

## Apollo's Monstrous Delight in the *Thebaid*

In Book 1 of the *Thebaid*, Adrastus finds Polynices and Tydeus fighting on his doorstep and welcomes them in. Recalling Evander in the *Aeneid*, he proceeds to explain to his guests the feast and rites for Apollo that they witness. The hostile Apollo revealed in this tale is, of course, an important part of the problematic relationship between gods and men in the *Thebaid* (see Newlands 2009 for a recent discussion), but the joy he finds in vengeance and death also fits with a larger theme throughout the poem of monstrous delight.

In this inset tale, Apollo, after killing Python, went to the land of Crotopus and raped his beautiful daughter. Fearing her father's wrath, the girl left her child with a shepherd, but, when she learned of his subsequent death, all discretion was abandoned in grief. Her fear turns out to have been warranted, however, and her father has her killed. This sad story is told concisely (1.569-595), but Adrastus goes on to relate Apollo's revenge in gory detail.

The transition itself is swift; within the space of three lines, Apollo recalls the *thalamus* in which he took his pleasure from the maiden (1.596) and makes ready a monster from the *thalami* of the Furies (1.598). In a mythic context, punishment naturally arises from the Furies, but the mention of their bedchamber is striking here. It evokes the *ferrei thalami* (6.280) of the Furies in the *Aeneid*, and the poetic recollection of the emblematic monsters in Vergil's Underworld is certainly appropriate to a scene of summoning a monster. Moreover, the sexual context of *thalamus* makes sense given the clear ties between monster and maiden (Keith 2013, Fontenrose 1959), but Statius can be read as suggesting that Apollo found pleasure there, too, just as he did in raping the maiden by the shores of the Inachus.

When his monster is killed by Coroebus, Apollo becomes even more savage (*saevior*,

1.627) in avenging her death. With the monster as a doublet for the maiden, a reprise of that vengeance is unsurprising, but Statius goes further and shows us an Apollo who seizes the opportunity to indulge his pleasure in destruction. This delight in violence demonstrates an affinity with the Furies, and that in turn is entirely fitting in a poem that features a remarkably bloodthirsty Venus and introduces the Fury Tisiphone as a protective mother figure.

### Bibliography

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