foreshadows imagery that is fundamental to his *magnum opus* (cfr. *Inf.* 1, 1–3), as he asserts the necessity of obedienza: ‘così l’adolescente che entra nella selva erronea di questa vita, non saprebbe tenere lo buono cammino, se dalli suoi maggiori non li fosse mostrato’ (*Cvo* IV. xxiv. 12).

Dante’s use of Statius to provide moral exempla suggests that Dante probably read the *Thebaid* accompanied by one of its typical medieval paratexts – the accessus that attributed moralising intent to Statius and his poem, schooling Dante to find such paradigms in Statius’s epic. Dante had certainly read at least one such accessus by the time he wrote Stazio-character’s autobiography in *Purgatorio* xxi, with many eminent scholars discussing the accessus tradition as a possible source for this biography.

Dante’s growing confidence in dealing with classical poetry and his increasing familiarity with Statian epic manifests in his surprising decision to use episodes from Statius’s *Thebaid* to illustrate not a vice, but a virtue. Dante boldly reverses the accessus tradition’s general tendency to use the *Thebaid* to provide exempla of how to avoid vice and the tradition’s assertion that Statius’s own intention is to do so. Dante’s use of Statius’s poem to illustrate a virtue of adolescenza, a time of ‘acrescimento di vita’ (*Cvo* IV. xxiv. 1) is even more remarkable, since the *Thebaid* depicts a recurring cycle of violence that devastates countless young lives and, Statius implies, will continue to do so even after the poem’s conclusion. After all, this horrifying impiety and violence later led Dante to choose Thebes as a model for his hell and to utilise many of Statius’s impious sinners either

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55Battles, p. 1; Anderson, *The Manuscripts of Statius*, ii, p. 4 and passim. On Statius’s importance in the Middle Ages, see also Edwards.

56Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS Plut. 38.6 contains glosses in Boccaccio’s hand, see David Anderson, ‘Boccaccio’s Gloses on Statius’, *Studi sul Boccaccio*, 22 (1994), 32–66.

57On Dante’s access to and (lack of) acknowledgement of his source texts more generally, see Barański, passim.

58On Dante’s transition from claiming poetic to claiming philosophical auctoritas, see ‘La teoria dell’auctoritas’, passim.

59On the moralising aims attributed to the *Thebaid* by the Statian accessus, including its use as dissuader of vice, see Battles, p. 6; and especially *The Manuscripts of Statius*, ii, passim.

60On the probability that Dante knew the famous Queritur accessus and its similarities with Stazio-character’s ‘autobiography’, see Brugnoli, ‘Stazio in Dante’, and contra ‘Magna questio’. On Dante’s use of the Statian accessus tradition, see also Brugnoli, ‘Lo Stazio di Dante in Benvenuto’, in *Benvenuto da Imola lettore degli antichi e dei moderni*, ed. by Pantaleo Palmieri and Carlo Paolozzi (Imola: Longo, 1989), pp. 127–37; Giorgio Padoan, ‘Il Canto XXI del Purgatorio’, Nuove lettere dantesche, IV (Florence: Le Monnier, 1970), 327–54; Paratore; Violetta de Angelis, ‘Benvenuto e Stazio’, in *Benvenuto da Imola*, pp. 139–63; Rossi; and Violetta de Angelis, ‘I commenti medievali alla Tebaide di Stazio: Anselmo di Laon, Gooffredo Babone, Ilario d’Orleans’, in *Medieval and Renaissance Scholarship*, ed. by Nicholas Mann and Birger Munk Olsen, Mittelalterzeitliche Studien und Texte, 21 (Leiden: Brill 1997), pp. 75–136.

61For example, the accessus at fols 1r–2r, of the fourteenth-century manuscript Padua, Biblioteca del Seminario Vescovile, MS 41 asserts that ‘discordiam malasce mores dissuader intendat’ [it intends to dissuade us from discord and evil ways] (transcription and translation mine).
directly as characters (e.g., Capaneus; Amphiaraus) or as model for some of Inferno’s most disturbing scenes (e.g., the divided flame containing Ulysses and Diomedes (Inf. xxvi); Ugolino’s gnawing on Ruggieri’s head (Inf. xxxii–xxxiii)).

Dante also seems to foreshadow his later puzzling Christianisation of Stazio-character when Dante explains in Convivio IV. xxv. 3 that ‘è necessaria a questa etade la passione de la vergogna; e però la buona e nobile natura in questa etade la mostra […] la vergogna è apertissimo segno in adolescenza di nobiltade’. Dante qualifies that by vergogna, he means ‘tre passioni necessarie al fondamento de la nostra vita buona’, stupore, pudore, and verrecundia. These are necessary because ‘a questa etade è necessario d’essere reverente e disidiroso di sapere’; ‘rifrenato, si che non transvada’; and ‘penitente del fallo, si che non s’ausi a fallare’ (Cvo IV. xxv. 4). This desire ‘di sapere’ arises from humankind’s desire for its own perfection and therefore for God, the ultimate perfection, as Dante affirms in Convivio I. i. 1. This desire is the sete for the aqua vitae that becomes the leitmotif of the so-called Statian canti, Purgatorio xx and xxxii. Significantly, Christian salvation also requires souls to demonstrate the other aspects of vergogna – the exercise of free will and reason to avoid sin, and repentance of those sins that we commit. As Inferno demonstrates, failure to exercise all three in life results in the soul’s condemnation to hell upon death. According to Stazio-character’s fictional conversion account (Purg. xxxii), he exercised all three aspects of vergogna following his conversion, becoming a unique paradigm of a soul who has completed its purgation and is ready to join God. Nevertheless, Dante’s description of vergogna demonstrates Statius’s growing significance for Dante and Dante’s increasing knowledge of the Thebaid, but also furthers our surprise that he utilises this violence-driven text here.

**Statius’s Adrastus as Exemplum of ‘Stupore’**

At the time of writing Convivio IV. xxv, Dante had almost certainly moved beyond reading Statius in extracted form to beginning to read the text ‘tutta quanta’ like the Aeneid (Inf. xx, 114). Dante’s exemplum of stupore, the first aspect of vergogna, does not appear among the extracts of the Thebaid typically included in florilegia of classical poetry. Perhaps significantly, Dante now paraphrases rather translates from the Thebaid (I. 482–92) since in describing stupore, vergogna’s first aspect, Dante avers:

> E però dice Stazio, lo dolce poeta, nel primo de la Tebana Istoria, che quando Adrasto, rege de li Argi, vide Polinice coverto d’un cuoio di leone, e vide Tideo coverto d’un cuoio di porco salvatico, e ricordossi del risponso che Apollo dato avea per le sue figlie, che esso divenne stupido; e però più reverente e più disideroso di sapere.

_Cvo IV. xxv. 6_

This would accord with Leo’s assertion that Dante was (re)reading Latin poetry and understanding it more personally when writing these chapters of Convivio. Dante’s shift from translating to paraphrasing Statius seems to illustrate Dante’s growing confidence when dealing with classical poetry. The assimilation of Adrastus’s desire to know, wonder, and dutiful recalling of Apollo’s oracle, to humankind’s philosophical desire for wisdom and reverence for God resonates with the sete we see in Purgatorio’s Statian canti.

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62 On Statian intertextuality in Inferno generally and in the Ugolino episode specifically, see footnote 3. On Inferno xxxi, see, for example Emilio Mariano, ‘Canto xxvi’, in Lectura Dantis Scaligera: Inferno (Florence: Le Monnier, 1971), pp. 935–64.

63 Scholars who have tackled this crux of Dante’s engagement with Statius include, inter alia, Brugnoli, passim; Il pio Enea, pp. 125–50; Barolini, pp. 259–60; Paul M. Clogan, ‘Dante and Statius Revisited’, Medievalia et Humanistica, NS 35 (2009), 77–101, and most recently Heslin, who provides a useful summary of the various explanations for Stazio-character’s Christianity in ‘Statius in Dante’s Commedia’.

64 On sete in the Statian canti, see Gary P. Cestaro, _Dante and the Grammar of the Nursing Body_ (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), p. 138.

65 For details of Statian extracts contained in extant medieval florilegia, see, L’étude des auteurs classiques latins, ii, pp. 521–67. These do not include Thebaid I. 482–92.

66 Leo, p. 45.
Yet Dante’s use of Adrastus in Convivio IV. xxv. 6 suggests that Dante may not have read much past Thebaid I when he used this example. If Dante had read past Thebaid I, he could have found one of Statius’s rare examples of the virtues of adolescenza among young men. For example, Menoeceus desires to know the gods’ will and then sacrifices himself to save Thebes, obeying what he has learnt of that will (Thebaid X. 650–85). Instead, Dante utilises a man who is well past the twenty-five years that Dante himself asserts that adolescenza lasts (Cvo IV. xxiv. 2). Adrastus is ‘medio de limite vitae | in senium vergens’ [‘verging from life’s midway into old age’] (Thebaid I. 390–91). Again, this resonates with Inferno’s opening – this time to Dante-pilgrim as ‘Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita’ (Inf i, 1). In Thebaid III, Adrastus’s inciting of his subjects to arms on Polynices’s behalf and his own involvement in the Thebaid’s impious war mar his virtue and otherwise honourable conduct. Perhaps Dante chose Adrastus, a mature man, to emphasise the rarity of such virtue among the Thebaid’s male characters, or due to Adrastus’s siring of the two virtuous women Dante shortly uses as examples of vergogna. In any event Dante’s use of Adrastus here demonstrates that Dante has begun to read and appreciate the Thebaid’s complex themes in earnest.

Statius: ‘Lo Dolce Poeta’

In introducing this exemplum, Dante also admiringly calls the Thebaid’s author ‘lo dolce poeta’. This recalls Juvenal’s description of the tanta dulcedine with which Statius captured people’s minds (Satires VII. 82–87) and the similar sentiments captured in the Statian accessus, many of which quote Juvenal.\(^{67}\) For example, the Queritur accessus asserts that Statius was ‘clarus ingenio, doctus eloquio’ (line 7), perhaps because Juvenal mentions ‘ingenium and eloquium’ as ‘important virtues of a poet’, and then quotes Satires VII. 82–87 in full (lines 9–14).\(^{68}\) Significantly, Dante mentions Statius’s dolcezza again in Stazio-character’s claim regarding his ‘dolce […] vocale spirto’ (Purg. xxi, 88) and Virgilio-character even tells Stazio-character that Juvenal has spoken of him (Purg. xxii).\(^{69}\) Dante’s use of the epithet dolce in Convivio IV. xxv. 6 also seems to indicate his increasing regard for Statius, as previously Dante referred to Statius somewhat clinically as ‘Stazio poeta’ (Cvo III. viii. 10) or even just ‘Stazio’ (Cvo III. xi. 16). This would tally with Leo’s general observation that by the time Dante writes Convivio IV. xxv, he seems to have (re)read his Latin classics ‘with a completely new and personal reaction’, since he adds epithets to these poets’ names that display ‘veneration’ and ‘familiarity’.\(^{70}\)

Dante also regards Statius’s poem as more than mere fabula as he calls the Thebaid ‘la Tebana Istoria’ (Cvo IV. xxv. 6). Dante may well be recalling Statius’s own deliberate invocation of Clio, the Muse of History, rather than Calliope the Muse of Epic, in Thebaid I. 41. Dante expressly recalls Statius’s invocation of Clio (whom Statius invokes again at Thebaid X. 630) in Virgilio-character’s attempt to understand Stazio-character’s appearance among the Christian souls of purgatory (Purg. xxii, 58).\(^{71}\) This further connects Dante’s engagement with Statius in Convivio to that in the Commedia, providing further evidence of Dante’s increasing engagement with the Thebaid as he abandoned his philosophical treatise and embarked upon his poetic masterpiece.

\(^{67}\) On the Statian accessus and Statius’s poetic dolcezza, see The Manuscripts of Statius, iii, passim.

\(^{68}\) Ibid., p. 2.

\(^{69}\) On Statius’s dulcedo according to Juvenal and Dante’s allusion to it in both Convivio IV. xxv. 6 and Purgatorio xxi–xxii, see Alessandro Ronconi, ‘L’incontro di Stazio e Virgilio’, Cultura e Scuola, 13–14 (1965), 566–71. On Statius’s urbanitas in the accessus tradition see Rossi, pp. 209 and 218. On Dante and poetic dolcezza more generally, see James Goldstein, ‘Dolcezza: Dante and the Cultural Phenomenology of Sweetness’, Dante Studies, 132 (2014), 113–43.

\(^{70}\) Leo, p. 59.

\(^{71}\) On Purgatorio xxi, see for example Picone, ‘Canto XXII’.
The ‘Pudore’ of Adrastus’s Virgin Daughters

By the time of writing Convivio IV, xxv and despite only reading Thebaid I in depth, Dante’s grasp already of a fundamental aspect of Statius’s Thebaid – Statius’s embodiment in his female characters of the traditional Roman female values – is more apparent still. When Dante describes pudore as ‘uno ritrimento d’animo da laide cose, con paura di cadere in quelle; si come vedemo ne le vergini e ne le donne buone e ne li adolescenti, che tanto sono pudici’ (Cvo IV, xxv. 7), he chooses not a male adolescens to exemplify this virtue but Deiphyle and Argia, Adrastus’s virgin daughters. Dante also expressly signals his engagement with Thebaid I, as he avers:

Onde dice lo sopra notato poeta ne lo allegato libro primo di Tebe, che quando Aceste, nutrice d’Argia e di Deifile, figlie d’Adrasto rege, le menò dinanzi da li occhi del santo padre ne la presenza de li due peregrini, cioè Polinice e Tideo, le vergini palide e rubricunde si fecero, e li loro occhi fuggiro da ogni altrui sguardo, e solo ne la paterna faccia, quasi come sicuri, si tennero.

Cvo IV. xxv. 8

Dante’s description recalls Statius’s own account of Deiphyle’s and Argia’s modest blushing, contrasted with their pale skin, and their inability to meet anyone’s eyes but their ‘sacred father’s’:

noua deinde pudori  
uisa uirum facies: pariter pallorque ruborque  
purpureas hausere genas, oculique uerentes  
ad sanctum reidiere patrem.

[Then they saw men’s visages, new to their bashful eyes. Pallor and blush together consumed their radiant cheeks, and their eyes in shame returned to their reverend sire].

Thebaid I. 536–39

In this ‘recreazione del testo staziano’, Dante ‘si conferma […] non solo il maggior poeta della sua era ma anche la più grande intelligenza critica’ as Dante makes express what is only implicit in Statius – ‘la fuga dello sguardo da quello dei promessi’ and their ‘riposo dal proprio turbamento negli occhi del padre’.72

Significantly, Dante’s use of Deiphyle and Argia provides a further prelude to Dante’s engagement with Statius in the Commedia, as both daughters appear alongside other Statian paradigms of female virtue among the virtuous pagans Virgilio-character confirms to Stazio-character are in Limbo (Purg. xxii, 109–14).73 This interconnection between Dante’s engagement with Statius in Convivio and in Purgatorio is enhanced by the resonance of Deiphyle and Argia’s pudore with the exemplum of the Temperance of the Roman matrons professed by the tree at Purgatorio xxii’s close (Purg. xxii, 145–46). Dante also recalls Deiphyle’s and Argia’s virtue when he echoes Thebaid I. 533–39 in describing Matelda’s modest blushes in Purgatorio xxviii, 55–57. The resonance of Dante’s exemplum of adolescent pudore with an exemplum of Temperance, a virtue of gioventute (Cvo IV. xxvi), illustrates the high behavioural standards expected of women throughout their lives and Dante’s understanding of the paradigmatic value of Statius’s women. The contrast between Deiphyle’s and Argia’s behaviour and that of their husbands Polynices and Tydeus becomes apparent in Inferno. Here Dante recalls Polynices’s and Eteocles’s mutual fratricide in both the divided flame (Inf. xxvi) and ‘l’animalesco cozzare dei fratelli Alberi’ (Inf. xxxii, 55–58), and Tydeus’s hate-filled cannibalism in Ugolino’s similarly horrifying anthropophagy.74 By the time he writes the Commedia, Dante fully understands the terrible tensions at the Thebaid’s heart.

72Puccetti, p. 221.
73On Statian women in Limbo, see, for example, Picone, ‘Canto xxi’.
74On Inf. xxvi and xxxii–xxxiii, see footnote 58.
Polynices – An Unusual Statian Exemplum

Both Dante’s reliance in Convivio IV. xxv only on Thebaid I and his engagement with the Thebaid’s defining themes are driven home in his use of Polynices as exemplum both of verecundia, the final aspect of vergogna, and perhaps also of adornezza corporale. This is surprising given that Dante imbues his explanation of verecundia with a distinctively Christian tone. Dante avers that ‘La verecundia è una paura di disonoranza per fallo commesso; e di questa paura nasce un pentimento del fallo, lo quale ha in sé una amaritudine che è gastigamento a più non fallire’ (Cvo IV. xxv. 10). This ‘gastigamento a più non fallire’ seems at odds with the recurrent cycle of violence at the heart of Statius’s Thebes – and perhaps that is its point. After all, Dante’s Ugolino later refers to Pisa as ‘novella Tebe’ (Inf. xxxiii, 89) and Dante uses Statius’s Thebes as a model both for his divided Italy’s tragic cities and for hell itself.75

Dante’s growing awareness of and engagement with the Thebaid’s recurrent cycle of violence is apparent in his subtle highlighting of the significant incongruity of his exemplum as he paraphrases Thebaid I for the final time in Convivio (this time Thebaid I. 671–81). Dante avers:

Onde dice questo medesimo poeta, in quella medesima parte, che quando Polinice fu domandato da Adrasto rege del suo essere, ch’elli dubitò prima di dicere, per vergogna del fallo che contra lo padre fatto avea, e ancora per li falli d’Edipo suo padre, ch’è paiono rimanere in vergogna del figlio; e non nominò suo padre, ma li antichi suoi e la terra e la madre. Per che bene appare, vergogna essere necessaria in quella etade.

Cvo IV. xxv. 10

The scene Dante describes occurs following references to Polynices’s and Eteocles’s reciprocal hatred and the impious war and mutual fratricide to which it leads in the Thebaid’s proem (I. 1–45); the ferocious fight between Polynices and Tydeus over the cave in which they both wish to shelter (I. 401–47); and the description of the lion skin cloak which Polynices wears and of which Adrastus dreams (I.483–84). This cloak symbolises Polynices’s pride — a strange contrast to his apparent vergogna. Like Adrastus, Polynices is also older than adolescens as Statius describes Polynices both as taller than Tydeus and ‘integer annorum’ [in prime of years] (Thebaid I. 414–15). Dante may even wish to hold up Polynices, the ‘Ismenius heros’ [‘the Ismenian hero’] (I. 673), as an exemplum of the ‘bellezza e snellezza nel corpo’ that constitute the adornezza corporale, which Dante states is adolescenza’s final virtue (Cvo IV. xxv. 11–13). Accordingly, Dante deliberately but subtly connects his use of Adrastus in Convivio IV. xxv. 6 to his use of Polynices in IV. xxv. 10, reminding us of the rarity of masculine virtue in the Thebaid — a theme already apparent in Thebaid I. Moreover, the vergogna Dante states Polynices feels is more than simple verecundia as it is both ‘del fallo che contra lo padre fatto avea’ and for Oedipus’s own horrific failings. Accordingly, through this exemplum Dante highlights the terrible and recurrent violence he is already aware is at the Thebaid’s heart. Perhaps he also gives a warning that even those who believe they are virtuous can sink unwittingly or deliberately into vice, as while Polynices does not appear in Inferno, Dante alludes to his later sinfulness in the two powerful episodes mentioned above.

Dante’s reading of the Thebaid in exile also may have led Polynices’s struggles as exul to resonate with Dante’s own difficult position as exul inmeritus (Epistole III. 1; II. 3; V, VI and VII, salutations).76 After all, Dante spent much of Convivio I defending himself regarding his exile and lamenting its injustice. Statius too emphasises Polynices’s exile with four uses of exul in Thebaid I alone, the latter two specifically referred to Polynices (I. 154, 178, 183, 312). Statius creates a sense of injustice through reference to Polynices’s ‘dilatus […] honos’ [‘his royalty […] deferred’] (I. 165), a sentiment that continues throughout the Thebaid, although Statius leaves us in no doubt regarding the impiety of Polynices’s later actions. Like Polynices, Dante too wrestled with his pride, claiming culpability for the sin inherent to humanity in Purgatorio xiii, 136–38. Yet Dante never sunk to the depths of depravity of Statius’s anti-hero, and Dante’s reference to Polynices and

75 On Thebes as a model both for the cities of Dante’s Italy and for hell, see Martinez, passim.
76 Epistole’, ed. by Ermenegildo Pistelli, in Le Opere di Dante (Florence: Società dantesca italiana, 1960).
underlying and subtle allusion in *Convivio* IV. xxv. 10 to the horrific crimes Polynices commits later in the *Thebaid* remind us that virtue is an ongoing choice that we must make. Without doing so we will face eternal punishment, like many of Statius’s characters.

Dante’s careful and deliberate use of Statian exempla here and his omission of Statian exempla in describing adolescenza’s other virtues (a contrast to how he utilises Vergil’s *Aeneid*) indicates already that Dante understands the rarity of virtue among the *Thebaid’s* characters. This hints at the *Thebaid’s* value in instructing us to follow the *diritta via* on which Dante focuses in the *Commedia*. Dante’s in-depth understanding of *Thebaid* I and his enthusiasm for the text seem to have prompted him to continue reading Statius’s only finished epic, such that by the time of writing the *Commedia*, he had read it ‘tutta quanta’.

**Statius’s *Achilleid*: A Deliberate Omission or A Lack of Knowledge?**

Dante is notably silent regarding the examples of *vergogne* that the *Achilleid* contains. If Dante did know the *Achilleid*, this may have been because exempla of the virtue are rare in the poem. Even the dutiful virgin Deidamia lacks the extreme *pudore* of Adrastus’s blushing, bashful daughters, and Achilles’s mother Thetis could be taken either as example of maternal *pietas* or admonition not to counter the will of fate. Alternatively, Dante may have wanted to select paradigms from only one epic source, as he does for all the virtues displayed by Aeneas. After all, Dante does not yet display the confident intermingling of multiple classical and contemporary sources in a single character or episode that he does in the *Commedia*.

A more plausible explanation is that Dante had not yet read Statius’s second epic. In an educational context, the *Achilleid* was often read before the *Thebaid*, among the so-called *auctores minores*, with the *Thebaid* saved for more advanced study. However, as we saw above, there is nothing to suggest that Dante encountered the *Achilleid* during his formal education at Florence. Instead, like the *Thebaid*, Dante probably read the *Achilleid* in entirety only after his exile. After all, the *Thebaid* appears alone in many of the manuscripts Anderson lists, and in the manuscripts in which both poems appear, the *Achilleid* can appear either before or after Statius’s complete epic. Yet when Dante writes *Inferno* he includes Achilles among the lustful (Inf. v, 65–66), mentions Achilles’s abandonment of Deidamia in *Inferno* xxvi. 61–62, places Chiron among *Inferno* xii’s centaurs, and refers expressly to Statius’s unfinished ‘seconda soma’ in Stazio-character’s autobiography (*Purg.* xxii, 93).

By the time Dante writes the *Commedia*, it is obvious that he has read and is enthused by both Statian poems. He draws on both epics in episodes and characters he later includes in *Inferno* and, having understood the tensions inherent within the two poems, includes their tragic but dutiful heroines among the Limbo-dwelling souls that Virgilio-character lists for Statius’s embodiment in the *Commedia*, Stazio (*Purg.* xxii, 109–14).

**Conclusion**

Dante’s failure to mention Statius prior to *De Vulgari Eloquentia* seems to confirm that Dante’s access to classical poetry prior to his exile was limited, and his knowledge of Statius practically non-existent. After his exile, Dante’s access to classical poetry increased as he travelled to cities with public libraries such as Verona or perhaps enjoyed the fruits of his acquaintances with other learned

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77 For the former interpretation, see the *accessus* at fols 62^a^–66, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Lincoln College Lat. 27, and for the latter, the *accessus* at fol. 75^b^ of BAV, MS Reg. lat. 1556.

78 See Birger Munk Olsen, ‘La réception de Stace au moyen âge (du IX au XII siècle)’, in *Nova de veteribus*, pp. 230–46 and *The Medieval *Achilleid* of Statius*, passim.

79 *Manuscripts of Statius*, i, passim.

80 On discussions surrounding the *Achilleid’s* completeness in the Statian *accessus* tradition, see *Manuscripts of Statius*, iii, passim. On Dante’s assertion of the *Achilleid’s* incompleteness, see ‘Magna questio’, passim and Rossi, passim.
men to access their private manuscript collections. Dante’s knowledge of Statius and probably of other poets too seems to have begun with the extracts included in florilegia, grammar texts, and other compendia, before starting to read complete texts, probably accompanied by various para-texts. Dante’s use of the Thebaid between Convivio III and IV. xxv demonstrates his growing regard for and engagement with the dolce poeta’s epic works and his appreciation of their moral value and driving themes. As this article demonstrates, this growing regard and engagement culminates in the Commedia, as Dante plays upon the tensions inherent in Statius’s two epics, not just in Inferno as we might expect, but in Purgatorio and beyond – a subject that merits research of its own.

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81 On the possibility of Dante’s access to classical texts in libraries or the collections of acquaintances, see footnotes 33–35.