

*Erret inops, exspes, caede cruenta sua: Reshaping Hypsipyle's Narrative in Statius' Thebaid*

Many scholars have recognized that Statius owes much to his epic predecessors for the characterization of his own characters in the *Thebaid*. More recently, Alison Keith (2016) has noted the Ovidian influences in Statius' *Thebaid*, namely how Statius draws upon the Theban origin story in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* for the creation of his own Theban history. While I agree that Statius owes much to the *Metamorphoses*, in my paper I will argue that Statius relies on another Ovidian text, the *Heroides*, for inspiration for his Hypsipyle, who dominates Books 4-6 of the *Thebaid*. By considering the rhetoric of the heroines of letters 6 and 12 of the *Heroides*, Hypsipyle and Medea, I will demonstrate how Statius refashions his Hypsipyle into Medea figure, a figure who is able to twist her narrative from one of infanticide to one of an abandoned woman. If the reader views Statius' Hypsipyle through the lens of the Ovidian heroine, the reader is able to see how Hypsipyle carefully rewrites her story and thus reshapes her image, drawing sympathy from the reader and preventing the reader from viewing her merely as an infanticide.

In order to understand how Statius' Hypsipyle is influenced by the Ovidian heroines, I will first look at her introduction to the narrative as a wandering exile (4.746ff), noting specifically how the passage corresponds with the curse Hypsipyle utters against Medea in the *Heroides*. As Hypsipyle's rage against Medea builds, she cries out that Medea should "wander helpless, hopeless, and bloody from her own slaughter" (*erret inops, exspes, caede cruenta sua, Her. 6.162*). This wish for Medea is precisely the portrayal given to the reader of Hypsipyle by Statius, effectively modeling Hypsipyle as a Medea figure.

I will also analyze the beginning of Hypsipyle's address to Adrastus in Book 4 (4.777ff), building on S Georgia Nugent's (2016) and Peter Heslin's (2016) observations that demonstrate how Statius' Hypsipyle models her address after Aeneas' introduction to Dido in Book 1 of the *Aeneid*. By modeling her introduction in this manner, Hypsipyle commands a certain respect from her listeners and immediately places herself in a position of authority. However, if the reader keeps in mind as a comparison letter 6 of *Heroides*, in which Hypsipyle is isolated and longs for an audience, her command of a captivated audience begins to take on new meaning. Furthermore, Hypsipyle seems to craft her words as though influenced by those of Medea in *Heroides* 12, for both speakers begin their opening address with a form of the verb *memini* (*Her.* 12.1; *Theb.* 5.38).

As Heslin (2016) explains, Statius' Hypsipyle is keenly aware of her place in the *Thebaid*. However, Statius' Hypsipyle also seems to understand her role within the *Heroides*, as well as the complicated relationship she holds with Medea. Hypsipyle is aware that her own story is not entirely dissimilar to Medea's, for Hypsipyle, too, is associated with mass murders, the betrayal of family, and the death of a child. Yet, just as Medea's letter within the *Heroides* succeeds in reshaping her image from that of a murderous, barbarian exile to an abandoned heroine, so too does Hypsipyle alter her own characterization by modeling her speech after that of an Ovidian heroine.

#### Bibliography

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