DANTE’S STAZIO: STATIUS AND THE TRANSFORMATIONS OF POETRY

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Abstract

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The dissertation examines how Dante draws on the medieval tradition on Statius to develop his portrait of his character Stazio, taking advantage of Statius’ standing as an auctor about whom little was known in the Middle Ages. The changes Dante introduces into Stazio’s biography illuminate the functions the poet intended Stazio to have in the Commedia. Stazio’s unexpected conversion dramatizes the Christianization of classical culture that Dante strives to effectuate through his poetry. Stazio’s presence also helps Dante to define his own complex feelings toward Virgil. Dante’s other major change—Stazio’s prodigality—may ultimately be as important for Dante’s purposes as Stazio’s conversion. Since Dante’s own sins and repentance are an integral part of the narrative of the Commedia, it was important for Dante to introduce a prior example of a sinful poetic auctor in order to establish his own auctoritas. Through the biblical precedent of prodigality representing sin generically, Dante establishes Stazio as an Everyman sinner who becomes an
Everyman Christian through his conversion, and who also represents all Christians who are sanctified through the process of purgation.

The way Dante works with and adapts Statius’ poetry in *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* suggests that Dante genuinely appreciated Statius as a poet. The *Thebaid* is a particularly fruitful source for Dante’s depiction of Hell and its characters, especially in the lowest three circles of violence, fraud, and treachery. Dante’s use of Statius’ works in the *Purgatorio* is more surprising, and perhaps more complex. There is evidence to suggest that scenes from the later books of the *Thebaid*, either the story of Menoeceus’ sacrifice or the prayers to Clementia, or both, may have influenced Dante’s decision to Christianize Stazio.

Finally, Dante uses Stazio in order to express a complex position on the interpretation of poetry. Stazio’s account of his conversion provides an argument for the value of poetry as a vehicle for truth. However, Stazio’s narrative also points to a fact especially inherent in poetic discourse—authors cannot control their audiences’ response to their texts. The *Commedia* is a *sacro poema*—either sacred or sacrilegious, according to how it is interpreted.
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CHAPTER 1

STATIUS IN THE MIDDLE AGES

Publius Papinius Statius was regarded as one of the major poetic auctores for many centuries, but today, few people are familiar with the poet and his works, which means that modern readers of the Commedia may not recognize what is distinctive about Dante’s portrayal of the poet. Dante’s “Stazio”1 is depicted as a poet who revered and imitated Virgil, which corresponds with traditional opinion, but also as a man who was led out of prodigality and into Christianity by reading Virgil’s poetry, both of which assertions would have surprised Dante’s audience. The tendency to downplay Statius’ literary importance, which many Dante scholars fall prey to, even if they briefly acknowledge Statius’ status as an auctor, naturally obscures the intentions and significance behind Dante’s characterization of Stazio. A correction to this tendency is to study the Latin poet as Dante’s medieval audience would have encountered him. Recent studies of the reception of Statius have addressed the various changes in his popularity and the shifting interpretations of his work over time. This study will focus on pertinent aspects of the late-medieval

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1 In order to distinguish between the historical Statius and Dante’s personaggio, this dissertation will refer to the Commedia character as “Stazio,” and the historical person as “Statius.”
reception of Statius and his works, so as to establish a foundation for how Dante and his peers might have regarded the poet. Thus, among the first questions to be asked in this inquiry are: Who was reading Statius in the Middle Ages? and How was he read?

1.1 Dante and Medieval Education

1.1.1 The Florentine Schools

It is unfortunate that there exist few specific accounts of Florentine education prior to the mid-fourteenth century, so it is difficult to form a clear picture of Dante’s own education or that of his peers. In 1339, Giovanni Villani recounted in his Cronica\(^2\) some details of lay instruction: about ten percent of the population (Charles T. Davis estimates 8,000-10,000 children) were being taught to read, and about an eighth of these (550-600) went on to Latin schools for the study of grammar and logic, in which pursuit they would likely encounter some of the auctores.\(^3\) However, very little is known about Florentine education in the previous century. In Robert Davidsohn’s research into Florentine notarial records, he finds only a single reference to a grammar teacher that exists prior to 1300.\(^4\) Other

\(^2\) Giovanni Villani, Cronica di Giovanni Villani: a miglior lezione ridotta coll’aiuto de’ testi a penna Tomo II, ed. Ignazio Moutier and Francesco Gherardo Dragomanni (Firenze: Sansone Coen, 1845), XI, 94.

pertinent documents include letters written to two Florentine schoolmasters by Mino da Colle in the 1280s, and a 1299 document unearthed by Santorre Debenedetti concerning the income and expenses for a particular grammar school. Davis argues that Dante probably obtained the grammatical education he put to use in reading Cicero and Boethius in a grammar school like the ones noted in these records, but there is no historical source that can provide a clearer picture of what this education might have looked like or whether Davis’ hypothesis is actually sustainable.

Charles T. Davis’ research into ecclesiastical-based education in Duecento and Trecento Florence suggests that Santa Maria Novella and Santa Croce did not have extensive literary holdings. Although these schools were involved in the teaching of grammar, the education there emphasized philosophical and theological texts over literary ones. Santa Croce propagated Bonaventure’s neo-Platonist doctrines, whereas Santa Maria Novella emphasized the teaching of the Thomistic synthesis of Aristotle and scholastic thought.

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7 Davis, “Education,” 417. See also *Convivio* II.xii.2-4.


9 Davis, “Education,” 421.
When Davis looks more closely at the Santa Croce library, he notes that the among the 45 manuscripts believed to be in its possession shortly after 1300,\textsuperscript{10} the holdings are most extensive in the subjects of canon law, Biblical commentary, patristic theology, later theology, philosophy, and grammatical treatises. Moreover, judging by the near absence of the classical \textit{auctores}, one can assume that study of literature existed only as preparation for theological texts. The Santa Croce library did possess some secular literary works, but their holdings were greater in the \textit{auctores minores} than in the \textit{maiores}, such as Virgil and Statius. Davis exclaims that “the almost total lack of classical literature among surviving manuscripts written in the thirteenth century or earlier is startling in a library of this size.”\textsuperscript{11} The library was known to have works of Servius, Suetonius, Valerius Maximus, Solinus and Eutropius, as well as some of the standard grammatical works like Priscian and Isidore.\textsuperscript{12} They also owned fragments of Ovid and Horace, and Davis posits as likely that a copy of Virgil was in their possession at some point, because Fra Anastasius, who lived at Santa Croce around 1300, produced a compendium of the \textit{Aeneid}. These detailed records of the library’s holdings, which even account for text fragments, only serve to emphasize that the library owned very few literary works, especially

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{10} Davis explains: “The collection of this fairly extensive sample is made possible by comparing the names which sometimes appear in notes at the beginning or end of early manuscripts (indicating that they were reserved for the use of particular friars) with the same names appearing in documents drawn up by the notary Opizzo da Pontremoli, who helped to transact much of the business of the convent during the years 1296-1311.” “Education,” 423.

\textsuperscript{11} Davis, “Collection,” 410.

\textsuperscript{12} Davis, “Collection,” 410.
\end{flushright}
those of pagan authors.\textsuperscript{13} Thus, the education received there could have placed little if any emphasis on the literary \textit{auctores}.

As for Santa Maria Novella, more is known about its school generally than about the books it held.\textsuperscript{14} The holdings of the Santa Maria Novella library around 1300 are even more uncertain, because documents indicate that a new building for the school built around that time had been funded by the sale of manuscripts.\textsuperscript{15} The most relevant figure at Santa Maria Novella is Remigio de’ Girolami, who in his sermons, orations, and treatises quotes from and refers to many Roman authors, including Cicero, Seneca, Ovid, Virgil, Horace, Lucan, Martial, Livy, Valerius Maximus, Aesop, Proclus, Macrobius, and Boethius. Davis argues that at least some of the works of these figures must have been present at Santa Maria Novella, because of the breadth and length of Remigio’s quotations; however, it is also likely that he accessed some of these authors through \textit{florilegia} or during his time in other intellectual centers.\textsuperscript{16} While there was apparently more contact with the \textit{auctores} at Santa Maria Novella than at Santa Croce, most of the education there focused on theology and philosophy. Though records are scanty, there is nothing to indicate

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14} Davis, “Studia,” 347.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Davis draws this conclusion from a sermon given by Remigio de’ Girolami in 1318. Davis concludes: “The fact that a fairly ambitious building venture could be at least partly financed in such a fashion indicates that the early book collection of S Maria Novella was both large and valuable.” “Education,” 427. See also Davis, “Studia,” 351.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Davis, “Education,” 432.
\end{itemize}
that there was much of a literary component to the education at Santa Maria
Novella, aside from Remigio’s sermons, so it is unlikely that Statius could have been
included in the education there, especially since Remigio does not seem to draw on
him as a source.¹⁷

There were also several Florentine private citizens who were interested in
the study of Latin literature, and who possessed private libraries, including Brunetto
Latini and Francesco da Barberino. Brunetto, whom Dante possibly claims as his
own teacher in Inferno XV (although there is debate about what this claim might
mean), demonstrated knowledge of Cicero, Boethius, Sallust, Lucan, and Ovid, and
also translated several classical works. But as Davis notes: “it is impossible to know
how much of their learning came from libraries in Florence and how much from
their travels [particularly in France]. Probably it was derived in very large part from
the latter.”¹⁸ Francesco Maggini argues that Brunetto knew only Cicero, Lucan,
Sallust, and Ovid’s Heroïdes in their Latin originals, and the last of these may have
been through a French translation.¹⁹ Aristide Marigo is yet more restrictive,
believing that Cicero was the only author Brunetto knew directly rather than from
excerpts.²⁰ Thus, even if Dante had had access to these private Florentine libraries,
they may not have broadened his exposure to the Latin auctores.

¹⁷ Since Davis lists several dozen figures to whom Remigio does make reference, it seems
likely that he would have mentioned Statius if such a reference had been present.

¹⁸ Davis, “Education,” 418-419.

¹⁹ Francesco Maggini, La Rettorica italiana di Brunetto Latini (Firenze: Galletti e Cocci, 1912),
52.
1.1.2 Medieval Education

Even if where and how Dante studied classical literature is uncertain, it is possible to describe some aspects of his education. Medieval education tended to operate according to a hierarchy based on the merit and difficulty of certain texts. The *auctores* were revered, as the name suggests, for their authority, and this authority pertained both to their skill in composition and to their wisdom and moral character. The school curriculum was designed not only to progress according to the difficulty of understanding of a given text at the grammatical level, but also according to the difficulty of discerning the lessons or truths found within the text, since the wisdom within texts was a general concern in medieval education. In general, during the Middle Ages, works of the *auctores* such as Statius were read in the second and third levels of education, after some competency in Latin morphology and syntax had been reached. However, while historians have had some success in determining the manner of early grammatical study, the method for studying the *auctores* is far less certain, because there exist very few manuscripts that can be said definitely to have been used for this purpose. Since the *auctores* tended to be read only at the highest levels of education, texts containing them bear few, if any, of the annotations associated with schooltexts. Thus, though the existence of copies of these texts signify that the *auctores* were being read, it is

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difficult to answer the questions of who was studying the *auctores*, and how they were being studied.

At the stage of the *auctores*, there were divisions between the *auctores minores*, studied first, and the *auctores maiores*, who were read only at the highest levels.\(^2^1\) Aimericus wrote in his *Librum de arte lectoria* of 1086 that there was a division between the *auctores*, such as Virgil, Terence, and Juvenal, those “in subgradivo genere, hoc est argenteo,” such as Plautus, Boethius, and Donatus, and those “in tercio, hoc est in communi genere,” such as “Cato,” namely the *Disticha Catonis*, as well as Maximianus and Aesop.\(^2^2\) The specific lists of each group vary from source to source, but it is possible to generalize that Virgil, for instance, was always considered a major author. Statius, on the other hand, had the interesting distinction of being both a major author, as the *Thebaid* was read only in the upper levels of the schools, and, in some lists, a minor author as well, since his *Achilleid* was read by more elementary readers.\(^2^3\) However, the use of the *Achilleid* as a minor text did not tend to diminish Statius’ status as an *auctor*. For instance, Aimericus


\(^{2^2}\) Quoted in Marcus Boas, “De librorum Catonianorum historia atque compositione,” *Mnemosyne*, N.S. 42 (1914): 33. There also exist sources that ignore any gradations among writers, such as this verse from Escorial O. III 17: “Dolens pro Ambrosio dolet priscianus / Donatus urgilius prosper et lucanus / Cato et boetius statius alanus / Seneca ouidius plato claudianus,” quoted in Boas 37 fn.1.

\(^{2^3}\) Birger Munk Olsen has researched the different levels of schooling as they apply to the study of Statius. He notes that, in addition to other evidence, one can ascertain that the *Achilleid* and the *Thebaid* were usually studied at different levels of education on the basis of the texts with which they were grouped. Since the *Achilleid* tends to be surrounded by elementary texts, it seems that it was intended for beginners: Birger Munk Olsen, “La réception de Stace au moyen age (du IX au XII siècle),” in *Nova de veteribus. Mittel- und neulateinische Studien für Paul Gerhard Schmidt*. ed. Andreas Bährer and Elisabeth Stein (Munich: K. G. Saur, 2004), 233-35.
does group Statius among the nine *auctores*. Marcus Boas points to a thirteenth-century French manuscript, Dijon, Bibliotheque Municipale M 497, which contains both “major authors” (Virgil, Ovid, Horace, etc.) and “minor authors,” (Avianus, Sedulius, Prudentius, etc.) and notes that, in this case, Statius is clearly grouped among the major authors, indicating that even if his work was used as a schooltext for the lower levels of education, he retained a higher standing than the other authors used in this way.\(^{24}\)

However, one of the arguments that can be made for the popularity of Statius in the Middle Ages is the purported inclusion of his *Achilleid* among the so-called *Liber Catonianus* collection of school texts. The concept of such a collection was popularized by Boas, who claimed that six poetic works, which are often found grouped together in manuscripts, were traditionally used together in medieval education: the *Distichs of Cato*, the *Eclogue* of Theodulus, the *Fables* of Avianus, the *Elegies* of Maximianus, the *De raptu Proserpinae* of Claudian, and the “minor Statius”—the *Achilleid*\(^ {25}\). This assessment was taken as fact for many decades, but in recent years, there has been growing skepticism about whether this group of texts can really be said to represent medieval education in the way Boas proposed. As Gehl writes: “though such canons certainly existed among teachers and students of individual schools, cities or regions, it merely confuses our view of the situation to assume that they did not much change over time. Nor can we assume that they

\(^{24}\) Boas, 29.

\(^{25}\) Boas, 17.
changed in some orderly organic fashion.”26 Although many of the criticisms of modern scholars are valid, a more moderate position on Boas’ argument may be in order. For instance, Boas’ work does show that the number of manuscripts containing some grouping of these six texts is significant, and it seems likely that these manuscripts were used for education, especially in the twelfth through fourteenth centuries; nevertheless, readers should be hesitant in assuming that this trend applies to every region.

When Boas lists the manuscripts he has discovered that contain some subset of these six texts, about two dozen contain at least some verses of Statius, which is a testament to the poet’s popularity.27 Other historical sources also indicate the use of Statius in the schools. Birger Munk Olsen asserts that Statius had an increasingly important role in education by the twelfth century.28 Helmold von Bosau, in the *Chronica Slavorum 42*, indicates that the *Achilleid* was commonly read in schools by the beginning of the twelfth century, if not before. An even earlier date is suggested by Paris 8051, in which the beginning of Cato’s *Distichs* was added immediately following the *Achilleid*, in a tenth-century hand.29

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26 Gehl, 13. Black gives greater assent to the idea that these texts performed the sort of role that Boas describes, but does so by linking the *Achilleid* with the *auctores minores*, a general grouping that includes more texts than the *Liber Catonianus. Humanism*, 218.

27 Boas lists 17 entries for Statius, but at least one seems to be mistaken, because his description contains no mention of Statius, nor does this manuscript appear in H. Anderson’s exhaustive work. Another entry appears to be a printed book, rather than a manuscript, and thus must fall well outside the relevant time period.

28 Olsen, 234-35. His work particularly draws on French and German sources, and covers the period from the tenth to twelfth centuries.

For the thirteenth century, the lack of resources regarding the study of the auctores in general is particularly pronounced, leading many scholars to suppose that the study of the Latin classics fell off to some degree during this period, when study of the professional arts flourished in its stead. It does seem that far fewer classical manuscripts were produced in Europe for this period than in the centuries before and after, although such claims must always be tempered with the awareness that knowledge is limited to what manuscripts have survived. On the other hand, Harald Anderson argues that, based on his study of all the manuscripts of Statius, even if the popularity of the other auctores was in a decline, Statius became more commonly read during the thirteenth century, as evidenced by his greater role in the schoolroom and the “wild proliferation of his texts.” Anderson has also identified a manuscript in which the accessus claims that Statius was second only to Virgil in popularity by the thirteenth century. Boas also argues that the Achilleid especially flourished as a schooltext in the thirteenth century. Moreover, Statius' increase in popularity is accompanied by expansions in the accessus texts for his was used for teaching grammar, because it is a very fine one, but he believes that all the other manuscripts of Statius now extant were used in the schools. The manuscripts bear both glosses of explanation and at times, neumes, which were presumably used for the singing of the poetry by students. Olsen, 233.

Paul Oskar Kristeller characterizes the situation by saying that, by the thirteenth-century, study of the auctores had "suffered a decisive, though perhaps temporary defeat" in the battle of the professional artes versus classical auctores in education. Paul Oskar Kristeller, Renaissance Thought: the classic, scholastic, and humanistic strains (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), 7. Black also provides a fine summary of the situation in Humanism, 192-95.


Anderson, vol. 3, 35. Anderson refers to the In principio accessus, entry 126 in his Incipitarium. However, based on the witness of medieval manuscripts and library book lists, it seems that Lucan was certainly a more popular auctor than Statius for much of the Middle Ages, and that Ovid and Horace may have been more widely read as well. The relative popularity of the auctores will be looked at further below, particularly as evidenced in the work of Munk Olsen.
works, suggesting that readers not only wanted to read the poet’s works, but to
know more about him. H. Anderson reads Dante’s *De vulgari eloquentia* II.vi.79-81
as an indication that by the thirteenth century, Virgil, Ovid, Statius and Lucan were
the standard school poets.\(^{33}\) It is clear that Statius was widely used in medieval
education, at least in some parts of Europe.

However, as both Robert Black and Paul Gehl have demonstrated in detail,
many of the conventional beliefs about medieval education do not hold true for
Florence.\(^{34}\) The research of both Black and Kristeller also indicates that Italian
libraries, with the exception of Monte Cassino, had significantly fewer holdings in
the areas of the Latin classical poets than French or German libraries.\(^{35}\) In addition,
unlike the German and English schools, there does not appear to be a standardized
reading curriculum in Italy; nor are there enough examples of Italian schooltext
anthologies to indicate that Boas’ claims of the dominance of the *Liber Catonianus* in
the medieval curriculum hold true for Italy or Florence.\(^{36}\) In Florence, literacy was
relatively high, but Latin was a far more specialized skill.\(^{37}\) Since there were strong

\(^{33}\) This claim warrants some skepticism, for the evidence points to Dante only having
encountered the texts of Statius once in exile, and it is almost impossible that these works were part
of his Florentine curriculum. Thus, his statement in *De vulgari eloquentia* says more about his own
canon than it does about school practices. However, this statement does also indicate that Statius was
respected and read, since it is unlikely that Dante would name him as an authority if he thought his
audience would not appreciate him.

\(^{34}\) Gehl and one of Black’s works are cited above. Another pertinent work by Black is Robert
Black, *Boethius’s Consolation of Philosophy in Italian Medieval and Renaissance Education: Schoolbooks
and their Glosses in Florentine Manuscripts* (Florence: SISMEL/Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2000).

\(^{35}\) For instance, see Kristeller, 107-108.


\(^{37}\) See Gehl, 21, 24; Davis, “Education,” 415.
notarial and political traditions in Florence, education there was particularly geared toward the practice of those professions, rather than to understanding the auctores.\textsuperscript{38} Ronald Witt believes that most students read the Octo auctores (eight auctores minores), but did not receive further education in the Latin poets, because there was such a focus on specialized educational training in Italy.\textsuperscript{39} He argues that it is only under the influence of the Italian humanists that the Latin auctores were eventually added to the Italian grammar school curriculum.\textsuperscript{40}

In addition, the division between the auctores minores and maiores according to the level of reading ability seems to have been strictly enforced in Italy. Gehl writes:

\begin{quote}
none of Golden or Silver Age poets appear in these reading books. It would seem that the lyric Virgil, Horace, Ovid, and Terence—whose use was criticized in the late fourteenth-century polemics against the humanist educational program—were not used at the Latinizing level in Florence much before the time of that controversy. Nor do we find Appian or the epic poetry of Prudentius, Statius, Virgil, or Lucan. These authors seem to have been reserved for the later, auctores course. They would have been given only to older boys, and only to the few who went on to the university.\textsuperscript{41}
\end{quote}

In Black's assessment of schooltexts, he finds little evidence that Statius was as popular a school auctor in Florence as he is attested to be in other regions in the

\textsuperscript{38} As Black writes in \textit{Humanism}, “With a rapidly expanding legal, notarial and medical class in the Italian cities, it was only to be expected that the education practices used to train professionals at universities would also come to prevail in the preparatory schools run by grammar teachers,” 86.

\textsuperscript{39} Witt, 133.

\textsuperscript{40} Witt, 195.

\textsuperscript{41} Gehl, 54. However, there do exist examples of “anthologies” containing more advanced texts, like Boethius or Virgil, which may have been used at the lower level, 58.
Middle Ages.42 Between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, Black finds only one school manuscript of Statius. For comparison, over the same period, he records 11 Horace manuscripts, 9 Lucan manuscripts, 9 Ovid manuscripts, and 8 Virgil manuscripts.43 Additionally, it is helpful to contextualize Boas’ findings on the *Liber Catonianus* with H. Anderson’s research on the provenance of the manuscripts Boas names. Of the 24 manuscripts, 10 are French, 5 are German, 3 are English, 2 are Flemish, and only 3 are Italian.44 Even if Boas observed a legitimate educational trend, it does not seem that his findings necessarily hold true for Italy. Thus, although Statius, and particularly the *Achilleid*, might have been an important educational text for some European regions in the Middle Ages, this does not seem to be the case for Italian education.

Even Statius’ status as a popular *uctor* in Italy can seem uncertain, depending on the evidence collected; in cases where the four or five ‘primary’ literary *uctores* are named,45 he is always among them, but this status did not necessarily translate into high readership for his works, judging on the basis of manuscript evidence.46 Moreover, when Black looks at the references to other

42 Gehl has similar findings, 53.

43 Black, *Humanism*, 191. It is important to note that Black is extremely particular in his selection of the manuscripts that meet his criteria. In *Boethius’ Consolation* he lists ten different features of a typical schoolbook, and a manuscript must have a majority of these features to be included on his list, XXII.

44 Boas does also list an Italian manuscript from the mid-fourteenth century, but this manuscript is too late to be relevant for the current inquiry. The provenance of these manuscripts is listed in Anderson, *The Manuscripts of Statius*, vol. 1.

45 Virgil, Ovid, Lucan, Statius, and sometimes Horace.
found within manuscripts, there are relatively few references to Statius. In his set of manuscripts, which extends in time from the twelfth century up through the Renaissance, Statius receives only 6 mentions, as opposed to 35 and 29 for Virgil and Ovid respectively, and 16 and 13 for Lucan and Horace.\textsuperscript{47} One possible conclusion to draw from these facts is that, although Statius was respected as an \textit{auctor}, there existed very few copies of his work, even in excerpted form, before some time in the Trecento in Florence. For the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the number of Statius manuscripts is far more similar to those of his peers: there are 22 Statius manuscripts for that period, as opposed to 27 for Ovid, 27 for Virgil, 21 for Horace, and only 6 for Lucan (who had been the most popular author in the twelfth century, according to Black's calculations).\textsuperscript{48} The increase in the number of manuscripts for these latter centuries is connected to the rise of humanism, but it is notable that Statius goes from being one of the least popular, if still respected, \textit{auctores}, to among the most popular.\textsuperscript{49} However, it seems that even at this later

\textsuperscript{46} Gehl, 29, 38. Statius is also named in Conrad of Hirsau's (c. 1070-1150) \textit{Dialogus super auctores}, as an \textit{auctor maior}. When Giovanni del Virgilio is appointed in 1321 to the University of Bologna, he was to teach “versificaturam et poesim et magnos auctores, videlicet Virgilium, Statium, Luchanum et Ovidium.” Vittorio Rossi, \textit{Dal Rinascimento al Risorgimento} (Florence: G.C. Sansoni, 1930): 17. However, as noted above, it does not seem that Statius was one of the numerous sources drawn on by the learned Remigio de Girolami. See Davis, “Education,” 432.

\textsuperscript{47} Black, \textit{Humanism}, 303

\textsuperscript{48} Black, \textit{Humanism}, 186.

\textsuperscript{49} Whether Dante could have played a role in the rise of Statius' popularity is a valid question. The next chapter will address the effect of the \textit{Commedia} on the production of late-medieval and Renaissance texts on Statius.
date, Statius’ *Thebaid* is a much less popular text in Florentine schools than his
*Achilleid*, or than either text in other regions.50

Of course, as the survey of schools has demonstrated, it is difficult to
determine the availability of the classical literary texts in Duecento and Trecento
Florence, apart from the short passages excerpted in grammar textbooks, the texts
of the *artes dictaminis*, and *florilegia*. It was not until later in the fourteenth century
that Zanobi della Strada, Giovanni Boccaccio, and Tedaldo Della Casa brought
classical works to Florence. As Davis notes, when Dante reads Cicero’s *De Amicitia*
and Boethius’ *De Consolatione Philosophiae* after Beatrice’s death (ca. 1290), he calls
the *Consolation* a text “non conosciuto da molti,” despite the fact that it is usually
considered to have had a widespread circulation at this period.51 In addition, the
widespread fall-off in the study of the classical *auctores* in the thirteenth century
was particularly pronounced in Italy. Black writes: “it seems that the study of
classical authors in the classroom reached a bare minimum in thirteenth-century
Italy, dwindling to a small fraction of the quantity studied in the previous period.”52
However, in Florence, Statius still seems to be marginalized more than the other
*auctores*, and this may remain true even for later centuries. For instance, Witt
identifies Florentine vernacular translations of the works of Ovid, Virgil, and Lucan


I.xii.2. Black writes: “as early as the thirteenth century, there are as many school-level Italian
manuscripts of Boethius in Florentine libraries as of any one classical Latin author.” *Humanism*, 198.

52 *Humanism*, 196. Black argues that the waning of the study of the classics in Italy is
particularly tied to the emphasis on pre-professional education addressed above.
composed by the Quattrocento, but there is no indication that Statius received similar treatment.\textsuperscript{53}

Despite an extended period of dormancy, by the time of Giovanni Dominici (ca. 1356-1419), a Dominican who set himself in opposition to early humanists like Coluccio Salutati, the reading of classical texts was sufficiently widespread in Florence as to provoke Dominici’s censure.\textsuperscript{54} Moreover, Francesco Mattesini argues that even if no traces remain of literary studies in Florence, the fact that the study of Latin and vernacular literature, specifically that of Dante, was explicitly prohibited in 1335 is a sign that some study had been carried out in previous years. The edict reads: “Prohibemus distincte fratribus universis quatenus poeticos libros sive libellos qui Dante nominatur, in vulgari compositos nec tenere nec studere audeunt.”\textsuperscript{55} However, the very fact that Dante is named within this quotation indicates that this increase in the reading of literature came about well after Dante’s own education. In any case, it cannot be assumed that Statius was among the works being read without more specific evidence.

All this research indicates that it was very unlikely that Dante was able to engage in any real study of the \textit{auctores} in thirteenth-century Florence. Instead, it is probable that he gained his extensive education through the travels of his exile,

\textsuperscript{53} Witt, 192-93.

\textsuperscript{54} Giovanni Dominici, \textit{Regola del governo di cura familiare}, ed. Donati Salvi (Florence: A. Garinei, 1860), 134. He bemoaned that Florentine youth were corrupted by the reading of Ovid and Virgil, and contrasted these studies with the customs of the “buoni antichi,” who desired knowledge of the Psalter and catechism, and perhaps “moralità di Catone fizioni d’Esopo, dottrina di Boezio, buona scienza tratta di santo Agostino, e filosofia d’\textit{Eva Columba, o Tres leo naturas}, con un poco di poetizzata Scrittura santa nello \textit{Aethiopum terras}.”

\textsuperscript{55} Provided in Francesco Mattesini, OFM, “La biblioteca di S. Croce e Fra Tedaldo della Casa,” \textit{Studi francescani} 57 (1960): 263.
possibly in Bologna.\textsuperscript{56} At the same time, it is also doubtful that this later education in the \textit{auctores} had any formal quality to it, since Black claims that “the authors were not normally included in the university curriculum in Italy until the fifteenth century.”\textsuperscript{57} Thus, it seems most likely that much of Dante’s knowledge of the \textit{auctores} came from his independent study of these texts, even as his exile made it possible for him to come into contact with more texts.

Research does suggest that there were more possibilities and resources for the study of the \textit{auctores} outside of Florence in this period. Witt argues that there was an increase in interest in grammatical studies in northern and central Italy around the end of the twelfth century.\textsuperscript{58} This interest may have involved the study of ancient texts, but it is difficult to determine if the increase in references to the \textit{auctores} in textbooks derived from actual interactions with the classical texts, or if the quotations come from other manuals of excerpts. Moreover, Witt also notes:

That no Italian commentary on an ancient author, the surest sign that the ancient author was being taught to students, can definitely be assigned to the period 1190-1250, raises the question of how extensively the ancient literary works were taught even after 1190, and even in Bologna. Given their respect for French classicism, it is possible that Italian grammarians relied on the rich tradition of French commentaries for their lessons, but nevertheless, the absence of any surviving Italian contribution suggests that down at least to the middle of the Duecento, the new concern with Latin

\textsuperscript{56} Thus, the historical record supports the assertions of Ulrich Leo, based on textual analysis, that Dante read or reread the \textit{auctores} shortly before writing the \textit{Commedia}. Ulrich Leo, “The Unfinished \textit{Convivio} and Dante’s Rereading of the \textit{Aeneid},” \textit{Medieval Studies} 13 (1951): 41-64.

\textsuperscript{57} Black, \textit{Humanism}, 202.

\textsuperscript{58} Witt, 32-35.
grammar was not matched by an equal interest in the works from which that grammar drew many of its examples.\textsuperscript{59}

Nonetheless, Witt argues that interest in vernacular poetry may have inspired a greater appreciation of classical poetry in Italy. For the period after 1250, Witt also identifies many classical allusions in the Latin poetry composed in North Italy, particularly that of Lovato Lovati, so that he thinks it extremely likely that formal study of the classical \textit{auctores} was available by this time.\textsuperscript{60} He asserts that by the middle of the thirteenth century, it is likely that it was possible to study classical literature at a university, at least in Padua, Bologna, and perhaps Arezzo.\textsuperscript{61} Study of the \textit{auctores} at the university level may have been necessary precisely because this instruction was not available at lower levels of the curriculum. However, Witt admits that although the existence of such university education is a reasonable assumption, this hypothesis is very difficult to prove. There are no historical documents relating to the teaching of the \textit{auctores} in the university before the 1316 outline of a course given by Albertino Mussato on Seneca, and the 1321 letter appointing Giovanni del Virgilio to teach the \textit{auctores} in Bologna.\textsuperscript{62}

Taken together, these records give a reasonably detailed account of the state of Florentine education around the time of Dante. In addition to the generalization that the Latin \textit{auctores} were not much studied in the Florence of this time, one might

\textsuperscript{59} Witt, 35-36. Kristeller also comments on the lack of production of commentaries on Latin works for this period, 107.

\textsuperscript{60} Witt, 80. Witt considers such study—the ‘close reading of ancient texts’ as an early sign of humanism.

\textsuperscript{61} Witt, 89.

\textsuperscript{62} Witt, 196. The letter is cited in footnote 46.
particularly note that the name of Statius rarely, if ever appears. This absence is unusual and noteworthy, not merely because of the weight Dante gives to Statius in the *Commedia*, but because of his comparative popularity elsewhere in the Middle Ages. However, since Dante’s knowledge of Statius must have derived from medieval sources, it is necessary to assess what the Statius manuscript tradition can reveal about Statius’ medieval reception.

1.2 Statius Manuscripts

While those scholars who have attempted to work on the relationship between Dante and the historical Statius have produced enlightening studies on individual facets of the medieval tradition on Statius, all have been hampered by lacking the resources to engage with the tradition more broadly. The present study, however, can display a more extensive picture of the “medieval” Statius by examining existing arguments in light of one another, and in light of more recent work on the medieval tradition of Statius interpretation. Harald Anderson’s three-volume work on the manuscripts of Statius provides a description of every manuscript containing materials related to Statius, descriptions of all ancillary

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63 These scholars have been almost exclusively concerned with finding medieval resources that might explain Dante’s decision to portray Stazio as a Christian. For instance, Andreas Heil examines medieval etymologies on Statius’ name, whereas Giorgio Padoan points to commentary passages linking Statius’ Altar of Clementia with the Altar to the unknown God in *Acts* 17, alongside typological interpretations of the figure of Theseus. Andreas Heil, *Alma Aeneis: Studien zur Vergil- und Statiusrezeption Dante Alighieri* (New York: Lang, 2002). Giorgio Padoan, “Teseo ’figura Redemptoris’ e il cristianesimo di Stazio,” in *Il pio Enea, l’impio Ulisse: Tradizione classica e intendimento medievale in Dante* (Ravenna: Longo, 1977), 125-50. While Stazio’s Christianity is a subject of major importance, and one chapters two, three, and five will explore, this chapter and the next will also show that there are other aspects of the interpretative tradition that shed light on what Dante is doing in his portrayal of Stazio.
materials contained within these manuscripts, and a history of the tradition of accessus on Statius. By building upon his work, as well as on other similar resources, it is possible to draw a number of conclusions about the ways in which Statius was read and studied in the Middle Ages.

1.2.1 Statius’ Texts in the Middle Ages

Harald Anderson has written at length on the textual history of the Thebaid, including its recensions in two textual families. His analysis shows that "the critical condition of the text of the Thebaid did not vary much in the course of the Middle Ages, as, with the exception of lines X: 100-105 and 112-17, there appear to have been no widely transmitted lacunae." Thus, when medieval readers were reading the full text of the Thebaid, the versions did not vary much from one to another.

The Achilleid has a much more complex medieval reception history. The assertion of Dante’s Stazio that: “ma caddi in via con la seconda soma” was in fact a pronouncement on a controversial issue (Purg. XXI: 93). Modern editors consider the Achilleid to be an incomplete work, and partition the poem into one complete book and a second partial one. In medieval manuscripts, however, the poem is rendered in any combination between one and five books. The earliest extant manuscripts feature the work as either divided into two books or without divisions

64 H. Anderson, vol. 1, V-VII.
65 H. Anderson, vol. 1, IX.
at all. These variations derive from the unusual transmission history of the text, for the Achilleid was not widely disseminated until the twelfth century, when it begins to appear in the libri manuales. At this point, the text was generally divided into five books, with the final line being: “Aura silet, puppis currens ad litora venit.” No presentation of this material quite followed epic conventions: a copyist could either preserve Statius’ intended structure, including the wide disparity in book length (a Book I of normal length and a short Book II), and present it as a work left incomplete, or else divide the text into books of roughly equal length, but which were necessarily far shorter than a typical epic book. There was so little consensus on this issue that, at times, the description in the accessus does not match the actual arrangement of the text in the same manuscript. However, despite the manuscript variations in the forms of the Achilleid’s textual transmission, accessus texts generally agree that Statius composed the work in either five books, or four, in cases

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66 Of manuscripts that have survived, there are 21 manuscripts without division, 18 divided into 2 books, 1 divided into 3 books, 7 divided into 4 books, 150 divided into 5 books, and 2 divided into 6 books. Anderson lists a further 11 manuscripts without description of the division into books.

67 Violetta de Angelis, “Magna questio preposita coram Dante et Domino Francisco Petrarca et Virgilio,” Studi Petrarcheschi, n.s. 1 (1984): 139-41. These verses do not appear in modern editions, for they are verses added to the text to make the ending seem more complete. Within this tradition, the breaks occur at I: 97, I: 396, I: 674, and before book II. Anderson, vol. 3, XII.

68 Olsen points out the inclusion of a note in the Oxford Lincoln 27 manuscript that offers an explanation as to why the books of Achilleid are shorter than those of the Thebaid: “Sunt autem eisdem libri quinque distinctiones, quas thomos uocant a Greco thomos, quod est diuisio. Et sunt idem thomi seu libeli longe breuiiores quam in Thebaide ne populus audiens recitantem proximate grauaretur. Quid autem unusquisque thomus in se continet subscripti uersus breuiter intimabunt,” 243. This manuscript is also the one in which H. Anderson finds the first reference to the Achilleid as an unfinished work. The fact that the writer supplies an explanation for the length of the Achilleid books despite knowing that Statius died before completing the work is a useful illustration of the point that it is extremely difficult to determine when readers believed the Achilleid to be unfinished. Dividing the work into five books was not equivalent to an attestation that the work was finished. De Angelis provides the additional examples of Benzo d’Alessandria and Hugh of Trimberg, who both divide the work into five books, and yet declare the work to be incomplete. “Magna questio,” 173-74.
when the final two books are grouped together.\textsuperscript{69} The unusual length of the text and the variations in its presentation in manuscripts also meant that medieval readers were divided as to whether or not Statius had completed the text. This debate was complicated by the fact that the \textit{Achilleid} is atypical in its incompleteness, in that it is a polished poem without lacunae or partial lines.\textsuperscript{70}

The reason some readers believed the work to be unfinished, despite its polished state, often rested on an interpretation of \textit{Achilleid} I: 7: “tota iuvenem deducere Troia,” which implies that Statius will tell far more of Achilles’ story than is actually found in the \textit{Achilleid}, which ends with Achilles setting out to join the Trojan War.\textsuperscript{71} It was necessary for those who believed the \textit{Achilleid} to be a complete work to address the matter of the text’s abrupt ending.\textsuperscript{72} In some manuscript traditions, a few verses are tacked on to the end of the poem to make the ending seem more like an actual conclusion. Anderson’s Incipitarium entry 180, found in six manuscripts, offers one such set of verses:

\begin{quote}
Occurrunt reges multa comitante caterva.
Suscipiunt hilaris illum donisque decorant
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{69} As one example of this belief, see Anderson’s Incipitarium entry 115: “Sunt enim quinque libri...... Secundum enim alios, quattuor sunt libri, sed duos ultimos in unum copulant et coniungunt.” This \textit{accessus} is found in three manuscripts, ranging from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century. Anderson, vol. 3, 92.

\textsuperscript{70} Anderson, vol. 3, XII.

\textsuperscript{71} One such text is Anderson’s Incipitarium entry 115: “et in hoc opus istud terminatur, quia auctor morte preuentus non potuit quod uluit adimplere. Proposuerat enim dicere ea que prelibata sunt et omnia que egerat ipse Achilles aput Troiam, unde id in prologo <1.7>, “Sed tota iuuenem deducere Troia.” Anderson, vol. 3, 92.

Et multo plausu simul ad tentoria ducunt.73

There is also the example mentioned above, “Aura silet, puppis currens ad litora venit,” a concluding verse often found added to the end of the text. When the poem was presented with such attempts to shape a conclusion, it was easier for readers to accept the poem as completed, and many did so.

However, other medieval annotations argue that Statius died before completing the work, and connect that fact to the brevity of Achilles’ story. Anderson’s Incipitarium entry 111, found in three manuscripts of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, reads: “Intendit enim actor Achillis gesta describere et supplere quicquid Homerus de illo dimisit intactam, quod ostendit in prologo dicens…. Sed sciemendum est quod morte preuentus propositum non inpleuit, sed opus suum dimisit incompletum.”74 Moreover, another example of verses appended to the end of the text indicate the text to be unfinished:

Dum frena laxaret Muse dum altius ire
Pollicitus uates moribundus ad astra meavit
Proh dolor! ecce (heu!) remansit alba papyrus
Auctoris ergo magni casum doleamus acerbum
Quattuor in fine subiunxit Ghesa rudes.75

There are articulations of both sides of the debate at all points of the tradition.

Violetta de Angelis believes that there are signs of the idea of the Achilleid being


unfinished circulating in Trecento Italy, but other scholars assert that it was more commonly believed to be a complete work at that time. However, at least four accessus on the Achilleid written before Dante’s Commedia attest that the work was unfinished, and it seems likely that Dante would have encountered both sides of the argument since it is apparent that he drew on multiple accessus texts for his portrayal of Statius.

Today it is known that Statius also wrote a third work, the lyrical poems of the Silvae, but this text was lost to medieval audiences until its rediscovery by Poggio Bracciolini around 1417-18. The loss of this text was unfortunate, not merely because it meant that readers could not experience Statius’ poetry in another style, but because the Silvae is the best biographical source on Statius. Some Dante scholars have erroneously supposed the Silvae to be a resource available to Dante, and based part of their theories or accounts upon this misconception. André Pézard, on the other hand, acknowledges that the text was lost until 1417, but still proposes the idea that Dante either had access to an unknown vita that drew on the Silvae, or somehow had access to the Silvae poems themselves. His evidence is Dante’s inclusion of Statius’ coronation, which he could not find mention of in any medieval text.

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76 de Angelis, “Magna questio,” 170.

77 Anderson finds the first claim of the Achilleid’s incompleteness in the accessus of the twelfth-century Oxford MS. Lincoln College lat. 27, but argues that it seems to have taken some time for this interpretation to become more widespread. vol. 3, 23.

78 Anderson’s Incipitarium entries 111, 126, 167, and 238. These texts are found in vol. 3, 24-25, 29, 38-41, and 61.
text before Dante, and the existence of a number of close textual parallels between the *Silvae* and the *Commedia*.\(^7^9\)

Pézard’s thesis is certainly interesting, and perhaps of some merit,\(^8^0\) so this section will evaluate the strongest historical evidence supporting the possibility that the *Silvae* was known in the Middle Ages. After analyzing a poem of Lovato Lovati (1241-1309), Witt argues that the “tui cura secunda, Lupus” is an echo either of Propertius II.1.25-26 or of *Silvae* IV.4.20, the *Epistola ad Vitorium Marcellum*.\(^9^1\) It is possible that the latter text could have been known to Lovato as a poem fortuitously preserved by itself in some manuscript, and probably under a name other than Statius’. However, Witt’s claim of literary influence also seems quite tenuous: of the phrase he identified in Lovato, only the phrase “tua cura” appears in Statius’ poem, whereas in Propertius more of the phrase appears, and the grammatical similarity is greater: “.... tui .... / .... cura secunda.” If either poem influenced Lovato, the greater similarity of the Propertius text suggests that that poem has the stronger claim.

Nonetheless, scholars have determined in recent years that a few traces of the *Silvae* did survive into the Middle Ages. Olsen notes that at least one poem of the *Silvae* was known in the Middle Ages, although its authorship was unknown. The

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\(^7^9\) André Pézard, “Rencontres de Dante et de Stace,” *Bibliotheque d’humanisme et renaissance* 14 (1952): 10-28. The following chapter discusses the relationship between Dante’s claims about Statius and the historical documents, such as *accessus*. It examines the claim of Statius’ coronation, and points to the existence of at least one medieval text asserting such a claim before Dante was writing. In addition, Statius himself references a coronation in the beginning of the *Achilleid*.

\(^8^0\) Pézard identifies a number of small textual similarities between Dante’s corpus and the *Silvae*. It is odd that the *Silvae* is the only Statian text to receive this kind of deep examination for textual resonances with Dante’s work, since even Pézard admits that the evidence that Dante could have known the text is very weak.

\(^8^1\) Witt, 97-98.
*Genethliacon Lucani ad Oppiam* (*Silvae* II.7) is included in a collection of grammatical texts, Florence BML Plut. 29.32, which was copied in Western Germany in the first third of the eleventh century.\(^{82}\)

Moreover, de Angelis has unearthed a reference in a manuscript with a potentially closer connection to Dante and his milieu. Vatican Barberinus 74 was composed in France in the twelfth century, but is known to have been in Italy by the fourteenth century. De Angelis has discovered the following note: “scripsit librum quem vocavit Sillabarum; scripsit et alium quem vocavit Sillabarum, scripsit etiam Thebaidem sub taxati imperatoris tempore.”\(^{83}\) This reference indicates at least knowledge of the *Silvae*’s existence, though little more, but centuries before the rediscovery of the text.\(^{84}\) As these examples are the best evidence that could be gathered concerning knowledge of the *Silvae* in the Middle Ages, it seems fairly certain that neither Dante nor his readers would have been aware of this text.\(^{85}\)

\(^{82}\) Olsen, 231.

\(^{83}\) In the manuscript, there is a correction next to the first “Sillabarum” that indicates that the word should read “Achilleidos” instead. The phrasing of this note shows a relationship to the *Quaeritur accessus*, which reads: “Scripsit autem Thebaiden supra taxati imperatoris tempore.” Text from H. Anderson, vol. 3, 6. This *accessus* was extremely influential in the Middle Ages, but there is no other example with this wording in Anderson’s editions of *accessus* and *vita*. The *Quaeritur accessus* does not name the *Silvae* as one of Statius’ works, so it remains necessary that the scribe had access to some additional source.

\(^{84}\) de Angelis, “Magna questio,” 179-80. De Angelis also believes that later Boccaccio came into contact with this manuscript. She brings to light other evidence indicating contact with the *Silvae*, but these manuscripts were written after 1400 and outside Italy.

\(^{85}\) Nonetheless, as noted above, the resemblances Pézard has uncovered are very interesting. He discusses: the usage of the phrase “Latiale caput” in both Dante’s “Letter to the Cardinals,” XI and *Silvae* I.i.191-2 (15); a parallel between “lacrimando ... atre” in *Purgatorio* XXX: 54 and “atros / nigrasset planctu” in the *Silvae* (15-16); a similarity between Statius’ nautical imagery in the *Proempticon* and Dante’s depiction of Beatrice as an admiral in *Purgatorio* (17-20); a similarity in the imagery Dante uses in the Eighth Heaven and that in “Epithalamia for Stella and Violentilla” (21-22); and Statius’ references to Ulysses in the *Eucharisticon* alongside Dante’s depiction of Ulysses in
Pézard concludes his essay by acknowledging the question of why Dante did not mention the Silvae as a work of Statius’ if he had known the text. An even better question, and the one that ultimately makes it extremely unlikely that Dante knew the Silvae, is why Dante would have provided his Stazio with the erroneous medieval biography examined more fully below (such as the claim that he was born in Toulouse) if he had had access to the Silvae, which provides accurate details, including Statius’ birth in Naples. Moreover, to return to the motivations behind Pézard’s study, if Dante added the claim of Statius’ coronation without a source, this signifies that he had important motivations for doing so. The following chapter will revisit this subject.

1.2.2 The Medieval Reception of Statius

Not only did Dante draw on Statius’ works themselves while writing the Commedia, textual evidence suggests that he certainly used some of the ancillary texts often grouped with those works in manuscripts. Commentaries or glosses on Statius’ works are one of the most common categories of these ancillary texts. In the case of Statius, these commentaries are rarely transmitted apart from the actual texts of Statius, because they were not designed to be standalone texts.86 These works exist either as commentary notes in the margins of the manuscript or between the lines of the text, and they range in length from a single word to multiple

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Inferno (23-26). Some of these Silvae passages share similarities with passages in the Thebaid and Achilleid, and further study on this subject could be fruitful.

sentences. The next most common category of ancillary text is the *accessus* and *vita*. An *accessus* is an introduction to a particular text and its author, whereas a *vita* focuses more particularly on the author and his life. Unlike the glosses on Statius, the *accessus* to his works do appear at times in manuscripts without the accompaniment of the *Thebaid* or *Achilleid*, particularly in *florilegia* or anthology manuscripts, which means that medieval audiences could be familiar with an *auctor* even without direct exposure to his work. Another common form of annotation is the *periochae*, which function as prose summaries of the different parts of the work, but which generally were transmitted separately from marginal or interlinear commentary. There is also a substantial tradition of verses used to introduce the work as a whole or the individual books therein. These were likely used as mnemonics to remember different events from the works. Some collection of such verses appear in nearly every manuscript containing Statius’ works. Finally, there are short texts that do not fit into any of the above categories, but which often appear in manuscripts grouped with Statius’ texts. For instance, H. Anderson’s research shows that several manuscripts of the *Thebaid* also contain the short *Planctus Oedipi*; this text has no real relationship to the work of Statius, but it provides the historical background to the story of the Seven against Thebes, which would have been helpful information for readers. Unlike the previous types of material, such texts are always kept separate from the poem itself.
1.2.2.1 The *Accessus* Tradition on Statius

It is sensible to begin with the *accessus* tradition, because *accessus* provide the most information to the modern scholar on how a text was read in the Middle Ages. H. Anderson writes:

most of the medieval commentaries that we have are aimed at school students and provide us with more glosses and etymologies than they do criticism. General interpretation, especially biographical interpretation, is stated most succinctly in the *accessus*, and often only there.... non-allegorical interpretation of an author was then, as it is today, intimately tied to the biography of the author.\(^{87}\)

The “commentaries” found in most Statius manuscripts are far more likely to provide definitions or grammatical notes than they are to provide insight into how a text was read. Moreover, *accessus* were clearly seen as fundamental to the medieval reading experience, in that the majority of manuscripts of Statius’ works include an *accessus* from the tenth century onward.

The writers of *accessus* for Statius’ texts needed to overcome the problem that very little information about Statius had reached the Middle Ages. Medieval readers did not even know the dates of Statius’s life and works, but needed to draw on Juvenal’s reference to him, which implied that the two poets were contemporaries,\(^{88}\) and on Statius’ own poems, which reveal that he was writing in the time of Domitian.\(^{89}\) Statius says very little about himself in his epic works, so his

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\(^{87}\) H. Anderson, vol. 3, V.

medieval readers knew far less about him than they did about Ovid and Horace, who were more self-descriptive, or about Virgil, whose legacy benefited from the interest of Servius, the author of an especially authoritative commentary. Moreover, from very early on, the poet Publius Papinius Statius, who was Roman with a Greek father, was confused with the Toulousan rhetor L. Statius Ursulus (also identified as Surculus or Sursulus). The few apparent sources for Statius’ life included Jerome’s translation of Eusebius’ *Chronica*, in which he writes of a different Statius: “Statius Ursulus Tolosensis celeberrime in Gallia rhetoricam docet.”90 Not only does this misidentification appear in most manuscript materials prior to the fifteenth century, it extends to Dante, who has the poet introduce himself with the words: “Tanto fu dolce mio vocale spirto / che, tolosano, a sé mi trasse Roma” (*Purg. XXI*: 88-89).

Until the rediscovery of the *Silvae*, medieval readers lacked any authoritative source that could correct this error.

Despite a limited number of informational resources, the form of and information contained within Statian *accessus* changed over time because there was some freedom in the production of an *accessus*.91 Since an *accessus* is tailored to the

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90 Jerome, *Eusebii Chronica*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. XIII, ed. Jean-François Bareille (Paris: L. Vivès, 1884). The following chapter will discuss this confusion further.

91 H. Anderson, vol. 1, XXI.
work it introduces, and both the *Thebaid* and *Achilleid accessus* traditions developed along different trajectories over time, there are some significant differences between the *accessus* to the *Thebaid* and to the *Achilleid*. *Achilleid accessus* are more likely to follow a particular formula than the *accessus* to the *Thebaid*, perhaps because the *Achilleid* was more frequently used as a schooltext. Most of these *Achilleid accessus* progress by answering the questions posed by a certain set of *circumstantiae*, such as the *intentio* and *materia* of the work. *Achilleid accessus* are also less likely to address additional information outside of this set of questions, but these texts are still very helpful for determining the interpretation and relative importance of characters and episodes within the *Achilleid*.

Statius’ basic biographical facts are established in the earliest surviving *accessus*, commonly termed the *Quaeritur accessus*, and which dates from the ninth century. This *accessus* was certainly very influential in the tradition, and many of the *accessus* that followed repeat its claims and its language. The *Quaeritur accessus* demonstrates that the confusion between P. Papinius Statius and L. Statius Ursulus was made at a very early point, and was not corrected until the rediscovery of the *Silvae* revealed Statius’ actual birthplace, along with other biographical details. Since *accessus* authors had to reconcile Jerome’s account of “Statius” with what is known of the poet from his works, these writers invented a narrative in which Statius moved to Rome and replaced his study of rhetoric with the practice of poetry.

From the earliest texts onward, *accessus* authors praise Statius as a poet and a person, as is conventional in such works. The *Quaeritur accessus* presents the poet as “nobili ortus prosapia, clarus ingenio et doctus eloquio,” while a later text argues
that he was a “poeta vetustissimo et elegantissimo” (Inc. 157). Statius’ literary purposes are another typical topic of interest. One accessus for the Thebaid reads:

“Denique animum suum ad hoc applicuit ut thebanam historiam pre nimia uetustate iam pene deperditam ad memoriam reucaret. Est itaque eius intentio thebanam describere historiam.”

According to this claim, Statius wrote the Thebaid because it was important to prevent the story of Thebes from vanishing from historical memory. As is typical in medieval readings, accessus writers tend to attribute to Statius an utilitas for his work that is moral or stylistic in nature.

London Burney 258 claims: “Vtilitas siue finis est correctio malorum et per hec exempla ab eis contineri,” whereas Zurich 53 offers: “Vtilitas eius est ut perlectis istis libris pulchras et ornatas sententiarum positiones imitetur.” Some accessus indicate that Statius was particularly valued as a stylist, which is an assertion supported by the type of marginal glossing his manuscripts tended to receive; as Olsen notes: “des figures stylistiques, et notamment les comparaisons, sont signalées dans les marges de la Thébaïde beaucoup plus fréquemment que dans celles des autres poèmes

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92 Paris 5137, twelfth/thirteenth century, France. Cited in Olsen, 238. Anderson notes that this accessus (his Incipitarium entry 36) seems to be a rewriting of the popular “In principio” accessus. A similar passage appears in that text.

93 Edward A. Quain writes of accessus practices: “The auctor was cited but his words were interpreted to suit the purpose of the writer. This attempt to maintain the auctoritas of the revered figure of the past even when twisting his words into an opposite meaning, is a sure index of the admiration in which he was held. Rather than contradict or condemn an auctor, the writer was content to interpret. Exponere reverenter, or simply, exponere became the customary process of face-saving for the auctor.” Edward A. Quain, “The Medieval Accessus ad Auctores,” Traditio 3 (1945): 225.

94 Cited in Olsen, 238. These texts are some of the earliest extant accessus for Statius, and both are dated to the twelfth century. H. Anderson treats them in vol. 3, 8-13, where they are his Incipitarium entries 310 and 98.
classiques.” Another popular epithet for Statius was urbanus, which can be seen in the eleventh century Vita Meinwerci. De Angelis believes that Urbanus is another derivative of Ursulus, but it also may indicate that medieval audiences recognized a refined quality in Statius’ poetry. None of these assertions are unusual praise for a revered poet of the Middle Ages. Virgil, Ovid, Lucan, Horace, and even more minor auctores, received a similar treatment in their respective accessus. But these texts demonstrate that to medieval readers, Statius did belong to the elite class of auctores maiores, and that his auctoritas was founded on his mastery of poetic style and the morality present in his epic works.

Another common practice of medieval readers was to find significance in the etymologies for their subjects’ names, and to connect these meanings to praise of the subject. Dante’s commentators, both medieval and modern, have looked to these etymologies for explanations of Dante’s treatment of Statius, and so a short overview of the major traditions will be profitable. The confusion between Statius and Jerome’s L. Statius Ursulus led not only to misleading information about the poet’s biography, but also to the proliferation of variations upon Statius’ full name. One of the most popular variations is “Statius Papinius Surculus,” with the possible


97 However, it is an oddity that accessus to the Achilleid are far less likely to be concerned with these etymologies until well into the Renaissance. The accessus in Lincoln College is the only Achilleid accessus to feature discussion of Statius’ names.
variants of “Papirius” and “Sursulus.” Both “Statius” and “Papinius” derive from the poet’s true name, although medieval texts reverse the correct order, and it can be presumed that “Surculus” or “Sursulus” is a corruption of the “Ursulus” in the name of Jerome’s rhetorician. Andreas Heil notes that Statius was believed to have the name “Sursulus” as early as 984, since Walter of Speyer writes in his *Libellus de studio poetae, qui et Scolasticos*: “Sursulus ingenua cantavit prelia voce.”

The first of Statius’ names to be etymologized was his agnomen, “Surculus,” for the *Quaeritur* text reads that “Surculus” signifies “sursum canens,” and six later *accessus* repeat this claim. The *accessus* in Royal 15.A.XXIX (Inc. 265) offers a different etymology for “Surculus,” and one that more strongly emphasizes the wisdom inherent in Statius’ *auctoritas*: “Surculus dicitur quasi surgulus a surgendo, quia surgebat et crescebat in sua sapientia.” The other major etymological tradition for “Surculus,” links the name to *surcus* or the diminutive *surculus*, meaning something like branch or twig, although in these texts it seems to signify something more like “root.” The author of the Royal 15.A.XXIX *accessus* writes: “Surculus pars trunci que super terram eminet ubi pes alicuius offenditur. Ita iste erat offendiculum

98 Heil, 100-101. Heil shows that this etymology also appeared in etymological dictionaries, like that of Uguccione of Pisa (*Magnae derivationes*, written before 1192): “sursum vel susum. adverbia loci. unde hic surcus.ci. truncus qui remanet post abscisionem arboris vel surcus est ramus qui ab arbore absconditur et generaliter pro ramo ponitur. unde hic surculus.li. diminutivum. Surculus aciam dictus est Statius quasi sursum canens quia post Virgilium inter ceteros poetas principatum obtinuit.” Cited in Heil, 100-101. Uguccione (Huguccio) is cited as the authority behind this etymology in some Statius *accessus*, such as Florence, II.25.

99 In chronological order, these texts are the “Bern-Burney” *accessus* (Inc. 210), the “In principio” *accessus* (Inc. 126), the Freiburg HS 375 *accessus* (Inc. 274), the Vatican, Reg. lat. 1375 *accessus* (Inc. 113), the Vienna ÖNB 13685 *accessus* (Inc. 41), and the Vienna ÖNB 3114 *accessus* (Inc. 268). The first four texts are *accessus* to the *Thebaid*, and the latter two pertain to the *Achilleid*. This interpretation remains popular from the time of the first *accessus* up until after the point of the rediscovery of the *Silvae* in the fifteenth century.
emulari.” Other *accessus* authors seize on the link between “Surculus” and “surcus” because this interpretation can be connected to the etymology of “Virgilius” from “virga,” also meaning branch, and a number of later commentators were interested in exploring the relationship between Statius and Virgil. The text of Genoa E.II.8 (Inc. 32) reads: “sicuti a uirga Uirgilius dictus est, ita iste Surculus a surco quod idem sonat est appellatus.”

The etymological traditions for “Statius” and “Papinius” were less popular. It seemed evident that “Statius” must derive from *stare*.

In his commentary on the *Commedia*, Francesco da Buti connects such an interpretation of “Statius” with the role Dante gives to Stazio in the *Commedia*. “E Stazio significa lo intelletto, che guida la volontà e la sensualità per quelle cose che con ragione non si possano comprendere, e però bene si li conviene questo nome Stazio, cioè stante iudicio; Statius, id est stans ius.”

A few texts contain etymologies linking “Papinius” to

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100 de Angelis has noted that this interpretation, which links Statius to Virgil, seems to have been particularly popular in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century texts; in addition to this *accessus*, she notes similar explanations in Benvenuto da Imola’s commentary on the *Commedia*. “Magna questio,” 201-202. Benvenuto’s commentary on *Purgatorio* XXI: 91-93 provides almost the very same text: “sicut Virgilius dictus est a virga, ita Statius dictus est surculus a surculo, quia idem sonat.” Benevenuti de Rambaldis de Imola Comentum super Dantis Aldigherij Comedio, nunc primum integre in lucem editum sumptibus Guilielmi Warren Vernon, curante Jacobo Philippo Lacaita, Tomus quartus (Florence: G. Barbèra, 1887).

101 The best that could be said in explanation was: “Statius a stando dicitur,” although both the Oxford, BL Lincoln College lat. 27 *accessus* (Inc. 238) and that of Royal 15.A.XXIX (Inc. 265) connect this etymology to a moral teaching. Lincoln College reads: “Recte fuit hoc nomen eius proprium, qui per omnia scripta sua non solum tamquam in uertice litterarum, sed in morum dignitate stetit et eminentia uirtutum,” and Royal 15.A.XXIX offers: “Staciue autem quasi stans dictus est, stando enim in summo castitatem et concordiam in probando eorum incesta scelera—scilicet incestum quod contrarium est castitati, et <quod> paci oposim scilicet discordiam.”

“Pampinius” or “Pape”, with explanations connecting these derivations to Statius’ poetry, rhetorical skills, and wisdom.\textsuperscript{103}

\textit{Accessus} authors were also preoccupied with the \textit{utilitas} of Statius’ works, particularly as it related to his historical situation, living and writing in the time of Domitian, a subject Dante would also address directly. The author of the \textit{accessus} of Inc. 115 posits that Statius particularly wrote the \textit{Achilleid} so as to acquire Domitian’s favor, and another \textit{accessus} writer asserts that once Statius had finished the \textit{Thebaid}, Domitian brought him to Rome to be crowned and honored (Inc. 262).\textsuperscript{104} The opening lines of both the \textit{Thebaid} and the \textit{Achilleid} imply that Domitian assumed that Statius would use his literary gifts to praise the great deeds of the emperor, or at the very least, that Statius knew it would be politic to suggest that he had yet to write on that subject because he doubted his own ability, not because of disinclination.\textsuperscript{105} Although Statius’ circumspection seems more likely, the former

\textsuperscript{103} The Lincoln College \textit{accessus} (Inc. 238) reads: “Cognominabatur etiam Pampinius, a Pampino, folio uitis, quia sicut pampinus sui densitate uitem circumtegit et uestit, sic iste poeta totum opus suum uarisi arborum ornamentis et maxime comparisonum uenustate compagnat.” The “Pape” tradition was slightly more popular, and the Bern-Burney \textit{accessus} (Inc. 310) provides: “et in hoc ipso Papianus id est mirabilis in recitatione, cum etiam in dictamine satis ualuit. Pape enim uox est mirabilis.” Whereas that interpretation favors Statius’ rhetorical skills, the text in Royal 15.AXXIX (Inc. 265) promotes Statius’ wisdom. The author writes: “Papinus dicitur a Greco quod est pape, quasi admirabilis in sapientia. Statius proprio nomine” and later adds: “Papinus id est admirabilis fieret.”

\textsuperscript{104} Inc. 115: “\textit{Utilitas autem potest esse duplex, scilicet communis et priuata. ... Priuata, ut fauorem Domitiani imperatoris Romani per nobilia sua scripta posset acquirere.” Inc. 262: “Que causa mouerit autorem principaliter ad hoc opus; est sciendo quod postquam Thebaydem composuit, in qua per annos XII inuigilauit, Romam uenit et ibi coronatus est et ab imperatore Domitiano honorificentissime susceptus.”

\textsuperscript{105} \textit{Thebaid} I: 16-24, 32-33: “limes mihi carminis esto / Oedipodae confusa domus, quando Itala nondum / signa nec Arctoos ausim spirare triumphos / bisque iugo Rhenum, bis aductum legibus Histrum / et coniurato delecto uertice Dacos / aut defensa prius uix pubescentibus annis / bella louis. tuque, o Latiae decus addite famae / quem noua maturi subeuntem exorsa parentis / aeternum sibi Roma cupit / ... / tempus erit, cum Pierio tua fortior oestro / factura canam.” \textit{Achilleid} I:
interpretation provided more fodder for the medieval art of creative biography, and legends sprang up in the ancillary documents to the *Achilleid* concerning the relationship between Statius and Domitian. Inc. 115 takes Statius’ lines at face value, explaining that Statius takes on his current subject so as to improve on his natural poetic ability before embarking on the great task of honoring Domitian’s deeds.\(^{106}\) The author of Inc. 262 elaborates even further, and brings together Statius’ public and private *utilitates*: he claims that when the question of whether or not one could elude predestination was posed in the emperor’s court, Domitian invited Statius to solve this problem. To do so, the poet composed the *Achilleid*, in which Thetis fails to prevent her son’s pre-ordained death.\(^{107}\) The linking of the writing of the *Achilleid* to a contemporary political situation might have been a matter of interest to Dante, who frequently comments on contemporary politics in the *Commedia*. However, unlike the *accessus* that posit that Statius wrote the *Thebaid* in order to warn the imperial brothers against enmity and war, this text suggests a positive relationship of patronage between Statius and Domitian. Since Dante’s Stazio has nothing but

\(^{14-19:} “At
tu,
quem
longe
primum
stupet
Itala
virtus
/Graiaque,
cui
geminae
florent
vatumque
ducumque
/certam
laurus—
olim
dolet
altera
vinci—,
/da
veniam
ac
trepidum
patere
hoc
sudare
parumper
/pulvere:
te
longo
necdum
fidente
paratu
/molimur
magnusque
tibi
praeludit
Achilles.”

\(^{106}\) Inc. 115: “In principio huius auctoris notandum est quod Domitianus imperator Romanus Vespasiani filius, uidens Statium opus Thebaidos feliciter consumasse, ipsum rogavit Statium quatenus sua fortia facta describeret. Statius uero de actis tanti ducis describendis se diffidens sufficere, aliquo leuiori opusculo suum uoluit preacuere ingenium et expiriri. Vnde datis sibi indutiis a Domitiano, hoc opus Achilleidos aggressus est.” Also: “Vel fuit priuata in hoc ut ingenium suum per hoc tractatum posset acuere ad uersificandum facta Domitiani nobiliter describenda et ut posset per hoc opus fauorem acquirere et impetrare.”

\(^{107}\) Inc. 262: “Demum in aula imperatoris questio talis fuit proposita, utrum ea que predestinata sunt possint euitari uel ne. Ad quam questionem soluendam, Statius a Domitiano imperatore inuitatus est, et eam soluere uolens, hunc libellum compositum, ostendendo qualiter Thetis fatis resistere uoluit et nequiuit.”
criticism for the way Domitian treated the early Christians, it is possible that Dante was responding to the theory of patronage put forth in texts like these, either to dismiss the claims altogether, or to have his Stazio distance himself from Domitian as his patron.

1.2.2.2 Commentaries on Statius

Although the commentaries on Statius provide fewer insights than *vitae* and *accessus* as to how Statius was interpreted, the commentary tradition is still a fruitful resource for where and how Statius was read. H. Anderson has broken down the commentaries on the *Thebaid* and *Achilleid* into different groups, finding 14 characterizable families among the *Thebaid* manuscripts, including the commentaries associated with Lactantius Placidus and Pomponius Letus, and 8 families among the *Achilleid* manuscripts, also including the commentary attributed to Lactantius Placidus. While none of the *Achilleid* commentaries were very influential, three *Thebaid* commentaries were widely disseminated in the Middle Ages: the Pseudo-Lactantius-Placidus commentary, which has thus far received the most critical attention, the “In principio” commentary (named after its incipit), and the “Arundel-Burney” commentary (named after its principal manuscripts). Each

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108 This study will not provide notes from the majority of these commentaries, as most have not yet been published, but it seems that further study of the different families would bear fruit for an understanding of the medieval Statius. However, that level of detail would be superfluous to a dissertation on the relationship between Dante and Statius, although some of the findings might eventually prove relevant to this study. Anderson’s methodology was to identify keywords among the commentaries on *Thebaid* I: 717-20 and *Achilleid* I: 1-2. Thus, any manuscript lacking commentary on either passage was not categorized.
of these commentaries can be found in an Italian manuscript composed before 1400.\textsuperscript{110} Only the commentary attributed to Lactantius Placidus is of late-antique composition, as it is believed to have been written before the fifth century.\textsuperscript{111} The “In principio” commentary seems to have been composed in the late eleventh or early twelfth century in northern France. The “Arundel-Burney” commentary appears in Northern French manuscripts from the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, and essentially derives from the “In principio” commentary.\textsuperscript{112} Another commentary tradition has received a lot of attention from scholars attempting to look at medieval readings of Statius: an allegorical treatment falsely attributed to Fulgentius. Unlike the commentaries named above, this commentary does not appear to have become influential or widely distributed, yet heretofore it has been overvalued in the assessment of the medieval Statius tradition.\textsuperscript{113} The following chapter will discuss the Pseudo-Fulgentius commentary at greater length, as it ties into the discussion of Statius’ possible Christianity.

\textsuperscript{109} The latter two commentaries were first identified in David Anderson, “Boccaccio’s Glosses on Statius,” \textit{Studi sul Boccaccio} XXII (1994): 3-134.

\textsuperscript{110} The Lactantius Placidus commentary is found in Florence, BML Plut. 68.6; Florence, BML Strozzi 130; Pistoia, BF A.45; Rome, BV C. 60-1; and Vatican, Pal. lat. 1694. The “In principio” commentary is found in Florence, BML Plut. 38.6; Milan, BA M. 60 Sup.; Perugia, BCA H. 53; and Vatican, BAV Chigi H. VIII. 272. The “Arundel-Burney’ commentary is found in Wolfenbüttel, HAB, Extrav, 265.4, 8e.

\textsuperscript{111} H. Anderson, vol. 3, XXIV.

\textsuperscript{112} H. Anderson, vol. 3, XXVI. Since this commentary shares so many features with the “In principio” commentary, and little scholarly work has been done on it, this section will not describe it further.

\textsuperscript{113} H. Anderson argues: “As it is transmitted in but one medieval manuscript (Paris, BnF, lat. 3012) and is not echoed in any other extant texts, it seems to have had little or no currency in the Middle Ages.” H. Anderson, vol. 3, XXVI.
The Lactantius-Placidus commentary is the oldest extant Statius commentary, and some posit it may be the first to have been written, although the attribution to Lactantius Placidus is false.\textsuperscript{114} David Anderson has studied Boccaccio’s manuscript of the\textit{Thebaid} that contains the scholia associated with Lactantius Placidus, and which were a significant resource for Boccaccio in the writing of the\textit{Genealogie deorum gentilium}. Since the Lactantius Placidus commentary is among the most developed and most highly disseminated of the Statius commentaries (as well as being one of the few for which an edition has been produced), this work has often been consulted by Dante scholars trying to make sense of the reading of Statius available to Dante. However, D. Anderson’s research on this commentary and the Italian tradition may call this approach into question. He notes that the commentary is very rarely found south of the Alps before the late fourteenth century, though it was widely disseminated in Germany in earlier centuries. The only manuscript that can be assigned to Italy before this period is Vatican Pal. It. 1694, of the eleventh century, and it seems that the later humanist copies of the commentary that proliferated in Italy during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries

\textsuperscript{114} Rainer Jakobi notes that neither Jerome nor Donatus, when talking about Statius, quote from a commentary, and argues that it can be inferred from those facts that there was not yet a commentary in their days. Rainer Jakobi, “Textgeschichte als Kulturgeschichte. Der sogenannte Lactantius-Placidus-Kommentar zu \textit{Thebais} des Statius,” in \textit{Der Kommentar in Antike und Mittelalter 2: Neue Beiträge zu seiner Erforschung}, ed. Wilhelm Geerlings and Christian Schulze (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 1-17. However, since Jerome’s \textit{Cronica} names only the Toulousan orator Statius, not the poet Statius, which resulted in the medieval confusion over these figures, that may indicate that Jerome was not familiar with the work of the poet Statius. Jerome’s \textit{Cronica} does contain references to the poets Virgil, Ovid, Lucan, and Horace, and his \textit{Contra Rufinum} named Virgil and Lucan, but not Statius. Thus, the fact that he does not mention a commentary is insufficient to suppose that one was not yet written during his lifetime. However, the fact that Donatus does not mention a commentary either is more suggestive. Jakobi also believes there was an increase of interest in Statius from 350 to 400, and argues that the foundation for Lactantius Placidus’ later commentary was probably laid in this period.
are related to this manuscript in some way.\textsuperscript{115} de Angelis also argues that this commentary more or less disappeared between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{116} Remigio Sabbadini has even proposed that it was Boccaccio himself who “rediscovered” the Lactantius Placidus commentary for Italy, and no scholar has yet disproved his claim.\textsuperscript{117}

Thus, it is unlikely that Dante ever saw this commentary; however, if he did, at least one of its features might have been of interest to him, for the author must have been very familiar with Servius’ commentary on the \textit{Aeneid}, in that some of the notes on Statius in the “Lactantius” commentary closely resemble Servius’ notes on the \textit{Aeneid}.\textsuperscript{118} There are also instances where both commentary authors address the same particular intertextualities; for instance, just as Servius’ commentary on \textit{Aeneid} XII: 90 refers the reader to \textit{Thebaid} II: 276, the commentary to \textit{Thebaid} II: 276 refers the reader to the \textit{Aeneid} passage. There is a similar occurrence with \textit{Aeneid} XI: 36 and \textit{Thebaid} VI: 37-43. Notes such as these, which establish the relationship between the two texts, both reflect an understanding of Statius as an

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\textsuperscript{115} D. Anderson, 17-18. Anderson’s article is particularly concerned with positing that Boccaccio owned a second, unidentified manuscript of the Lactantius Placidus commentary and the \textit{Thebaid}, and that he drew on this commentary to add glosses to Plut. 38.6 derived from both the traditions of the Lactantius commentary and the “In principio” commentary.

\textsuperscript{116} de Angelis, “I commenti,” 92-93.


\end{flushright}
imitator of Virgil and work to promote that idea. Since Statius’ veneration of Virgil is a major facet of Dante’s portrayal of the poet, it is possible that notes like these, whether found in this commentary or a similar one, may have been an impetus for Dante’s characterization of Statius, though it is equally likely that Dante could have noticed such similarities on his own.

Violetta de Angelis argues that the prolonged absence of the Lactantius Placidus commentary left space for the proliferation of medieval exegesis on the *Thebaid*, since interest in the *Thebaid* never waned. The most prominent of these commentaries is the so-called “In principio” commentary, whose oldest witness is found in a twelfth-century manuscript, Berlin SPK lat. 2o. 34. A shorter redaction of this commentary was produced shortly thereafter, in Paris, lat. 5137, which suggests that the commentary received recognition almost immediately. In his study of Boccaccio’s Statius manuscript, D. Anderson has also identified elements of the “In principio” commentary in the glosses added by Boccaccio. This commentary is also notable for containing passages that link Statius’ *Ara Clementiae* to the Altar to the Unknown God in Acts, a feature first noted by Carlo Landi, and one which will be examined in the next chapter.

According to de Angelis, it is possible to identify the author of this commentary, or at least, trace him to a particular place and time, because the commentary shares significant features with certain commentaries on the works of Virgil, and perhaps also others on Ovid and the Scriptures. A commentary on the

\[119\] de Angelis, “I commenti,” 92-94.
Aeneid de Angelis identifies contains a reference to “magister Ansellus,” whom de Angelis associates with Anselm of Laon; thus she suggests that the “In principio” commentary was composed by Anselm of Laon or one of his students. As this commentator was knowledgeable enough to write commentaries on both Statius and Virgil, he frequently notes the similarities between the two poets. de Angelis cites three glosses that refer to the more virgiliano in reference to stylistic similarities between Virgil and Statius. The commentator also points out the resemblance of Statius’ Dymas and Opleus in Thebaid X to Virgil’s Nisus and Euryalus. Like the author of the Lactantius Placidus commentary, the author of this commentary is very familiar with Servius’ commentary on the Aeneid, and he elaborates on or adapts some of Servius’ glosses to fit situations in the Thebaid. On the other hand, H. Anderson suggests the possibility that the commentary is an aggregate of notes without any one particular author, which is another plausible explanation for the breadth of knowledge on display.

120 de Angelis has noted some interesting passages in this commentary and connected them to passages in the commentaries on Virgil, but none of these passages seems distinctive enough to justify her claims.

121 de Angelis, “I commenti,” 95-96. D. Anderson, in a footnote, asserts that de Angelis later modified her position, and claimed that the commentary was the work of one of Anselm of Laon’s students, not of Anselm himself. His source is a talk, “Medieval Commentaries on Statius,” de Angelis gave on May 25, 1993 at the University of Tübingen. D. Anderson, 46 fn.67.

122 In particular, the use of hic for illic (Theb. I: 273, 327; II: 523).

123 de Angelis, “I commenti,” 97.

124 de Angelis, “I commenti,” 98.

Other interesting aspects of this commentary include its Platonizing elements, such as the use of Macrobius, especially in astrological and astronomical notes, or interest in themes like the *anima mundi*. de Angelis identifies a gloss that she characterizes as “evidentemente dipendente dal commento di Calcidio al *Timeo*, alla quale si cumula però l’originale notizia che Demogorgon è identificabile con l’*anima mundi*.”

However, there is very little allegory in the commentary, and there is no mention of the concepts of *integumentum* or *involucrum*, common Neo-Platonic concerns, and ones especially applicable to the study of literature. Nor are there any clear indications that the commentary was specifically influenced by the commentaries on Martianus Capella, or Bernard Silvestris’ on the *Aeneid*, even though her hypothesis suggests that these commentaries should have been influential.

C. S. Lewis, who was one of the first critics to use Statius’ own works in accounting for Dante’s treatment of Stazio, suggested that Dante was drawn to certain Neo-Platonic themes in Statius’ epics. The presence of these Neo-Platonic readings in one of the most important medieval commentaries on Statius lends some support to the theory that part of Dante’s appreciation for Statius is related to Neo-Platonic principles.

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126 de Angelis, “I commenti,” 112-13. Such glosses are among the reasons de Angelis wants to attribute the commentary to a school affiliated with Chartres.


128 C. S. Lewis, “Dante’s Statius,” *Medium Aevum* 25 (1957): 133-39. For a number of decades, Lewis was the only Dante critic to engage with Statius’ works. On the whole, Winthrop Wetherbee’s more thorough treatment of this subject seems to be a more plausible account of Dante’s attraction to the poet, but elements of Lewis’ argument may also be true. Winthrop Wetherbee, *The Ancient Flame: Dante and the Poets* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008).


1.2.2.3 Verse arguments

The verse arguments generally included in manuscripts containing Statius’ texts are another significant source of information about the way the poet was read in the Middle Ages. These verses served as mnemonic aids, addressing plot, characters, and the subdivisions of the text, and thus reveal what details medieval readers considered most important. Although these are ancillary texts, they tended to receive prominent rather than marginal manuscript placement; not only were they included within the boundaries of the text-space, but, in some cases, they themselves received further exegesis. As H. Anderson writes, “these poems were seen, thus, as independent, self-standing texts that were endowed with their own textual authority.”129 There are three main traditions of this sort associated with the Thebaid, and all seem to date from the fourth century or before. The first two traditions, referred to as the Associat and Solvitur arguments, from their incipits, are twelve-line poems, with a line addressing each book of the Thebaid. The third tradition is the argumenta antiqua, which supplies dodecastich arguments for Books II-XII of the Thebaid. The original verses for Book VI were lost to the tradition, so several attempts were made to supply a substitute in the twelfth century, and again in the fourteenth century.130 At least one set of these verses appears in a majority of


130 Although they are not associated with the argumenta antiqua tradition, there are also a number of verse arguments produced for Book 1, which this analysis will draw on.
the manuscripts of the *Thebaid* surveyed by Anderson.\textsuperscript{131} They were transmitted either in the form of the continuous full text, or with the individual lines or stanzas divided up among the pertinent books. In the case of the *argumenta antiqua*, it was most common for only some subset of the eleven dodecastichs to be transmitted; it is quite rare to find all eleven dodecastichs in the same manuscript.\textsuperscript{132} There are also verse arguments related to the *Achilleid*, but they were composed at a later date than those of the *Thebaid*.\textsuperscript{133}

An examination of these texts suggests that in many cases, Dante’s interest in Statius’ works did not align with the general interests of medieval readers. While these texts give prominent placement to the central Statian characters that Dante also depicts, such as Capaneus, Amphiaraus, and Hypsipyle, Dante’s presentations of these figures are more dynamic, and often focus on different aspects of these characterizations.\textsuperscript{134} For instance, many of these verse texts seem to sanitize the details of Tydeus’ death. Only Inc. 328 puts the case boldly: “Tideus occumbit. Menalippum in limine uitæ / Querit et in morsu uitam consumit anhelo,” and this text seems to have been less widely disseminated than the others. The three more common texts either merely mention Tydeus’ death (Inc. 27) or refer to his crime

\textsuperscript{131} H. Anderson, in his 2000 article, puts the numbers at 167 out of 254 *Thebaid* manuscripts, but his later work suggests the number is even higher. Anderson, “Metrical Arguments,” 221.

\textsuperscript{132} H. Anderson, vol. 1, XXII.

\textsuperscript{133} H. Anderson, vol. 1, XXIII.

\textsuperscript{134} The fourth chapter of this work focuses on Dante’s adaptations of Statian material, and will discuss most of these instances in greater detail.
only elliptically (Inc. 22, 253). Dante, on the other hand, uses the gory details of this scene as inspiration for the portrayal of Ugolino in *Inferno* XXXII and XXXIII. Moreover, while these texts provide apt summaries of the main events of the *Thebaid*, Dante also draws on more minor elements of Statius’ work, such as the Book I scene between Adrastus and Polynices, in which the king seeks to know Polynices’ identity, and Polynices replies elliptically in order to avoid naming his family’s shameful past. Dante imitates this scene both in the discussion between the pilgrim and Manfred in *Purgatorio* III, and again in *Purgatorio* XIV when the pilgrim explains his identity to Guido del Duca and Rinieri dal Calboli. None of the texts on *Thebaid* V mention Hypsipyle’s reunion with her sons, which is Dante’s point of comparison for the pilgrim’s joy at meeting Guido Guinizelli in *Purgatorio* XXVI. The ancillary texts also lack a description of the divided flame on the pyre of Eteocles and Polynices in *Thebaid* XII, which inspires the punishment of Ulysses and Diomedes in *Inferno* XXVI. Thus, these texts might have had some utility for Dante, but it was necessarily limited at best.

On the whole, the ancillary texts relating to the *Achilleid* more closely reflect Dante’s engagement with Statian themes than the texts on the *Thebaid*. However, Dante seems to view Thetis differently from these texts, because the *Achilleid* accessus, as well as the verse arguments, stress Thetis’ attempts to fight her son’s fate, which tends to be characterized as impious and presumptuous behavior. Dante,


136 Inc. 291 does acknowledge this scene, but none of the other texts do, which is especially notable since there are more verse arguments to *Thebaid* I than to any of the other books.
however, clearly places her in Limbo among those without sin, which suggests that he does not see fault in her actions. The other significant difference between Dante’s reception of the *Achilleid* and that of the tradition also concerns a woman: Deidamia, daughter of Lycomedes. In the *Achilleid*, Achilles seduces her, then leaves her behind when he departs to fight the Trojan War. A few of the texts mention Deidamia, but she receives little attention as compared to other events in the *Achilleid*. Dante, however, not only names her as one of the Statian women in Limbo, but also explains that one of the three crimes of Ulysses and Diomedes is taking Achilles away from Deidamia, for whom “ancor si duol.”\(^{137}\)

While these are just a handful of examples, the differences in emphasis between the other medieval texts and Dante’s treatments of Statius’ characters indicate that Dante’s knowledge of Statius’ works most likely came from direct study. It is possible that he used these ancillary texts in some capacity as well—he certainly drew on the *accessus* and *vita* tradition for his biography of Statius—but there are no signs that he was influenced by the verse arguments. It is likely, however, that the verse arguments, commentaries to Statius, and Statian *accessus* and *vitae* were helpful to Dante’s early commentators. Their texts reveal that early commentators could access Statius’ texts or texts about him in the century after the writing of the *Commedia*, because several commentators show extensive knowledge of Statius and his works. While later commentators, especially Benvenuto da Imola (ca. 1375-80) and Francesco da Buti (ca. 1385-95), provide more thorough and

\(^{137}\) *Purgatorio* XXII: 109-14; *Inferno* XXVI: 55-63. Moreover, at least some of the medieval Dante commentators believe that the reference to Achilles in love, in *Inferno* III: 65-66, concerns Deidamia.
sophisticated treatments of Statian material, commentators as early as Guido da Pisa (ca. 1327-28) are able to provide quotations from many different parts of the *Thebaid*, and commentators continue to repeat these passages, or add different ones.\(^{138}\) Since Dante’s commentators who quote Statius most are less likely to offer detailed explanations of the Statian material, it is possible that these commentators draw some quotations from *florilegia* rather than from Statius’ texts themselves. These commentators often cite passages outside the scope of Dante’s Statius references, and most of the material they provide resembles the summaries of Statius’ texts found in Statius commentaries or the material in the verse arguments. It is difficult to determine whether their expansions on Dante’s material indicate *florilegia* use or a broader knowledge of Statius.\(^{139}\) On the other hand, Dante’s slightly later commentators, like Benvenuto and Francesco, rarely quote Statius, but they offer more detailed contextualization and analysis of Dante’s references to Statius, which may indicate that deeper engagement with Statius’ texts was possible by the end of the fourteenth century.\(^{140}\) While Statius commentaries and other ancillary texts might have aided Benvenuto and Francesco, the knowledge and

\(^{138}\) Of the early commentators (through 1405), the following quote lines from Statius’ works at least once: Guido da Pisa, L’Ottimo Commento (in two recensions), Pietro Alighieri (in all three recensions), the Codice cassinese, the Chiose ambrosiane, Giovanni Boccaccio, Benvenuto da Imola, Francesco da Buti, and Filippo Villani. However, there are signs to suggest that some of these commentators are merely copying an earlier commentary.

\(^{139}\) It is also worth noting that *Thebaid* I is by far the book most quoted by the early commentators, despite the fact that Dante does not draw much from this book directly. Some of the commentators seem to be trying to establish themselves as authorities through their use of quotations, although their familiarity with Dante’s use of Statius elsewhere is more limited.

\(^{140}\) It is also possible that that these two types of commentators simply had different intentions in mind for their commentaries. But the difference is worth noting, in light of the apparently limited access to Statian texts in Italy at the beginning of the fourteenth century.
analysis they provide goes beyond what is available in any medieval extant text on Statius, and indicates engagement with Statius’ texts themselves.

This survey has produced a picture of how Dante and his contemporaries might have encountered Statius’ work, based upon historical records and resources. Despite the evidence that it is very unlikely that Dante could have engaged with Statius’ work in Florence, the depth of his engagement with his texts, which the following chapters will explore, proves that, during his exile, he did study them somewhere. From this presentation of Statius’ ancillary texts, it should be clear that there were a number of aspects in the interpretative tradition on Statius that Dante could have found engaging. However, as later chapters will discuss, Dante’s clear affinity to certain aspects not emphasized in these texts indicates that his knowledge of Statius almost certainly came from direct contact with the poet’s works. Thus, his insights and reactions are likely to be his own, not those of the medieval tradition. Now that these various manuscript materials have been introduced, it is possible to examine these resources alongside Dante’s work, and derive a clearer picture of his interaction with Statius’ own works, as well as with how the medieval tradition engaged with Statius. The next chapter will examine Dante’s engagement with the Statius accessus and other ancillary texts in his portrayal of Stazio in the Purgatorio, as well as consider the various critical hypotheses that have been proposed concerning the reasons behind Stazio’s Christianity.
CHAPTER 2

DANTE'S STAZIO AND THE HISTORICAL STATIUS

The classical poet Stazio\textsuperscript{141} is an extremely significant figure in the
*Commedia*. Not only is he the first soul Dante and Virgil meet in *Purgatorio* who has
been fully purged from his vices, but Stazio also serves as a guide for the two
travelers until the company reaches the Earthly Paradise, because Virgil has become
increasingly uncertain in his role as Dante’s guide as they ascend Mount Purgatory.
Moreover, in *Purgatorio* XXV, Stazio gives one of the longest speeches of the
*Commedia*, explaining the nature of the aerial bodies of the souls in the afterlife
through a discussion of embryonic creation and development that includes a
philosophical discourse on the divine creation of the human soul. But what readers,
especially scholars, have seen as most notable about Stazio’s presence in Purgatory
is that the tradition considered Statius to be a pagan poet, while Dante portrays
Stazio as a secret Christian convert. Scholars have diligently tried to discover any
indication that Dante is drawing on an existing tradition for his assertion, but aside
from this line of inquiry, few scholars have attempted to situate Dante’s account of

\textsuperscript{141} This dissertation will differentiate between the historical Statius, and Dante’s construct,
by referring to Dante’s *personaggio* as “Stazio.”
Stazio within the general medieval interpretative tradition on the poet. This inattention constitutes a serious omission, because Dante’s construction of Stazio’s biography is not limited to the assertion of his Christianity. When one reads medieval Statius *accessus* alongside the *Commedia*, it is clear that these texts were a major source for Dante’s portrayal of Stazio, and they shed light on what Dante strives to do with his unique portrayal of Stazio. Dante is ultimately so successful in establishing himself as an authority on Stazio, that later *accessus* authors are influenced by his unusual claims. This chapter begins by situating Dante’s Stazio *vita* within the existing tradition of *vitae* of the poet, and demonstrating how his alterations of the tradition serve specific purposes. The latter part of the chapter will focus on Dante’s claim regarding Stazio’s Christianity, addressing the possibility that Dante is drawing on an earlier tradition, and examining how scholars and readers have reacted to this claim across the centuries.

2.1 Dante’s *Vita* of Stazio

2.1.1 Stazio’s *Vita Nuova*

Dante actually writes a new “*vita*” for Stazio in *Purgatorio* XXI and XXII. As the previous chapter explained, those writing an *accessus* for Statius had to face the challenge that there were limited resources concerning Statius’ life available to medieval readers. Since very few biographical resources on Statius existed for *accessus* writers to draw upon, they seized on what material was available, even if it were dubious or untrue, such as the confusion of Statius with the Toulousan rhetorician named L. Statius Ursulus, an error made by Dante himself when he has
the poet introduce himself (Purg. XXI: 88-89). However, the paucity of resources on Statius was also a feature Dante could work to his advantage, since it gave him space to create his own characterization of Stazio.

A study of the Statius accessus tradition reveals how closely Dante adheres to the typical order of material in such texts, even as he adapts the form of the accessus to fit the Commedia. Not only does Dante write in vernacular terza rima rather than Latin prose, but he also conveys this biography through dialogue between Virgil and Stazio, and distributes it over two cantos with digressions and breaks in between the vita text. But to ascertain that, despite these formal adaptations, Dante also closely models his text on traditional accessus, one need only examine the text of the earliest extant accessus for Statius, the Quaeritur accessus, in comparison with Dante’s vita of Stazio. The basic form of Dante’s biographical presentation addresses: the time in which Stazio lived, which he specifies according to the emperor of the time: “‘Nel tempo che ’l buon Tito’”; his birthplace in Toulouse and transition to Rome: “‘che, tolosano, a sé mi trasse Roma’”; certain details of his life: “‘dove mertai le tempie ornar di mirto. / Stazio la gente ancor di là mi noma’”; and the works he wrote: “‘cantai di Tebe, e poi del grande Achille / ma caddi in via con la seconda soma’” (Purg. XXI: 82-93).142

An examination of the Quaeritur accessus reveals that Dante’s biography for Stazio closely follows its same basic pattern. The accessus presents in the following order: that Statius lived in the reign of Vespasian, up through the reigns of Titus and

142 Dante Alighieri, La Commedia secondo l’antica Vulgata, ed. Giorgio Petrocchi, 4 vols, 2nd ed. (Florence: Casa editrice Le lettere, 1994).
Domitian: “fuisse eum temporibus Uespasiani imperatoris et peruenisse usque ad imperium Domitiani fratri Titi”; his birthplace in Toulouse and move to Rome: “fuisse Tholosensis, ... postea ueniens Romam ad poetriam se transtulit”; certain facts about his life: “Fuit autem nobili ortus prosapia, clarus ingenio et doctus eloquio”; and one of his works: “Scripsit autem Thebaiden.”\(^{143}\) Because Dante’s text so closely follows the form of this particular *accessus*, which is one of the most disseminated Statius *accessus* in the Middle Ages, it seems very likely that this text, or a descendent from it, is almost certainly one of the *accessus* that Dante had read. Although other *accessus* on Statius present some of the same materials, the authors of the rest of these texts arranged the same facts in different formats.\(^{144}\) Giorgio Brugnoli had already noted the similarities between the *Quaeritur accessus* and the *Commedia*,\(^ {145}\) but he did not consider the broader *accessus* tradition. Based on a more thorough survey of these texts, it can be asserted that the high degree of similarity between the *Purgatorio* and the *Quaeritur accessus* is unique within the


\(^{144}\) Of the two other texts with structural similarities to the *Quaeritur accessus*, one appeared before the *Commedia*, but several centuries later than the *Queritur accessus* (present in London, BL Royal 15.A.XXIX, 13th century), while the other was written after Dante (Vienna, ÖNB 13685, 1477-79).

\(^{145}\) Giorgio Brugnoli has argued that this *accessus* is Dante’s main source for his treatment of Statius. Giorgio Brugnoli, “Stazio in Dante,” *Cultura Neolatina* 29 (1969): 117. Violetta de Angelis disagrees with this interpretation, because, while there are affinities between this *accessus* and Dante’s portrayal of Stazio, it is impossible to be certain that he knew this specific *accessus*, especially since the information appearing in this *accessus* also tends to be included in other *accessus*. Violetta de Angelis, “Magna questio preposita coram Dante et Domino Francisco Petrarca et Virgilio,” *Studi Petrarcheschi*, n.s. 1 (1984): 161-62. This dissertation contends a stance in the middle—it is impossible to be certain which particular *accessus* texts Dante knew, but one of them must have been at least a relation of the *Queritur accessus*, if not that text itself.
tradition. Thus, it is reasonable to claim that the *Quaeritur accessus* (or its relative) was particularly influential for Dante.

Since Dante’s account of Stazio includes other facts not provided by the *Quaeritur accessus*, but which are found in other texts of the tradition, he must have drawn on various *accessus*. At least one of Dante’s additional texts must have been an *accessus* to the *Achilleid*, because some of the points Dante makes in *Purgatorio* are only found in *Achilleid accessus*, specifically, the claims that Statius received a coronation (XXI: 90), and that he died before completing the *Achilleid* (XXI: 92-93). All the claims Dante makes are already present in the *accessus* and *vita* traditions, with the exception of the claims regarding Stazio’s Christianity and his profligacy.

An examination of other biographical details, and how these were presented in the tradition, reveals how Dante adapts the accepted details of Statius’ life to create the *personaggio* of Stazio to meet the needs of his poem. For instance, although Stazio begins his autobiography according to the traditional *accessus* scheme, by locating himself in space and time—he lived under Titus, and came from Toulouse—it is notable that he delays naming himself until halfway through his account, in line 91: “Stazio la gente ancor di là mi noma.” In the *Commedia*, this reticence is a marker of humility typical of those undergoing purgation or who have attained a sanctified state. Some of the infernal shades refuse to name themselves

\[\text{\textsuperscript{146}}\] For instance, the *accessus* found in the eleventh-century Florence, BML plut. 24. sin. 12 reads: “Stacius iste Thebanus fuit poeta qui librum Thebaidos composuit, quare coronatus fuit et de fonte ex quo alii poete in fine libri bibeabant potauit.” Anderson, vol. 3, 16. An extended examination of the various claims regarding whether or not Statius completed the *Achilleid* before his death appears below.
out of stubbornness or shame for their crimes, but those who give Dante their
names freely do so early in their speeches, because they have retained earthly
pride.\footnote{Infernal shades who name themselves almost immediately include Ciaccio in \textit{Inferno} VI, Catalano and Loderingo in \textit{Inferno} XXIII, Vanni Fucci in \textit{Inferno} XXIV, and Mohammed and Mosca in \textit{Inferno} XXVIII.} On the other hand, the inhabitants of Purgatory and Paradise neither seek
their own glory by naming themselves, nor need to avoid the shame of revealing
themselves to be damned.\footnote{One such example is Omberto Aldobrandesco, who purges the vice of pride in \textit{Purgatorio} XI. Omberto begins speaking to Dante in line 49, and reveals nothing about himself until lines 58 and 59, when he identifies himself as a Tuscan son of Guglielmo Aldobrandesco; he does not reveal his own name until line 67, after he has humbly described how his earthly life was characterized by pride.} By delaying to name Stazio, and thus breaking the
usual form of the medieval \textit{accessus} he otherwise adopts, Dante can show that Stazio
is truly one of the redeemed.

Dante subtly manipulates his treatment of the details of Stazio’s life in other
notable ways. For instance, Stazio links himself to Titus, “‘I buon Tito,’” as his
primary ruler. Although some Statius \textit{accessus} mention Titus, most texts make no
reference to him. If Dante did read an \textit{accessus} in which Titus is mentioned, he
would have seen that Titus is always acknowledged to be of secondary importance
in the life of Statius. Titus’ brother Domitian, or even his father Vespasian are given
far more attention in the medieval \textit{accessus} tradition, and both ruled far longer than
Titus.\footnote{Vespasian ruled 69-79 A.D., Domitian 81-96 A.D., and Titus only 79-81 A.D.} The \textit{Quaeritur accessus} mentions Titus, but marginalizes him, reading:
“peruenisse usque ad imperium Domitiani fratris Titi, qui etiam et Titus iunior
dictus est.”\footnote{Statius himself addresses Domitian in the openings to his two epics,}
which caused many medieval readers to assume that the Emperor had been his particular patron.

When Titus is mentioned in other accessus texts, his name is generally evoked in relation to the themes of Statius’ work, rather than as a temporal marker for the poet’s life. The accessus tradition throughout the Middle Ages considered fraternal enmity to be the major theme of the Thebaid, and it was a fairly common medieval assumption that the Thebaid was written specifically to exhort Domitian and Titus to maintain harmony in their family by providing the negative example of the warring fraternal rulers, Eteocles and Polynices. For instance, the author of the thirteenth-century In principio accessus writes: “Quidam enim dicunt quod mortuo Uespasiano, filii eius Titus et Domitianus in tantam regni cupiditatem exaserunt ut fraternale odium incurrerent. Ad quorum dehortationem auctor iste Thebanum proposuit describere historiam et secundum hanc causam talis erit huius intentionis utilitas.” Since Titus was never the primary temporal referent for Statius in the accessus tradition, the way Dante links Stazio to Titus, rather than to either Domitian or Vespasian, is obviously significant.


151 Anderson, vol. 3, 39. Also of relevance is Anderson’s Inc. 32, found in Genoa, BU E.II.8, one of the manuscripts that makes direct reference to Dante: “Qui primum aduertens inter imperatorem Domitianum et Titum germanos seditionem et simultatem, ad illorum instructionem Thebanam scriptis historiam a Latinis poetis intactam.” Of Dante’s commentators, only Benvenuto da Imola, who is the commentator most aware of the Statian tradition, notes this interpretation. He writes in his commentary on Purgatorio XXI: 91-93: “nam Statius videns dissensionem esse inter Titum et Domitianum fratres assumpsit ad instructionem eorum hanc memorandam historiam duorum fratrum describendam.” Benevenuti de Rambaldis de Imola Comentum super Dantis Aldigherij Comoediam, nunc primum integre in lucem editum sumptibus Guilielmi Warren Vernon, curante Jacobo Philippo Lacaita, Tomus quartus (Florence: G. Barbèra, 1887).
But it is how Dante expands the reference to Titus that is especially noteworthy; namely, he calls the emperor the “‘buon Tito,’” who, “‘con l’aiuto / del sommo rege, vendicò le fóra / ond’usci ‘l sangue per Giuda venduto’” in his war against the Jews in Jerusalem (XXI: 82-84). Thus, Dante’s decision to associate Stazio with the emperor Titus is one of the means he selects for establishing the truth of Stazio’s claim to be Christian. This reference to the popular medieval tradition of the destruction of Jerusalem is also one of the ways that Dante uses Stazio to forge a link between the classical and the Christian traditions, one of the major themes at work in his portrayal of Stazio. It is possible to conceive of Titus as a leader who aids the Christian cause through his defeat of Jerusalem in 70 AD, but for Stazio to interpret the events of his own life thus is a sign of his conversion to Christianity, because he applies a Christo-centric hermeneutic to history. Thus, Dante chooses to exchange the traditional accessus reference to Domitian as Statius’ primary emperor for a reference to a ruler who could be thought to be an ally of Christianity. When Stazio does refer to Domitian in Purgatorio XXII, his account is wholly negative, characterizing Domitian solely as the author of persecutions against the Christians: “‘quando Domizian li perseguette, / sanza mio lagrimar non fur lor pianti’” (XXII: 83-84). According to Stazio, Domitian created the environment that

\[\text{152 Justinian provides a similar assessment of Titus in Paradiso VI: 92.}\]

\[\text{153 It is possible that even these lines of Dante’s derived from an existing tradition, because there is at least one accessus, that found in London, BL Royal 15.A.XXIX (thirteenth century), that connects Titus to a victory against the Jews before the Commedia: “Stacius iste tempore Uespasiani imperatoris dicturuisse, qui cum duos filios haberet, Titum scilicet et Domicianum, cum altero eorum ludeam euertit.” Anderson, vol. 3, 48. However, it is equally likely that Dante added this detail independently.}\]
tempted Stazio into the lukewarmness of *acedia*, for Stazio explains that he kept silent about his Christianity because he feared Domitian's persecutions:

“ebb’ io battesmo;  
ma per paura chiuso cristian fu’mi,  
lungamente mostrando paganesmo” (XXII: 89-91)

and this silence merited him more than four centuries on the terrace of *acedia*. In this way, Dante “corrects” the *accessus* tradition; Stazio was not a friend or follower of Domitian, and to assume otherwise would be to misinterpret his works and life.

Medieval *accessus* writers typically incorporated a few quotations from the work they were introducing into their own text. Most frequently, writers would include the incipits and explicits, but some would also quote other passages of interest. Although Dante does not directly quote from Statius’ work, several features within his description of Stazio’s arrival are, on closer inspection, “quotations” or adaptations from the *Thebaid*. Stazio greets the pair with the words: “O frati miei, Dio vi dea pace”’ (XXI: 13). This sentiment is not only a typical greeting for a soul in Purgatory, but also a recasting of the famous opening line of the *Thebaid*: “Fraterna acies alternaque regna profanis” (*Theb.* I: 1). Instead of fraternal hatred and violence, Dante’s cleansed Stazio now sings of fraternal unity and peace, and it is fitting that his first words in *Purgatorio* should rewrite the opening of his most famous work. However, Stazio’s previous preoccupation with the themes of betrayal and violence also influences his autobiographical account. When he alludes to Christ’s death, he does not name Christ, but rather focuses on Judas’ betrayal: “le fóra / ond’ usci ‘l sangue per Giuda venduto” (Purg. XXI: 83-84). This reference is the only instance outside of the Inferno in which Judas is named. Dante chooses to
evoke him here to demonstrate the continuity in Stazio’s poetic persona as the
author of the *Thebaid*, even through the process of his conversion and after death.154

Like many other writers of Statius *accessus*, Dante draws not only on the
poetry of Statius, but also on that of Juvenal for information about Statius. Juvenal's
verses about Statius, found in *Satire* VII, read:

Curritur ad uocem iocundam et carmen amice
Thebaidos, letam cum facit Statius urbem,
Promisitque diem tanta dulcedine captos
Afficit ille animos, tantaque libidine uulgi
Auditur, sed cum fregit subsellia uersu
Esurit, intactam Paridi nisi uendat Agauen.155

Most *accessus* writers take Juvenal’s words as straightforward praise of Statius. For
instance, the writer of the *Quaeritur accessus* commends Statius: “Fuit autem nobili
ortus prosapia, clarus ingenio et doctus eloquio” and then transitions to quoting
Juvenal: “Cuius luuena lis sic meminit dicens,” as offering a similar endorsement.156

Dante echoes Juvenal’s account in characterizing Statius’ poetry as “dulcedine,” and
calls Statius “lo dolce poeta” in *Convivio* IV.25.6 as well as in the *Commedia*, where
Stazio says of himself: “‘Tanto fu dolce mio vocale spirto’” (XXI: 88).157

154 As other scholars have noted, the mountainquake heralding Stazio’s concluded purgation
may also be an oblique reference to *Thebaid* VII and VIII, in which Amphiarus is swallowed up by an
earthquake and descends to the underworld. Both Dante and Stazio are contrastive doubles of
Amphiarus whose narratives rewrite Amphiarus’ own story and resist his fate—in the
mountainquake, Stazio ascends and attains life, while Dante, though descending alive into Hell,
survives the journey, and then returns to life on earth.

Ltd., 1918).

156 Anderson, vol. 3, 6. Today, Juvenal’s lines, which focus on the “sweetness” of Statius’
poetry, are interpreted as ironic, rather than sincere, praise of Statius.
But Dante’s main use of Juvenal here concerns the satirist as an authority on Statius’ regard for Virgil. In *Purgatorio* XXII, Virgil explains:

“tra noi discese
nel limbo de l’inferno Giovenale,
...
la tua affezion mi fé palese” (XXII: 13-15).

Although Dante follows tradition in citing Juvenal, he does not overtly refer to Juvenal’s actual text, but merely uses the *auctor* to express directly one of the major themes of the Statian cantos. In Dante’s account of Stazio, Virgil’s works were the inspiration for Stazio’s poetry, his conversion to Christianity, and his moral sense. Stazio’s praise for Virgil seems to be a way for Dante to express his own feelings about Virgil, but Stazio’s veneration is also historically based. In his own texts, Statius imitated Virgil in diction, poetic tropes, structure, and plot. At the end of the *Thebaid*, Statius explains that he has taken twelve years to write his epic, modelling himself on Virgil’s time composing the *Aeneid*, and humbly acknowledges that he is Virgil’s inferior (*Theb. XII*: 810-17).

It is strange, therefore, that only one extant text addresses Statius’ imitation and admiration of Virgil before Dante’s writing of the *Commedia*: the so-called *In principio accessus*, surviving in six manuscripts. However, Statius’ imitation of

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157 It is unusual to characterize Statius’ horrifically violent epic as “sweet,” but there are a number of other instances in the medieval tradition, including Eberhard Allemannicus’ *Laborinthus*, that comment on Statius’ poetry as “dulcis” or “melle.”

158 In his commentary on the *Commedia*, Benvenuto da Imola writes: “quia tantum debet Virgilius Homero, quantum Statius Virgilio.” Commentary on *Purg. XXII*: 100-105.

159 This portion of the text reads: “Quem auctorem imitetur ipse docet in fine, vbi dicit, ‘Vive precor nec tu diuiam Eneida tempta, sed longe sequere et uestigia semper adora.’ Per hoc innuens se imitari Virgilium, optimum Latinorum.” Anderson, vol. 3, 41.
Virgil is very well represented in the *accessus* tradition following the *Commedia*.\textsuperscript{160} Statius is called a “simia Virgilii” or “ape of Virgil” in at least four *accessus* to Statius manuscripts, including Carpentras, BM 369 (fourteenth century), Modena, BEU \textit{α.F.8.15} (fifteenth century), Vatican, Ottob. lat. 1261 (fifteenth century) and the “*Hoc ex ordine*” *accessus*, found in three Italian fourteenth- and fifteenth-century manuscripts. The Carpentras *accessus* reads: “Imitatus Virgilium nobilem principem poetarum et usque adeo eum imitatus est quod aliqui eum Virgilii simiam uocent.”\textsuperscript{161} Variations on this phrase also appear in the early commentaries on the *Commedia*, in the work of Benvenuto da Imola (1375-80), Filippo Villani (1405), and Johannis de Serravalle (1416-17). There are surely multiple factors involved in the increase of interest in the relationship between Statius and Virgil, but it seems quite possible that Dante’s emphasis on the connection between the poets plays a large role in the rise in such attestations in the *accessus* tradition, since, as will be seen, Dante affects the subsequent *accessus* tradition through his original *vita* of Stazio in further ways.

\textsuperscript{160} Andreas Heil, *Alma Aeneis: Studien zur Vergil- und Statiusrezeption Dante Alighieris* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2002), 89; and de Angelis, ”Magna,” 167 both address this phenomenon.

2.1.2 Dante’s Additions: Stazio’s Profligacy and Coronation

Stazio’s profligacy is another noteworthy example of Dante adapting the tradition. While critics have directed a great deal of effort toward finding a historical precedent for Dante’s claim that Stazio secretly converted to Christianity, the fact that Stazio’s putative prodigality would have been almost equally shocking to medieval audiences has been overlooked. Not only is there no indication in the *accessus* tradition that Dante drew from an existing account of Stazio’s prodigality, the very concept of a profligate Statius poses a great challenge to medieval ideas about *auctores* and *auctoritas*. It was normal in the Middle Ages for literary *auctores* to be perceived as great moral authorities. They were commonly believed to have led upright lives, and to have written works consistent with high moral principles. Not only was this true in Statius’ medieval reception, but Anderson argues that the texts of the Statius *accessus* tradition devote even more attention to the ethical and political themes in Statius’ works than is typical for literary *accessus*.162 Moreover, *accessus* writers often directly connect Statius’ moral teachings to his life and character, particularly when considering the *intentio* or purpose behind his writing a work. For instance, there are at least three texts on the *Thebaid* that assert that the *intentio* of the work is to dissuade the reader from sin: Reims 1265 claims Statius’ intention as “dissuadere a cupiditate regni,” Paris 13046 as “dissuadere abambitione,” and Zurich 53 as “dissuadere fraternum odium ne tale incurramus periculum.”163 These texts also often include attestations such as that Statius “fuit

162 Anderson, vol. 3, 33-34
igitur morum honestate preditus” (In principio accessus), and “per omnia scripta sua non solum tamquam in uertice litterarum, sed in morum dignitate stetit et eminencia virtutum” (Lincoln College 27 accessus). 164 Although the references to Statius as a virtuous man tend to be left vague, and these claims are commonplaces for auctores, they signal that Statius was universally considered to have an upright character. 165

When the poets meet Stazio in Purgatorio, Dante has Virgil speak as a representative of the tradition convinced of Statius’ moral integrity:

“come poté trovar dentro al tuo seno
loco avarizia, tra cotanto senno
di quanto per tua cura fosti pieno?” (Purg. XXII: 22-24, emphasis added)

Virgil acknowledges Stazio as a fellow auctor, while also reproaching Stazio for failing to meet the standard of moral auctoritas by falling prey to avarizia. The only other instance of the phrase “tra cotanto senno” in the Commedia appears in Inferno IV, when Dante is welcomed into the circle of poetic auctores:

e più d’onore ancora assai mi fennò,
ch’è si mi fecer de la loro schiera,
si ch’io fui sesto tra cotanto senno. (Inf. IV: 100-102, emphasis added)

Through this verbal link, Dante emphasizes that Stazio’s status as an auctor cannot be doubted. But, as Inferno IV and Purgatorio XXII demonstrate, every other poetic

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163 All three manuscripts date to the twelfth century, and Reims 1265 is believed to be of French provenance. 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. Andreas Bährer and Elisabeth Stein (Munich: K. G. Saur, 2004), 238.


*auctor* resides in Limbo, a condition achieved by living lives of moral rectitude. Thus, Stazio’s presence in *Purgatorio* would not only have surprised medieval readers because Dante asserts Stazio to be a Christian, but also because Stazio’s position among the avaricious shows that his life had been morally imperfect. As Stazio himself explains to his mentor, if Virgil’s poetry had not inspired his moral conversion, Stazio would now be found in the fourth circle of Hell:

“E se non fosse ch’io drizzai mia cura,
quand’io intesi là dove tu chiame,
....
voltando sentirei le giostre grame.” (*Purg. XXII*: 37-38, 42)

In fact, medieval readers might have been more surprised by this assertion of Stazio’s vices than by the assertion of his Christianity. While modern readers know that Ovid led a morally dubious life and Lucan died by suicide, the medieval tradition did not tend to emphasize these actions. Thus, the possibility of an *auctor* with moral failings can be considered a paradigm shift in the medieval concept of *auctoritas*. On the other hand, there already existed other medieval accounts of poets like Virgil and Ovid converting to Christianity, so readers might have considered Stazio’s Christianization in alignment with such traditions.

While it is almost certain that Dante was the first writer to claim outright that Statius was profligate, this assertion may have been inspired by elements in the existing *accessus* tradition. Juvenal’s lines on Statius from *Satire VII*, which were

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166 This point is further demonstrated by a note provided in the Ottimo Commento (1333) on the *Commedia*. When discussing Statius’ claim that he has the name of *poeta*, which is the name “che più dura e più onora,” the commentator explains his words by stating that a poet is, by definition, “savio di sapienza naturale e morale” Commentary on *Purg. XXI*: 82-93. *L’Ottimo Commento della Divina Commedia: Testo inedito d’un contemporaneo di Dante citato dagli Accademici della Crusca*, ed. Alessandro Torri, 3 vols (Pisa: N. Capurro, 1827-1829).
frequently quoted by *accessus* authors, end with the claim that Statius was so poor he had to sell his work, the *Agave*: “Esurit intactam Paridi nisi <u[endat> Agauen,” (*Sat.* VII: 87). Dante may have decided that this poverty resulted from Statius being a spendthrift.167

But even if Dante’s claims were inspired by Juvenal’s poetry, this does not answer the question of why Dante introduced this change. A simple answer would be that Dante needs a Stazio-like figure to enter the text at this point, in order to introduce a foil for Virgil in the lead-up to that poet’s departure, and as another poetic presence for the discussions of poetics that occur in this part of *Purgatorio*. Making Stazio avaricious or prodigal fits the timeline for Dante’s journey, if one considers how Dante structured the vices of purgatory. Moreover, prodigality seems to be a lesser, and more understandable sin, especially when considered as an excess of generosity. One might also consider the observation made by the Ottimo Commento that prodigality brings to mind the conversion parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15.168 However, Dante has another key motivation for depicting Stazio


168 Note to *Purg.* XXI. L’Ottimo does not connect Statius with the prodigal son, but uses the passage in order to explain the vice of prodigality generally. William Stephany first noted this
as formerly profligate. Dante needs to assert the existence of another morally
imperfect auctor in order to justify himself as an auctor and auctoritas, while also
presenting his journey as a narrative of redemption. So much of the Commedia is
concerned with Dante’s own dubious background and his conversion experience
that he could not be considered an auctor according to the medieval identification of
auctoritas with rigorous morality. Thus, Stazio’s identity as a former prodigal not
only stresses the possibility of redemption inherent in Christianity, but also clears a
way for the recognition and acceptance of Dante’s own auctoritas.\textsuperscript{169}

It is possible that Dante includes the claim that Statius was crowned for very
similar purposes. While, as noted above, there is an instance of this fact in an
eleventh-century accessus,\textsuperscript{170} that text is the only one known to have been written
before the Commedia to make the claim, so it is almost certain that this claim was
not widely known or believed. If Dante does not base the assertion of Stazio’s
coronation on an accessus text, then it seems that he wants to emphasize that Stazio
deserves to be crowned as a poet even though Stazio was writing later than the
other great epic auctores. Just so, although Dante writes long after the Latin poetic
auctores, he establishes himself as an auctor comparable to them, and shows that he
too deserves such a coronation, which is a hope he makes explicit in Paradiso XXV.

\textsuperscript{169} Stazio is not necessary for Dante to prove himself as a worthy Christian authority, because
the Christian tradition already recognized the possibility that a flawed figure (like David) could
nonetheless be a scriba Dei.

\textsuperscript{170} The eleventh-century Florence, BML, plut. 24 sin. 12 accessus to the Achilleid reads:
“Stacius iste Thebanu fuit poeta qui librum Thebaidos composuit, quare coronatus fuit et de fonte ex
quo alii poete in fine libri bibebant potauit.”
Of course, Dante is also careful to specify that Stazio received a myrtle crown, but that he himself hopes for and expects the superior crown of laurel.\footnote{Edoardo Fumagalli has provided an extended treatment of these coronations, in Edoardo Fumagalli, “Il lauro e il mirto. Osservazioni e dubbi sullo Stazio di Dante,” in Anagnorismos, Studi in Onore di Hermann Walter per i 75 Anni, ed. Natalia Agapiou (Bruxelles: Maison d’Érasme, 2009), 191-216.} One of Dante’s motivations for his portrayal of Stazio is to link Stazio to himself in various ways, both to justify the needs of his narrative and the personal hopes that he expresses.

\subsection{2.1.3 Dante’s Impact on the Medieval Statius Tradition}

Dante was so successful at creating an authoritative biography for Stazio that he influenced later generations of Statius’ readers and scholars. Two fourteenth-century Italian accessus unmistakably demonstrate that Dante’s Commedia affected later medieval interpretations of Statius.\footnote{Since these texts consider Dante to be discussing the historical Statius, “Statius” will be used in this section rather than “Stazio.”} The first text, found in Florence, BNC II.II.55, incorporates Dante’s assertion of Statius’ Christianity. In the second text, found in Genoa, BU E.II.8, the author addresses Statius’ Christianity, his prodigality, and whether or not Statius completed the Achilleid. It is notable that within less than a century, Dante’s claims were sufficiently influential to merit discussion within these accessus.

Since Stazio’s prodigality seems to be at odds with the medieval interpretative tradition, some discussion of this assertion might be expected in the Statius accessus texts that show signs of the Commedia’s influence. The accessus in Florence BNC, II.II.55, although it discusses Dante’s revelation of Statius’
Christianity, does not address the issue of his prodigality at all. The author merely says that Dante put Statius in \textit{Purgatorio} because the poet “\textit{erat vir bonus et optimus},” a statement that both ignores the poet’s prodigality and seems to misunderstand what Dante is saying about Christian conversion in his portrayal of Statius.

On the other hand, although elsewhere the writer of the Genoa, BU, E.II.8 \textit{accessus} names Dante as a source, and repeats the claim that Statius had been profligate, he does not actually mention Dante in his discussion of Statius’ prodigality. Instead, this author looks to the pre-existing \textit{accessus} tradition, and recognizes that the traditional Juvenal quotation can be construed to indicate that Statius had been a spendthrift when alive. This author writes: “Vixit tamen cum summa paupertate et rerum inopia ut idem satiricus testatur vbi supra, sic inquiens: ‘Esurit intactam Paridi nisi \textless uendat\textgreater Agauen,’”\textsuperscript{173} thereby using the final line from the Juvenal quotation as a proof of Statius’ poverty and prodigality. The writer of this \textit{accessus} is certainly aware of Dante’s poem, since he also addresses the subject of Statius’ Christianity in his \textit{accessus}, and refers to Dante directly as the “uates Etruscus.” However, for the profligacy claim, the writer simply accepts Dante’s testimony, and confirms the assertion with the Juvenal text, as an accepted part of Statius’ \textit{accessus} tradition. This is a clear instance of Dante influencing the later reception of Statius in the \textit{accessus} tradition.

\textsuperscript{173} Anderson, vol. 3, 75.
2.1.4 Statius’ *Achilleid*: Finished or Unfinished?

The *accessus* found in Genoa, BU, E.II.8 also discusses the claim made by Stazio that “‘caddi in via con la seconda soma’” (XXI: 93). Dante’s text is generally interpreted as stating that Stazio died before finishing his second epic work, the *Achilleid*. This claim may seem to be unproblematic, and it is one generally accepted as true by modern scholars, but, as noted in the previous chapter, this matter has a complicated history in the medieval interpretative tradition on Statius. This assertion, even though Dante is not the first to make it, provoked even more controversy and argument among later thinkers than Dante’s assertions that Statius was a prodigal and a secret Christian.

In this case of the author of the Genoa *accessus*, his examination of whether the *Achilleid* was completed or not constitutes the longest discussion in the text, even longer than his discussion of Statius’ Christianity. The *Achilleid*’s status as complete or incomplete had great significance for the interpretation of the poem, particularly in regard to Statius’ aims in composing the epic. Of course, since the *Achilleid* was left incomplete because Statius died before finishing it, this topic is also relevant for medieval views about Statius’ life, and for the biographical aspects of an *accessus*. But, given that so little was known about Statius’ life, no one could know with certainty that Statius had died before finishing his text, hence its highly controversial character. Decades after Dante, Petrarch explicitly excludes Statius from his list of writers who died before finishing their works; the text of *Seniles* XI:
17 reads: “His... Statium Papinium addunt quidam, sed falluntur; opus enim hic utrumque perfecit.”

Although the controversy over the Achilleid existed well before Dante, the author of the Genoa, BU, E.II.8 accessus attaches the authority of Dante—identified here as the “uates Etruscus”—to this claim, instead of to the claims that Dante seems to have originated, namely, Statius’ Christianity and prodigality. He writes: “Oritur autem questio an secundus liber completus fuerit, et ille uates Etruscus, cuius nomen uulgaribus etiam innotavit, librum Achilleydos asserit incompletum, prout in secundo eius libro Purgatorii repperitur.” Moreover, the author of this text ends up making a strong argument against Dante’s assertion, by claiming that the work is finished, and that those who argue differently are mistaken in their interpretation:

tamen alii in quorum numero fuit dominus Gerius de Aretio, dicunt librum fore completum, ex eo quod ibidem dicit “Sed tota iuenem deducere Troia” <1.7>, quasi dicit “non dicam de hiis que apud Troiam gessit sed de aliis.” Et tum expone “nec in Hectore tracto sistere (pro insistere),” et quod supra dixit, “nos ire per omnem,” lege interogatiue, quasi dicit “Homerus multa dimisit; nos dicemus de omnibus eius gestis?” Certe non. Sed subaudi <1.5-6>. “Sic amor est, heros uelis Schiroque latentem / Dulichia proferre tuba.” Que omnia plene exequitur.

This author cites Achilleid I: 7, the verse upon which the opposing interpretation rests, but he invokes a competing authority to support his own interpretation of this line. He concludes: “Quare oppinor librum fore completum, cum claudat optime materiam propositam.”

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174 de Angelis discusses this reference in “Magna,” 176-77.

175 All quotations from this accessus are found in Anderson, vol. 3, 75-76.
But even though the Genoa accessus author ultimately disagrees with Dante on this point, as well as on the subject of Statius’ Christianity, Dante’s status as an authority on Statius is never called into question. The author merely points to other authorities and to Statius’ text itself to support his argument. Moreover, although other accessus texts make similar claims that the Achilleid was complete, this text offers by far the most thorough treatment of this point. If anything, it seems that Dante’s auctoritas requires this writer to make an especially careful refutation of his claims. This author may be attempting to bolster his own authority by finding flaws in the argument of Dante, a recognized authority. Thus, for the writer of this accessus, Dante has become a problematic authority on Statius, but an authority nonetheless.

Almost a century later, another accessus writer brings up the Purgatorio in his discussion of Statius, and once again makes Dante the authority behind the assertion that Statius had not completed the Achilleid. The accessus in Vatican, Ottobon. lat. 1261 was written after the rediscovery of the Silvae, and thus, is able to draw on the biographical facts presented in that text. This writer constructs a new argument for why he believed the Achilleid to have been completed, but he also connects Dante’s errors regarding Statius’ biography to his assertions about the unfinished Achilleid, suggesting that, just as Dante was wrong in calling Statius “tolosano,” he was similarly incorrect in his assertions about the Achilleid. While the

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176 This author’s argument points to Achilleid 1: 16-17: “Patere hoc sudare parumper / Pulvere,” which, because of his choice of “parumper,” suggests that the poet is embarking on a short work. Moreover, he notes that the final line of the work, “Scit cetera mater,” provides a suitable conclusion for the work. Finally, he adds: “et quod etiam uidetur nolle alii quam latebras Achillis describere cum cetera Hom<erus> ante a scripsisset.” While the latter two arguments appear elsewhere in the tradition, the first point seems to be original to this author.
writer recognizes that the source of Dante’s error was the text of Jerome on Statius Sursulus, he never acknowledges that this mistake appeared everywhere in the medieval Statius tradition before the rediscovery of the *Silvae*. Rather, he is quite dismissive of Dante for confusing the two figures, and belabors his correction of the poet’s errors, exposing each incorrect detail one by one. The motive for this dismissive treatment of Dante may be rooted in Renaissance/humanistic attitudes to Dante or to vernacular literature more generally. In his description, the author subtly undermines Dante, writing that he was “Florentinus poeta doctissimus quamuis vernaculus.” This attitude, as well as the rediscovery of the *Silvae*, which revealed that all earlier biographies of Statius were incorrect, helps explain why Dante could not have remained an authority on Statius well into the Renaissance. Still, in that Dante created Stazio’s *vita* to serve the purposes of the *Commedia* rather than to be an authoritative account of Statius’ life, it is remarkable that his presentation became so influential for Statius’ reception.

However, Dante’s claim about the *Achilleid* was so contentious that even some Dante commentators were not sure how to react to it. Dante commentators tend to be reluctant to disagree with him, but the subject of the *Achilleid*’s completion is one of the rare instances where commentators struggle to accept Dante’s authority because Dante’s text seems to assert ideas they believe to be false. Benvenuto da Imola and Johannes de Serravalle both argue that Statius completed the *Achilleid*, but also manage to interpret Dante so that his text concurs on this point. As Johannes de Serravalle writes, the *Achilleid* must have been finished,
Rather, he and Benvenuto argue that the “seconda salma” (“soma”) to which Dante refers is not the *Achilleid*, but the work on Domitian’s heroic deeds that Statius promised the emperor in the proems to his epics. Benvenuto writes: “Quibus respondendum est breviter et clare, quod vere secundum opus est completum, nec Dantes hoc negat: sed vult dicere, quod cecidit cum secunda salma, quia debebat subire tertiam historiam, scilicet, gesta Domitiani, sicut ipse protestatur in prohemio sui Thebaidos, et in prohemio Achilleidos.”

Thus, both commentators can argue that Dante did not err, while maintaining the consensus opinion about the completed status of the *Achilleid*.

Lacking certain knowledge of which specific texts Dante was drawing from, it is impossible to be sure whether or not the poet was aware that he was weighing in on a controversial matter. He may have thought he was repeating a widely known fact. However, if Dante was aware of the argument that Statius had finished the

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177 Francesco da Buti also addresses the question of the status of the *Achilleid*, but makes a different argument about Dante’s intentions. He seems skeptical about the claim that the *Achilleid* was unfinished, because, as noted above, the text was clearly polished by someone, and if Statius were not the one to polish the text, then who did so is unknown. “Appresso se vede lo libro esser corretto, e non si sa che fusse corretto per altrui che per Stazio, dunqua appare compiuto: imperò che li Poeti, non compiendo l’opera, nolla correggeno; e compiuta la rivedeno e correggeno.” *Commento di Francesco da Buti sopra La Divina Commedia di Dante Alighieri*, ed. Crescentino Giannini, 3 vols (Pisa: Fratelli Nistri, 1858-62). Commentary on *Purg.* XXI: 76-102. Like many *accessus* writers, he locates the probable source of Dante’s claim as the idea that Statius did not fulfill all he set out to do in the *Achilleid*: “e però non so pensare che cagione moveisse lo nostro autore a dire cusi; se non forsi che ebbe nel proemio quello altro intendimento, dove pare promettere di dire di tutte l’altre cose d’Achille, de le quali non disse Omero poeta Greco.” However, unlike the other commentators, Francesco does not argue directly that Dante was correct in his assessment, nor does he argue that Dante was definitely wrong; he simply tries to suggest a motive behind Dante’s claim, even if he himself is ambivalent about the truth of that claim.

178 Commentary on *Purg.* XXI: 91-93.

179 Commentary on *Purg.* XXI: 91-93.
Achilleid, but intentionally chose to report the Achilleid as incomplete, his choice might have been rooted not only in his skills as a critic, but also in his own poetic identity. If Stazio had converted to Christianity partway through writing the Thebaid, and did not complete his post-conversion Achilleid, then Dante would be the first Christian author to write a great and complete epic-like work.\textsuperscript{180}

2.2 The Christian Statius

2.2.1 Christianity and the Accessus Tradition

Of course, the point where Dante’s authority on Stazio is most problematic and questionable for many readers is the poet’s assertion of Stazio’s Christianity. This topic is also the facet of Dante’s Stazio that has been explored most thoroughly by the critical tradition, beginning with the early Dante commentators, and even by medieval and Renaissance commentators on Statius himself. The history of the critical reaction to Stazio’s Christianity is complex and broad. Later chapters will return to the subject of Stazio’s Christianity when discussing how the portrayal of Stazio’s faith functions within the Commedia, but the remainder of this chapter addresses the relationship between Dante’s assertion and the medieval texts on Statius.

Most scholarly attempts to show that Dante did not invent Statius’ Christianity have argued for the possible existence of a tradition in which Statius was believed to be a Christian, rather than finding historical evidence for this

\textsuperscript{180} Thanks to Filippo Gianferrari, who offered this suggestion.
tradition. For instance, Léopold Constans suggested that there was a medieval popular tradition of Statius’ Christianity, which left no trace because the educated men who wrote accessus and commentaries rejected ideas from lay traditions.\(^{181}\) However, this argument relies on the very fact that there is no evidence of such a tradition, so it is impossible to prove. Moreover, it was not uncommon among authors of accessus to present a popular idea on a given subject for the purpose of arguing against that position. Thus, if there were a popular tradition regarding Statius’ Christianity, it is likely that some trace of this would have survived in the accessus tradition. Similarly, scholars such as Vladimiro Zabughin and ScevolaMariotti argue that Dante’s claim derives from a lost commentary.\(^{182}\) While this contention is not in itself impossible, it would be highly unusual for such a striking attestation as Statius’ Christianity to have left no mark on either accessus or commentary traditions before the fourteenth century had it actually reached any degree of popularity or acceptance.

Discussion and disagreement does arise among medieval and Renaissance readers who encounter the assertion of Stazio’s Christianity in Dante’s work, or in a text that repeated the Commedia’s claim. There are two Statius accessus that engage with Dante’s text on the matter of Statius’ Christianity, some Renaissance writers who incorporate Dante’s assertion into their own work, and varied reactions to the

\(^{181}\) Léopold Constans, La légende d’Œdipe: étudiée dans l’antiquité, au moyen âge et dans les temps modernes: en particulier dans le Roman de Thèbes, texte français du XIIe siècle (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1974), 135.

claim from early Dante commentators. These texts have at times been used as
evidence that Dante is engaging with an existing tradition for Statius’ Christianity.
However, since all of these texts appear well after the Commedia, it is far more likely
that Dante is their common source. This chapter concludes that the evidence for a
pre-existing tradition maintaining Statius’ Christianity is very slim, but the texts
examined below are interesting for what they show about the reception of one of
Dante’s most controversial claims.

Of the three extant Statius accessus that engage with Dante’s work, only two
address his claim that Statius was a secret Christian. As noted above, the latest of the
three texts, the Vatican, Ottobon. lat. 1261 accessus written after the rediscovery of
the Silvae, only engages with Dante on the subjects of whether the Achilleid was
completed or not, and the false biographical details that derived from the confusion
of the poet with Statius Surculus. It may be that the commentator’s complete silence
on the matter of Statius’ Christianity is meant to express how little credence he gives
to that idea.

But the writers of two other accessus, Florence, BNC II.II.55 and Genoa, BU
E.II.8, do consider Statius’ putative Christianity a matter worthy of discussion. These
two writers take very different stances on Dante’s claims, one accepting and the
other challenging it, but the fact that both think Dante’s assertions must be
addressed indicates how quickly Dante’s auctoritas was generally accepted, as both
of these accessus were composed in the fourteenth century. Moreover, it seems that
both writers were moved independently to discuss Dante in their text, rather than
one being influenced by another, because one accessus addresses the Thebaid and
the other the *Achilleid*, and these two *accessus* traditions remained separate throughout the Middle Ages.

The Florence, BNC, II.II.55 writer accepts the claims of Dante’s text more easily. He does not provide his own argument for Statius’ Christianity, but repeats Dante’s assertions as rooted in truth. He writes: “Dantes ipsum ponit in Purgatorio, quia erat antiquus et multa uiderat et erat vir bonus et optimus et ideo Cristicola appellabatur.” The claims this writer makes about Statius’ character, that he was a “vir bonus et optimus,” is the sort of generic positive assertion found in any of the other texts in the medieval Statian tradition. The conception of Christianity and Christian conversion presented here is reductive, but these assertions also indicate that this author believes Statius’ purported Christianity to be potentially consistent with the medieval understanding of Statius’ life and character. However, this writer may express some doubt through the verbs he selects in presenting Statius’ Christianity. He never says that Statius *was* a Christian, but only that Statius was said to be so; he “est dictus inter poetas Cristicolas” and “Cristicola appellabatur.” Moreover, he does not claim that Dante knew or discovered Statius’ actual Christianity, but only that “Dantes ipsum ponit in Purgatorio.” But even if these verbal choices do indicate the author’s doubts, it is significant that he does not articulate these doubts more openly. What is more, he presents Dante as an authority on Statius (one of only two named authorities), and devotes a significant portion of the text to the poet’s claims. This *accessus* is only about twenty lines long, but five of those lines are concerned with Dante.¹⁸³
The writer of the second accessus, found in Genoa, BU E.II.8, is far less willing to accept Dante’s claims, as was seen in his discussion of whether or not Statius completed the Achilleid. However, even his more critical treatment of Dante’s assertions suggests that he respects Dante as an authority, for he gathers together counterarguments rather than dismissing the claims altogether. He prefaces his section on the claim of Statius’ Christianity with the clear statement: “Vero religione paganus fuit,” which seems to leave no room for the possibility of Statius being a Christian; however, by the end of this section, he admits: “Quid de hoc uerum fuerit satis certum non habeo.” The commentator’s claim that “Quorumdam opinione clandestinus Christianus, scilicet timore Domitiani” has caused some interest among critics, because his use of the plural “quorumdam” seems to suggest the possibility of an existing tradition of Statius’s Christianity. However, since this writer is engaging primarily with Dante’s text in his discussion of Statius’ prodigality, Christianity, and the Achilleid’s completion, and he names no other source, it seems likely that Dante is the primary source of the Christianity claim as well.

This writer’s discussion engages not only with history, but even with what conversion to Christianity entails. He recognizes the historical possibility that Statius could have become a Christian, since he lived after the death and

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183 He even returns to Dante as an auctoritas when considering the final cause of the Thebaid, for he explains: “Causa finalis potest esse propria et specialis et [com]munis, ut sibi gloriarn aquireret, secundum quod dicit Dantes: ‘Omnium qui laborant est vt prosint alis.’” This quotation is unfamiliar, but its usage implies at the least that this writer wants to treat Dante as an important auctor. Anderson suggests that it is a paraphrase of Monarchia 3.2.1: “nam sine prefixo principio...laborare quid prodest?”, vol. 3, 71.
resurrection of Christ, and would have witnessed the spread of Christianity and the deaths of the early martyrs:

Quod satis mirum est putare tantum virum hortodoxe fidei preceptis imbutum, que tot martirum confirmatur exemplis, mortem uel iram Cesaris timuisse, quamuis et minime consonum uideatur, virum in quo tanti ingenii uena prodierit donum sane divinum, Christi nomen illis precipue temporibus ignorasse, quod refragante Romano imperio et euntis pene mundi principibus nec legibus tolli, nec innumerabilium Christianorum suppliciis potuit occultari, quin in dies fides illa adolesceret et Christi virtus darius eluceret.

The author acknowledges that, because of these historical facts, it would be surprising if Statius were unaware of Christianity, and that it would be likely for a wise and intuitive poet to have embraced Christianity. However, this author also attacks the explanation offered by Dante’s Statius, that the poet kept his Christianity a secret out of fear. He points out that if one were truly convinced of the truth of the Christian faith, and understood why the martyrs were willing to die for it, it would be inconsistent to hide one’s faith out of fear of the emperor. By this author’s reasoning, there is a problem in believing that Statius would not have converted, but an equal problem in believing he could have converted and hid his conversion. The author acknowledges that he cannot be certain enough to allege that either position is definitively true. Then, since the historical argument is so inconclusive, the writer points next to Statius’ own text, in which he “non dubitauerit” to write: “Primus in orbe deos fecit timor” (Theb. III: 661). He interprets this line to mean that Statius was a pagan “palam,” or openly,\textsuperscript{184} and he seems to find this argument conclusive.

\textsuperscript{184} It is worth noting that this assertion was uttered by Capaneus, who is later killed by the very gods whose existence he denies, so it hardly stands as evidence that Statius himself held
for on it he ends this section. Even though this writer apparently ultimately rejects Dante's claim, he does pay him the respect of considering the possibility of his assertion.

Anderson has argued: “strangely, Dante's error would be one of the most important catalysts in the development of early modern scholarship—at least vis-à-vis Statius.” While “error” seems to be the wrong word for Dante’s Christianization of Stazio, which appears to be a deliberate choice made to serve the ends of the Commedia, it is true that whether or not readers accepted Dante’s claims about Stazio, the uniqueness of his portrayal and the authority with which he wrote prompted them to investigate those claims.

### 2.2.2 Statius in the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance

Attestations of Statius’ Christianity can also be found in a number of other late medieval and Renaissance texts. There are enough repetitions of this claim that scholars have inferred that they can be used as evidence for a tradition of Statius’ Christianity that existed separately from Dante. However, it seems more likely that even these text's authors are knowingly or unknowingly drawing from Dante, especially since all of these texts seem to have been written after the Commedia and none names a source other than Dante.

Giovanni Colonna's vita of Statius in his De viris illustribus was written within two decades of Dante’s death. This text was transmitted in two different forms: in

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185 Anderson, vol. 3, 73.
the older version, pagans and Christians are treated separately, whereas in the newer, the historical figures are presented alphabetically. Both redactions of the text were likely completed between 1332 and 1338.\textsuperscript{186} While the \textit{vita} itself does not discuss Statius' conversion or overtly present him as a Christian, in the older tradition, Statius' \textit{vita} is grouped with those of other Christians.\textsuperscript{187} Brugnoli argues that this text derives mostly from the \textit{Quaeritur accessus}, with additions from \textit{accessus} and commentaries on Lucan.\textsuperscript{188} Remigio Sabbadini dismisses the idea that Colonna's putative belief in Statius' Christianity was based on the claims of the \textit{Commedia}, because he was certain that Colonna was ignorant of Dante's text; he believes instead that Statius being grouped among the Christians reflected a current interpretative tradition that existed independently of Dante's claim.\textsuperscript{189} He argues that Colonna's positive description of Statius' character—"Mirum honestate preditus, viciis instanter restitit coluitque indefesse virtutes"—implies the poet's Christianity. However, as demonstrated above, such assertions of Statius' moral character are typical in the \textit{accessus} tradition, and are commonly attributed to any figure held as a medieval \textit{auctor}. Even Colonna's phrasing resembles that of an existing text, the popular \textit{In principio accessus}, which reads: "Fuit igitur morum


\textsuperscript{187} Giorgio Padoan notes that Claudian is also included among the Christians, at least in MS Marc. lat. 3173. Giorgio Padoan, "Teseo 'figura Redemptoris' e il cristianesimo di Stazio," in \textit{Il pio Enea, l'impio Ulisse: Tradizione classica e intendimento medievale in Dante} (Ravenna: Longo, 1977), 131-32.

\textsuperscript{188} Brugnoli, "Statius," 11.

\textsuperscript{189} Remigio Sabbadini, \textit{Le scoperte dei codici latini e greci ne' secoli XIV e XV} (Florence: G. C. Sansoni, 1905).
honestate preditus.” Thus, the praise has little significance for whether or not Colonna himself considered Statius to be Christian.

A text written by Francesco da Fiano in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century also addresses the question of Statius’ Christianity directly:

Quid Statius natione Tolosanu quem aliqui Narbonensem ulunt? Siquidem Domitiano, Titi Vespasiani germano fratre imperante, qui Christianorum inexorabilis persecutor fuit; eum clam, metu principis in Christianos omnium suppliciorum generibus seuientis, Christi tenentem fidem et, si non aque uel sanguinis, baptismo quidem flaminis legimus fuisse respersum. 

Giorgio Padoan notes that Francesco cites as his source a particular text that "we read" (legimus), and that some of Francesco’s claims do not seem to match extant texts that pre-date his own. For instance, Francesco writes “baptismo quidem flaminis,” but the baptism Dante attributes to Stazio does not explicitly occur “in flames”, and Colonna’s text does not describe a baptism. Sabbadini assumes that Francesco refers to a particular, but still unknown, written tradition. Anderson, on

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190 Anderson also argues that it is almost certainly not Colonna’s intention that Statius be considered a Christian, and that he was only included among the Christians by later transmitters of the text (who were probably inspired by the authority behind Dante's assertion). To make this argument, Anderson points to the contrast between Colonna’s treatment of Statius and that of Seneca, both of whom were grouped among the Christians. There was an existing tradition in the Middle Ages in which Seneca was thought to be Christian, and the narrative Colonna gives him in his text is consciously shaped to give support to this tradition. Anderson, vol. 3, 68. But there is nothing in Colonna’s biography of Statius to suggest that he actually considered the poet to be a Christian.


192 Padoan, 131-32. However, there are extant glosses that also use similar phrasing to “baptismo quidem flaminis.” The first redaction of Pietro Alighieri’s commentary cites Augustine’s idea of the three types of baptism in his discussion of Purgatorio XII: 89-90: “Tamen dicit quod christianus fuit occultus, idest in baptismo flaminis, qui est cum quis in Christum et ecclesiam sanctam credit, non contemnendo baptismum aquae, sed eum non volendo habere; ut dicit Augustinus in 8.° de Civitate Dei: nam triplex est baptimus, aquae, sanguinis vel martyrii, et flaminis.” The notion of “baptismo flaminis” is also addressed in various Dante commentaries in relation to the figure of Ripheus.
the other hand, argues that Francesco would have cited an authority by name if he had such a source. Turning back to Francesco’s text itself, one notes that the majority of the text echoes the information presented in Dante’s *vita* of Stazio. Francesco mentions Statius’ background in Toulouse, the emperor Titus, Domitian as a persecutor of Christians, Statius’ conversion, and his decision to remain a Christian secretly out of fear of persecution. As for Statius’ birth in Narbonne, this detail is found in a number of accessus written after the rediscovery of the *Silvae*. Thus, the only additional element is the “baptismo quidem flaminis,” which is essentially a biblical gloss on the attestation of Statius’ baptism.\(^{193}\) It seems more likely that Francesco is drawing from and embellishing Dante’s text here, or drawing on an earlier author that had done so, than that he has a separate, unnamed source for the claim of Statius’ Christianity.

Angelo Poliziano also engages with the question of Statius’ Christianity. In the early 1480s, Poliziano wrote a commentary on the *Silvae* that included a *Vita Statii* discussing Statius’ putative Christianity and Dante’s relationship to that claim. Like the author of one of the accessus addressed above, he notes that Dante erred in claiming that Statius came from Toulouse, and presents Dante’s assertion of Statius’ Christianity as another mistake: “Sed et florentinus Dantes, poeta alioqui excellentissimus, et Tolosanum falsa hunc [Statium poetam] probidit et

\(^{193}\) In Luke 3:16 (and Matthew 3:11), John the Baptist says to the gathered crowd: “ego quidem aqua baptizo vos venit autem fortior me cuius non sum dignus solvere corrigiam calciamentorum eius ipse vos baptizabit in Spiritu Sancto et igni.” Later, at Pentecost, recounted at the beginning of Acts, flames of the Holy Spirit descend upon the disciples: “et apparuerunt illis dispersitae linguæ tamquam ignis seditque supra singulos eorum” (Acts 2:3). Padoan has suggested that Francesco was inspired by a gloss on the *Commedia* no longer extant for the description of a “baptismo...flaminis,” but, once again, there is no actual evidence supporting this assertion.
Christianum.”  

Shortly before this passage, he references the common medieval error concerning Statius’ birthplace that originated from misapplying Jerome’s text on L. Statius Ursulus, but Poliziano responds to Dante’s repeating of this common error as if Dante were unique in confusing the two Statiuses. In trying to find a similar (incorrect) source for Dante’s claim of Statius’ Christianity, he proposes that the inspiration is found in the text of the *Thebaid*: “ad religionem christianam ipsi applicandam versiculo, ut arbitror, quodam ex Thebaide Statij adductus est, in quo Tiresias ‘Et triplicis inquit mundi summum quem scire nefandum est, / Illum—sed taceo: prohibit tranquilla senectus’” (*Theb.* IV: 516-17). The passage, with its reference to the “triplex mundus,” and a deity that cannot truly be known, can be interpreted as aligning with Christianity. However, as Poliziano points out, this consonance is not enough to prove that Statius intended to represent Christian doctrines, especially since the lines also correspond to other beliefs current in Statius’ time. Poliziano argues: “Hoc vero ille de antiquissimo deorum Demogorgone intelligit; atque hunc ipsum locum, quo adductus fuerit, ipsem et noster Etruscus poeta quasi digito ostendit.” Poliziano does not even contemplate the possibility that Dante could be drawing from a historical source for the claim, even one later found to be false, such as the sources attesting to Statius’ Toulousan background. The only theory plausible to him is that Dante overinterpreted Statius’ text.

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194 This commentary is found in MS Magl. VII 873, on 3r, and is a Poliziano autograph. The vita is published in Manlio Pastore Stocchi, “Il cristianesimo di Stazio (*Purg.* XXII) e un’ipotesi del Poliziano,” in *Miscellanea per nozze Balduino-Bianchi* (Padua: Presso Il Seminario di Filologia Moderna all’Università, 1962), 42-63.
The humanist Pomponius Laetus was interested in the same *Thebaid* passage Poliziano examined for its connection to Statius’ putative Christianity. While he makes no reference to Statius’ Christianity in his *Vita Statii*, the same manuscript, Vatican, Vat. lat. 3279, contains his commentary on the *Thebaid*, featuring a note in which Pomponius also connects the “sumnum triplicis mundi” of *Thebaid* IV: 516 with Christian doctrine, specifically Paul’s words in his *Letter to the Philippians*: “in nomine Iesu omne genu flectatur celestium, terrestrium et infernorum” (2:10), for “Hoc nomen sanctissimum et toti antiquitati nomen incognitum nobis aperuit Paulus apostolus.” Although Pomponius does not consider the possibility that Statius himself was a Christian, he is clearly interested in identifying parallels between Statius’ text and Christian doctrine. While many medieval commentators on the *auctores* shared this interest in Christianized or allegorical readings, Statius’ texts tended to receive fewer allegorical treatments than those of his fellow *auctores*, at least until Dante’s assertions in the *Commedia*.

It is possible that Dante was inspired to name Stazio as a Christian because he noted passages in Statius’ works that could be interpreted according to a Christian framework. Contemporary hypotheses of which passages might have inspired Dante, such as the suggestions of Poliziano and Pomponius, are a helpful starting point for analyzing Dante’s reading of Statius. Padoan has raised the objection that the words of the *Thebaid* passage are uttered by Statius’ Tiresias, whom Dante places among the soothsayers in *Inferno* XX. Thus, it might seem

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195 This gloss was published by Zabughin, 214-15.
questionable that Dante could have believed Tiresias to make an utterance consistent with Christian truth. However, there is a sort of counterexample in Virgil, who was placed in Limbo despite the Messianic prophecy in his Fourth Eclogue that inspired Stazio’s conversion. By Dante’s own principles, a Christian Stazio could have written those words for Tiresias while intending a meaning Tiresias himself could not have understood.

This assortment of medieval and Renaissance texts helps confirm two previous assertions. The fact that none of these thinkers can name specific sources alleging Statius’ Christianity suggests that this tradition does indeed originate with Dante. However, the fact that thinkers well into the Renaissance continue to discuss whether or not Statius was a Christian shows that Dante’s claims in the Commedia were, to them, assertions to be taken seriously, even if they were ultimately dismissed.197

2.2.3 Dante’s Readers and Dante’s Text

It is also useful to examine how Dante’s commentators, who would be the readers most motivated to accept his claims, reacted to the assertion of Stazio’s Christianity. Among the early commentators on Dante, Benvenuto da Imola is the

196 Padoan, 129.

197 Craig Kallendorf has analyzed the claim of Statius’ Christianity over an even more extended period of time. He concludes that: "Dante’s claim that Statius was a Christian, therefore, dominated the commentary tradition to the Divina Commedia through the end of the sixteenth century, but not beyond. In the commentary tradition to Statius, by contrast, it was hardly ever accepted by humanist scholars except in Spain," although he acknowledges that the earlier commentaries examined here show hesitation toward the claims, rather than outright rejection. Craig Kallendorf, “‘Per te poeta fui, per te cristiano’ (Purg. 21.73): Statius as Christian, from ‘Fact’ to ‘Fiction,’” Deutsches Dante-Jahrbuch 77 (2002): 72.
only one to treat Dante’s assertion of Stazio’s Christianity as even potentially unusual or untrue.198 Whereas all the other commentators simply repeat Dante’s claims as if there were no question of their validity, Benvenuto acknowledges that Stazio’s Christianity might come as a surprise to readers: “multi mirantur quare poeta noster christianissimus facit Statium non christianum hic stare, nescientes videre causam.”199 Benvenuto does not contradict Dante’s assertion, which is unsurprising, since the early Dante commentators hardly ever suggest that Dante could be incorrect; however, he ultimately explains that the historical truth of Dante’s claim does not necessarily matter. Benvenuto comes to the same conclusion as many modern critics: Dante may have made Stazio a Christian simply because a Christian classical poet was necessary for his purposes within the poem. His commentary argues: “sed sive fuerit christianus, sive non, non facio vim in hoc, quoniam subtiliter et necessario poeta hoc fingit, quia multa erant tractanda per eum quae non poterat sine poeta Christiano, ut patebit in XXV capitulo et alibi.”

Though Dante could have expressed his ideas on poetics, conversion, Virgil, and the possibility of the Christianization of the classical world without Stazio, his presentation of these ideas is more complex and effective by engaging another Christian auctor as an interlocutor. Benvenuto’s argument is unusual in laying it out so baldly that the needs of Dante’s poem are a sufficient reason for claiming Stazio to have been a Christian, regardless of the actual historicity of the claim. Such an

198 Even Francesco da Buti, who rejected Dante’s claim that the Achilleid was unfinished, as noted above, accepts Dante’s claim about Statius’ Christianity.

199 This text is found in Benvenuto’s commentary on Purgatorio XXI: 7-13.
argument suggests that Dante’s own auctoritas is rooted in a conception of truth that is not necessarily identical to mere fact.

However, Benvenuto also does not hesitate to argue that Dante “potuit coniecturare ex multis indiciis Statium fuisse christianum," and to list these indications of Statius’ Christianity. First, he looks to the chronological possibility of Statius’ Christianity, then he examines Statius’ texts, and finally, he considers Statius’ character. Benvenuto argues that if Virgil received prophetic knowledge of Christ, which is present in his Fourth Eclogue, then it is even more likely that Statius would have been able to intuit the truth of Christianity, since he had access to Virgil’s poem, personally witnessed the persecutions of the early Christian martyrs, and observed that these deaths did not impede the growth of the Christian faith.

Benvenuto also cites the “daring” (“ausus”) of Statius in writing the line “Primus in orbe Deos fecit timor” (Theb. III: 661). It is unclear, however, whether Benvenuto reads this sentiment as daringly pious or daringly impious. In the Thebaid, these words are uttered by Capaneus, who is later struck down by Jove for his contempt for the gods. To Dante, Capaneus is the exemplar for blasphemy in Inferno XIV. Read correctly, this line means: there are no gods; rather, gods are merely the invention of man’s fear. As noted above, the Genoa, BU E.II.8 accessus author offers this passage as an example of how Statius displays his own paganism “palam” in his

\[200\text{ Of course, the choice of the verb coniecturare suggests that Benvenuto does not believe that Dante claims that Statius’ Christianity is a certain truth.}

\[201\text{ “Nam si Virgilius qui fuit ante Christum sensit aliquid de illo per carmina sybillae, ut testatur Augustinus, quanto magis Statius, qui visid tempore suo crudele exterminium et inauditum antea quod fecit Titus de judaeis, et tot miracula facta per martyres quos Domitianus frater Titi cruelissime persecutus est, cum christianum nomen semper magis cresceret.” Benvenuto’s commentary on Purg. XXI: 7-13} \]
work.\textsuperscript{202} It is possible, however, that Benvenuto reads the blasphemous line as ultimately resolved piously, since the one who utters it is later killed by the gods whose existence he denies. The latter interpretation is the most likely, since it seems that Benvenuto cites this line as one of the possible signs of Statius’ Christianity. Finally, Benvenuto examines Statius’ character, saying that he “fuit et honestissimus et moralissimus in omnibus suis dictis,” a generic description that probably came directly from a Statius \textit{accessus}. However, it should be noted that, despite Benvenuto’s attempt to make the strongest possible argument for Dante’s claim, he points to no previous tradition that indicated Statius’ Christianity. Of Dante’s commentators, Benvenuto is by far the most familiar with the medieval tradition on Statius,\textsuperscript{203} but even he cannot provide evidence that Dante is working within an existing tradition regarding Statius’ Christianity.

As noted above, Benvenuto does not believe it necessary for Dante’s claims about Stazio to be factual, but he does attempt to shed some light on the thought process behind Dante’s portrayal of Stazio. In Benvenuto’s reading of Dante, the truth status of Dante’s work does not depend on historical fact, but it does depend on there being a rational basis for Dante’s claims. Therefore, Benvenuto argues that a Christian Stazio is necessary for Dante to accomplish his ends in \textit{Purgatorio}, and

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{202} “Palam autem est eum quanquam fuisse paganum, quamuis et ipse dicere suisque inserere libros non dubitauerit: <Theb. 3.661>: ’Primus in orbe deos fecit timor.’” Anderson, vol. 3, 75. Francesco da Buti, the only other early Dante commentator to engage with this Statian passage, also seems to interpret this line as an impious utterance. In his commentary to the \textit{Paradiso}, he connects this line to ancient practices of idolatry. Commentary on \textit{Paradiso} VIII: 1-12.

\textsuperscript{203} The sorts of notes Benvenuto provides on Stazio suggest that he read a number of different Statius \textit{accessus} before writing his commentary on Dante, as he alone includes a number of the \textit{accessus} commonplace.
\end{footnotesize}
also that Dante could have recognized signs in Statius’ life that made his portrayal as a Christian possible. While many Dante commentators accepted Dante’s *auctoritas* unquestionably, Benvenuto provides a model for how it is possible to think critically about Dante’s text, and still support Dante’s *auctoritas*. Dante’s portrayal of Stazio is a curious enough case that it provides a rare look at how Dante readers and commentators could work through these issues. It is especially fitting for the Statius cantos to receive this sort of reading, for, as subsequent chapters will show, these cantos are particularly concerned with the question of what it means to read well.

### 2.2.4 Modern Attempts to Justify Dante’s Treatment of Stazio

Since all the texts that directly address Stazio’s Christianity seem to have been written after Dante, scholars looking for signs of Statius’ Christianity in the existing tradition have been obliged to make inferences from very little information. There are three additional major scholarly arguments that suggest that there may be possible support in the medieval tradition on Statius for Dante’s presentation of Stazio as a Christian. Many scholars have pointed to the allegorized treatment of Statius written by Pseudo-Fulgentius, while Andreas Heil has looked to the etymologies on Statius’ name. Finally, there is also an argument based on the similarities between *Thebaid* XII and Acts 17 of the New Testament. Some of these arguments are more plausible than others, but none can be conclusively proven. This section provides a brief overview of these hypotheses and assesses their strengths and weaknesses, before concluding by proposing a new theory.
2.2.4.1 The commentary of Pseudo-Fulgentius

Many Dante scholars who have written on the subject of Dante and Stazio have turned to the allegorical commentary falsely attributed to Fulgentius Planciades, found in Paris BNF lat. 3012, as their primary source for how Statius was read in the Middle Ages. Padoan in particular championed this manuscript, along with the tradition of the *Ara Clementiae* discussed below, as a way to understand Dante’s portrayal of Stazio as Christian, and subsequently many scholars have been influenced by his arguments. Padoan stresses that the commentary presents Thebes as the human soul in Statius’ work: “in hac itaque ciuitate id est humana anima,” and that the commentator discusses the *Thebaid* in relation to the major vices of *superbia*, *auaritia*, and *luxuria*. In Padoan’s argument, while this interpretation of the poem is not strictly Christian, it depicts a moral theory so compatible with Christianity that it could lay the foundation for a Christian

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205 To be fair to Padoan, while scholars often claim to follow his example in pointing to Pseudo-Fulgentius as the main resource for medieval readings of Statius, his work mostly concerns the closing passage that addresses Theseus as a redeemer figure. Padoan argues that Dante likely interpreted Theseus in a way similar to that presented in the commentary, and that this interpretation influenced his reading of the *Thebaid*. However, Padoan also supplies additional examples of theological interpretations of Theseus in order to demonstrate that his suggestion had broader medieval currency. The treatment of the Pseudo-Fulgentius commentary in this chapter may seem overly detailed, but it is done in response to seeing various scholars casually reference this commentary as a source for Dante without having thought through the relationship between the text and Dante’s treatment of the same material. Scholars such as Franco Caviglia and Fabio Rosa have argued that this commentary was fruitful for Dante even after analyzing the text. Franco Caviglia, "Appunti sulla presenza di Stazio nella *Commedia*," *RCCM* 16 (1974): 267-79. Fabio Rosa, "La doppia trestizia di Giocasta": La ricezione di Stazio nel *Super Thebaiden*, in *Dalla tarda latinità agli arbori dell’umanesimo: alla radice della storia europea*, ed. Paolo Gatti and Lia de Finis (Trento: Università degli studi di Trento/Dipartimento di scienze filologiche e storiche, 1998), 185-97.
interpretation of the *Thebaid*.\textsuperscript{206} Moreover, the allegorical interpretation of Theseus clearly aligns him with Christ. Theseus is described as “humilis” and as the liberator of Thebes, which in this interpretation represents the human soul: “Tanto autem uitiorum conflictu Thebe id est humana anima quassata est quidem, sed diuinae benignitatis clementia subueniente liberatur.”\textsuperscript{207} The idea that Dante interpreted Theseus as a Christ-figure seems possible, based on the sources Padoan presents. But even he admits that there is no evidence that this particular commentary had any influence on the medieval interpretative tradition. It is true that the survival of this commentary in a single copy does not definitively prove that the text was little known, but it does strongly suggest as much, and recent scholarship also indicates that it is very unlikely that Dante could have read the commentary. Violetta de Angelis characterizes the Pseudo-Fulgentius commentary as “assolutamente ininfluente sulla sua [of Statius] esegesi.”\textsuperscript{208}

A closer examination of the particulars of the pseudo-Fulgentius commentary demonstrates how little the text has in common with Dante’s own engagement with the works of Statius. The commentary begins with a discussion of the function of allegory in the interpretation of texts, with particular emphasis on the analogy

\textsuperscript{206} Padoan, “Teseo,” 134-50.


between a text and a nut that must be cracked open.\textsuperscript{209} This treatment is a commonplace, and not necessarily in divergence with Dante's own views on literature, although far more simplistic than Dante's writings. If one were to read only this section and the closing passage regarding Theseus, it is understandable how one might consider it a possible source for Dante. However, the rest of this commentary distorts the \textit{Thebaid} text even more than is typical in medieval allegorical interpretations. What is more, the aspects of the \textit{Thebaid} that the anonymous commentator ignores or distorts in order to present his interpretation are the very parts that Dante draws upon repeatedly in the \textit{Commedia}.\textsuperscript{210}

The first difference between Dante's reading of the \textit{Thebaid} and the interpretation given in the commentary occurs in the etymology provided for the name of Thebes. The commentator presents Thebes as representing "the goodness of God" because of the name's etymological similarity to "theosbe": "Thebae' \textit{<Grece> dicuntur quasi 'theosbe; id est 'dei bonum.}"\textsuperscript{211} Such an interpretation is the complete opposite of Dante's consistent use of Thebes as an analogue for Hell.

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{209} "\textit{diligit puer nucem integram ad ludum, sapiens autem et adultus frangit ad gustum; similiter si puer es, habes sensum litteralem integrum nullaque subtili expositione pressum in quo oblecteris, si adultus es, frangenda est littera et nucleus litterae eliciendus, cuius gustu reficiaris. his itaque alissque pluribus modis tam Graecorum quam Latinorum poemata possunt commendabilia probari, quorum summa poscit intentio ut nullos ut simplices aut peritos operum suorum utilitatis immunes relinquent.}" Sweeney, 698.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
! It seems very probable that Dante would have been opposed to this bowdlerization, even if he had encountered it. The following chapters will expand upon this idea, but one of the factors that makes his portrayal of the Christian Statius interesting and powerful is that Dante does not ignore the horrific aspects of Statius' work, nor does he shy away from the use of shocking imagery in appropriate places. There are many problematic interpretations in the Pseudo-Fulgentius commentary, but only the ones related to Dante will be discussed here. Munk Olsen also offers a critical assessment of the commentary, 236.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{211} Sweeney, 699.
\end{quote}
The commentator’s portrayal of Hypsipyle is the source of another significant problem. The references to Hypsipyle in the Commedia reveal that Dante had a particular interest in her, perhaps even to a degree disproportionate to her importance in the Thebaid. He refers to her three times, and always positions her as a virtuous and sympathetic character.\textsuperscript{212} The Pseudo-Fulgentius commentary also refers to Hypsipyle’s kind actions, but combines them with an etymology of her name that classifies her as a vicious figure who represents idolatry in the Thebaid. The commentator writes: “sitientes ducuntur ad Ipsiphile ad fontem. Isis fuit praecipua dea in Egipto, ‘philo’ dicitur ‘amor’, inde ‘Isiphile’ ‘amor Isidis’, id est idolatria, quae ducit ad fontem suum omnem hominem saecularibus scientiis [pro temporalibus] insudantem. sed dampnosum est huic subsesse.”\textsuperscript{213} While Dante does utilize name etymologies in his work, it seems doubtful that he would agree with this etymology. The negative nature of the commentary’s assessment differs greatly from Dante’s affectionate portrayal of the character.

Finally, the interpretations proposed by the commentary necessitate overlooking the complexity of the characterizations of Amphiaraus, Capaneus, and Tydeus, who all play a significant role in Dante’s work.\textsuperscript{214} The commentary allegorizes the “seven against Thebes” into representations of the seven liberal arts:

\textsuperscript{212} Chapter 4 will examine Dante’s portrayal of Hypsipyle in greater detail. For now, the relevant passages are Inferno XVIII: 91-95, Purgatorio XXII: 88-89, 112, and Purgatorio XXVI: 94-99. It should also be noted that Hypsipyle is not blameless in the Thebaid. In her desire to help the Greek army, she forgets about her infant charge Archemoros, and leaves him behind, and while she is away, the boy is trampled by a snake and dies. However, Statius’ text still presents her sympathetically, and when both the army and her newly discovered sons plead on her behalf, she is ultimately pardoned by the boy’s father.

\textsuperscript{213} Sweeney, 702.

\textsuperscript{214} Inferno XX, XIV, and XXXII.
“septem reges Greciae in ultione coniurant. hii septem reges septem artes liberales sunt, qui bene reges dicuntur quia sunt regimen et columnae omnium scientiarum.”

It stresses that these arts are true, if partial, goods, in that they are insufficient for salvation. However, in Statius’ text, the deaths suffered by most of the seven kings are directly tied to their particular vices, and this connection is especially apparent in the deaths of Amphiaraus, Capaneus, and Tydeus. Amphiaraus’ death is linked to his use of the gift of prophecy, Capaneus is killed by Zeus after viciously denying and condemning the gods, and Tydeus celebrates his victory over a foe by gnawing on his head, even as he himself is dying. In the commentary these negative characteristics have been elided because it is impossible to account for these circumstances within the positive allegorical framework that the commentator adopts. The author cannot even call these kings by name in his commentary, because naming them as specific, vicious figures rather than as “the seven Greek kings” would show that his argument is tenuous. However, it is precisely the vices causing the downfall of these characters that make them valuable figures for Dante to discuss and deploy in Inferno.

Since the treatment of the Thebaid found in the pseudo-Fulgentian commentary is so different from Dante’s recourse to the epic, and there are no signs of the commentary’s influence in the Middle Ages, it is most unlikely that the commentary was a source for Dante. Moreover, it is thus even more doubtful that it influenced Dante when he transformed Stazio into a Christian.

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215 Sweeney, 702.
2.2.4.2 Etymologies of Statius’ Names

Andreas Heil’s study of the tradition of etymologies for Statius’ names has led him to argue that Dante’s inspiration for portraying Stazio as a Christian is linked to these etymologies, which were discussed in the previous chapter. Heil notes that the punishment of the avaricious in Purgatory is to lie face down, and that Dante describes this activity with the verbs “giacere” and “stare” when portraying Pope Adrian V and in Stazio’s account of himself. As the previous chapter discussed, stare is the foundation for the etymological interpretation of ‘Statius.’ When Statius completes his purgation, he must rise up from his prone state, or “surgere”—as in “sursulus quasi sursum canens,” the etymology provided in several Statius accessus. Thus, the static Stazio is transformed into the surging “Sursulus,” through his conversion and penitence.\(^{216}\) Heil argues that Dante alone read Statius’ name properly, and perceived that it contained a presagium of the poet’s fate in the afterlife.\(^{217}\) This is the first new hypothesis for Stazio’s Christianity that has been presented in a long time, and it is ingenious; however, Heil’s conjecture seems insufficient as an explanation in itself for why Dante made Stazio a Christian. Thus, while the historical happenstance of Statius’ name could have helped inspire Dante’s choice, and may have influenced the decision to make Stazio a former profligate, as well as the portrayal of the contrapasso of the avaricious and prodigal, it seems unlikely that the etymology alone could have been a sufficient to validate the idea of

\(^{216}\) Heil, 111.

\(^{217}\) It is also questionable whether this reading, in which Heil suggests Statius was predestined to be saved, can fit with Dante’s views on free will, which are discussed only a few cantos before the appearance of Statius, in Purgatorio XVI.
Stazio’s conversion. At best, Dante has planted a hidden pun, appreciable only to the reader who is aware of Statius’ full name—both Statius and Surculus—as well as the possible etymologies those names contain.

2.2.4.3 Statius and the Athenian Altars

The third hypothesis concerns an interpretation of the Thebaid that builds on a medieval reading of Statius’ text. Some readers have associated Statius’ Ara Clementiae, as depicted in Thebaid XII, with the Altar to the Unknown God in the Areopagus found in Acts 17. In a speech Paul gives to the Athenians, he mentions the Altar to the Unknown God in order to set up a distinction between the broad and impersonal Athenian religion and the truth of Christianity, that of a God who can be known, and who became incarnate to save his people: “stans autem Paulus in medio Ariopagi ait viri Athenienses per omnia quasi superstitionsores vos video praeteriens enim et videns simulacra vestra invenit et aram in qua scriptum erat ignoto deo quod ergo ignorantes colitis hoc ego adnuntio vobis” (Acts 17: 22-23). Statius’ passage describing the Altar of Clementia occurs at a significant point in the narrative; his description suggests that mercy, relief, and order are potentially attainable even in the midst of tragedy:

urbe fuit media nulli concessa potentum
ara deum, mitis posuit Clementia sedem,
et miseri fecere sacram; sine supplice numquam
illa nouo, nulla damnauit uota repulsa.
auditi quicumque rogant, noctesque diesque
ire datum et solis nomen placare querelis.
parca superstition: non turea flamma nec altus
accipitur sanguis: lacrimis altaria sudant,
maestarumque super libamina secta comarum
pendent et ulestes mutata sorte relictae. (*Theb. XII:* 481-90)²¹⁸

 Medieval audiences apparently found it striking that both passages referred to
Athenian altars, given that a number of different manuscripts, many of which were
written before the fourteenth century, contain notes that either use the passage
from Acts as a gloss upon Statius, or even suggest a direct connection between the
two texts.

 Carlo Landi was the first modern critic to establish the importance of such
annotations in relation to Dante and the *Commedia.* He particularly examines a
fourteenth-century manuscript of the *Thebaid,* Seminario Patavino cod. 41, which is
annotated with portions of the Lactantius Placidus commentary as well as with
notes from other sources.²¹⁹ The commentary on the Altar of Clementia is
particularly noteworthy. Next to the word “ara,” there is the note “hanc deus ignotus
habebat,” suggesting a direct association between Statius’ altar and the altar to the
“deus ignotus” depicted in Acts. Moreover, the commentary later elaborates:

> Determinat qui fuerunt illius templi positores. Hylus, Deianire
> et Herculis filus et reliqui ex eodem nati, postquam Hercules
> interiit, pulsi ab Ericteo athenas confugerunt. A quibus facile

²¹⁸ John F. Burgess writes: “The Altar of Mercy focuses Statius’ thoughts on the position of
man in the universe and of the individual in society, and coming as it does after eleven books of
disaster offers some comfort to man in his suffering. Statius is concerned in the *Thebaid* with man as
a tragic victim, and the Altar of Mercy affords him comfort precisely in that area in which he most
is excellent, and in it he tackles the role of the Altar of Mercy in the narrative of the *Thebaid,* and how
Statius redefines the Roman concept of “clementia” in his portrayal to mean something more like
“misericordia.”

²¹⁹ Carlo Landi, “Sulla leggenda del cristianesimo di Stazio,” in *Atti e Memorie del R.
Accademia di scienze, lettere e arti in Padova* 29 (1913): 231-66. Landi seems to believe that this note
is part of the Lactantius Placidus commentary, but later work by Padoan clarifies that the note was
grafted on to the Lactantius commentary, 128. Padoan also gives an account of the history of
scholarly reactions to Landi’s work.

This gloss asserts that the altar described by Statius in *Thebaid XII* is the very same altar as that which Paul saw and preached about in Athens in Acts 17. Landi also identifies two other Florentine manuscripts, which he believes were written in the twelfth century, that associate the Altar of Clementia with the Altar to the unknown God: Laurenziano 38.5 and 38.6.221 Landi argues that whether or not Dante actually read these particular glosses is unimportant, since their existence is sufficient to confirm there was a tradition in which Statius was associated with Christian beliefs.222

De Angelis seems to be the only Dante scholar to recognize that a similar argument about the two altars appears in Abelard’s *Theologia Christiana* III. 45.

Abelard writes:

cuius quidem ignoti dei aram magnus philosophus Dionysius Areopagita Paulo apostolo apud egregiam studiis civitatem


221 Landi, 240. Harald Anderson identifies the first of these manuscripts as being of French origin and of the late thirteenth century, and the second as being written in Germany between the eleventh and twelfth centuries, before it arrived in Italy in the thirteenth century, where it was amended and later owned by Boccaccio. David Anderson writes in detail about this manuscript, but says little about the notes, in David Anderson, “Boccaccio’s Glosses on Statius,” *Studi sul Boccaccio* 22 (1994): 3-134.

222 Landi, 242. It is Landi’s contention that Statius’ lines are a true, historical description of the Altar to the Unknown God in Acts 17, which was mentioned in other authors of antiquity, 244-45.
Athenas legitur ostendisse. Haec quidem, illa est ara misericordiae, cui a supplicibus non immolabatur nisi illud Brachmanorum sacrificum, hoc est orationes et lacrymae; cuius videlicet area et Statius in XII meminit, dicens; “urbe fuit media nulli concessa potentum ara deum; mitis posuit Clementia sedem....”

De Angelis connects this passage to the similar account in the *In principio* commentary. Although Dante did not know the Abelard text, the fact that this interpretation appears not only in the *In principio* commentary, but also in other manuscripts, and in the work of Abelard, means that this interpretation of the altars had some currency in the Middle Ages.

Both Landi and Padoan use the argument about the two altars to indicate that there were medieval legends about Statius’ Christianity, but as Anderson has pointed out, the medieval commentators never even raise the possibility of Statius himself being a Christian. Rather, the passages about the altars are used to confirm that such an altar did in fact exist in ancient Athens. If the altar in Acts had truly existed, it is not unthinkable that Statius would have known about it. But, even then, for Statius to have knowledge of the Athenian altar is no indication that Statius himself was a Christian. Thus, although Dante may have been conscious of an interpretation that linked the two texts, whether from a commentary or from his own reading, and this appreciation could have inspired him to maintain that Stazio

223 de Angelis, “I commenti,” 122-23.

224 According to H. Anderson, one of the manuscripts cited above, *Laurenziana* 38.6, contains both the Lactantius Placidus commentary, and the *In principio* commentary, which helps explain why Landi and Padoan associate this passage with the Lactantius Placidus commentary, and de Angelis with the *In principio* commentary.

225 In fact, it is even more likely than medieval readers could have realized that Statius would have known about the altar, since they were unaware that Statius’ father was Greek.
was secretly a Christian, it is not the same as his being influenced by an actual tradition in which Statius was considered to be Christian. Still, of all the theories proposed for sources prompting Dante’s portrayal of a Christian Stazio, this suggestion seems the most plausible. The fact that Statius’ passage about Clementia seems consonant with Christian theology may have helped inspire Dante’s decision to Christianize Stazio.

### 2.2.4.4 Dante’s Stazio and Statius’ Menoeceus

In combination, the texts studied throughout this chapter suggest that there is not enough evidence in the historical record to conclude that a tradition of Statius’ Christianity existed before the *Commedia*. It is easy to discern a number of reasons Dante wanted to Christianize Stazio in order to serve various purposes in his work, and these reasons are sufficient in themselves. However, it is also possible that elements in Statius’ poetry helped inspire Dante’s decision, and may have shaped Dante’s portrayal of Stazio. A number of modern critics, in addition to Padoan, have offered their thoughts on this issue. This chapter will conclude by proposing

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226 A. W. Verrall argues that there is a difference in how the prefaces to the *Thebaid* and *Achilleid* treat Domitian, and that these differences signal that Statius converted between the works. He cannot find signs of Christianity in the *Thebaid*, but believes that Dante genuinely recognized certain signs in Statius’ works. A. W. Verrall, "'To Follow the Fisherman': An Historical Problem in Dante," *Independent Review* 1 (1903-4): 246-64. Most other critics do not argue that Dante necessarily believed in Statius’ conversion, but rather, provide examples of themes in Statius’ work that might have drawn Dante’s interest. C. S. Lewis calls attention to the figure of Natura, the Statian conception of man (particularly the portrayal of brotherhood, and that of human depravity), the sin of divination, the power of diabolical agents, diabolical Olympian gods as contrasted with virtuous abstractions as deities, and sexual mores. C. S. Lewis, “Dante’s Statius,” *Medium Aevum* 25 (1957): 134-39. L. A. Mackey argues that the *Thebaid* “is predominantly a poem of love, revered or rejected,” and specifically rejects the argument that there is a different, Christian character to the books written “after” Statius’ conversion. L. A. Mackay, “Statius in Purgatory,” *Classica et Medievalia* 67 (1965): 298-99. A. Teresa Hankey reads the *Thebaid* as primarily a melancholy work, and suggests that the only
another possible passage in Statius’ work that could have helped inspire Dante to Christianize Stazio, and by arguing that Dante’s presentation of Stazio includes intentional textual links to this passage.

In *Thebaid X*, between Statius’ rewriting of the night raid in Virgil and Homer, and his description of Capaneus’ death, Statius relates the story of Menoeceus, who willingly lays down his life for Thebes upon hearing Tiresias’ prophecy that such sacrifice is necessary for the city to be victorious. Several Dante critics have speculated that Dante may have been drawn to the story of Menoeceus, which can be read as having distinct Christological connotations even though Menoeceus’ sacrifice is ultimately insufficient to secure lasting peace for Thebes.227 There are at least two features of Dante’s presentation of Stazio that echo notable elements in Statius’ recounting of Menoeceus’ sacrifice: the appeal to the Muse Clio, and a passage that plays on the double meaning of the Latin *sacer*. In *Purgatorio* XXII, Virgil characterizes Statius’ poetry as having been written with the aid of Clio: “per quello che Clìo teco lì tasta” (XXII: 58), which seems to refer to the opening of possible Christian reading is that Statius means to expose the failings of a pagan world and its gods. A. Teresa Hankey, “Dante and Statius,” in *Dante and his Literary Predecessors*, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), 48. Winthrop Wetherbee provides a very detailed overview of the poem, its themes, conflicts, and characters, according to how Dante might have read it. Winthrop Wetherbee, *The Ancient Flame: Dante and the Poets*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 160-200.

227 Every Dante critic who has engaged in a sustained examination of Statius’ works at least mentions Menoeceus, and often connects him to a framework of Christian thought. Lewis characterized Menoeceus as an example of a Christian-like hope and of divinely inspired virtue in Lewis, 137-39. Hankey says of Menoeceus: “his soul is said to have reached Jupiter before his body hits the ground, a detail which may well have struck Dante as distinctively Christian,” Hankey 46. And both Wetherbee and Paul Maurice Clogan suggest a connection between the presentation of the way divine influence works on Menoeceus and Stazio’s discourse on the body and soul in *Purgatorio* XXV. Wetherbee, 189-91. Paul Maurice Clogan, “Dante and Statius: Revisited,” *Medievalia et Humanistica: Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Culture* 35 (2009): 80-81. Wetherbee also argues that Menoeceus’ death and apotheosis is “perhaps the most spiritually significant moment in the poem,” 166.
the *Thebaid*: “Quem primus heroum, Clio dabis?” (*Theb.* I: 41). However, Statius invokes Clio at one other point in the poem—when he begins to tell of the fate and choices of Meneoceus. He writes:

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nunc age, quis stimulos et pulchrae gaudia mortis
addiderit iuueni (neque enim haec absentibus umquam
mens homini transmissa deis), memor incipe Clio,
saecula te quoniam penes et digesta uetustas. (X: 628-31)\textsuperscript{228}
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By mentioning Clio, Dante may be pointing his readers to the episode of Meneoceus, thereby gesturing at the existence of spiritual content in the *Thebaid*, even as he has Virgil deny that the text can be read in such a way.\textsuperscript{229} Stazio’s autobiography would indicate that he wrote the story of Meneoceus after his conversion to Christianity, because Stazio was baptized “‘pria ch’io conducessi i Greci a’ fiumi / di Tebe poetando,’” a point that dates to several books before the account of Meneoceus’ death in *Thebaid* X (*Purg.* XXII: 88-89).

Dante’s choice to play on the ambiguity of “sacer” in Stazio’s “translation” of the *Aeneid* is even more suggestive. As many other critics have noted, the *Aeneid* does not lack passages condemning prodigality, so if Dante had merely desired to make a point about Virgil’s authority and his influence on Stazio, it was unnecessary.

\textsuperscript{228} Wetherbee has offered a thought-provoking reading of this passage, noting the appeal to history in the verification of Meneoceus’ deeds, rather than to the Muses of epic tragedy. As noted above, he also suggests that Dante may have meant his readers to recall “neque enim haec absentibus umquam / mens homini transmissa deis” when Statius speaks on embryology and the aerial bodies in *Purgatorio* XXV. Wetherbee, 166, 189-91.

\textsuperscript{229} It has long been a point of contention as to how Dante means his readers to interpret Virgil’s assessment that “‘Or quando tu cantasti le crude armi / de la doppia trestizia di Giocasta, / … / per quello che Clò teco li tasta, / non par che ti facesse ancor fedele / la fede, sanza qual ben far non basta’” (*Purg.* XXII: 55-57, 58-60). It is possible that Dante means readers to understand that Virgil is correct in asserting that there are no signs of Christianity in Statius’ work. Or, since it is one of the purposes of the Stazio cantos to underline the limitations of Virgil’s pagan understanding, Dante may intend readers to understand that there are signs of Christianity in Statius’ work, but that Virgil is speaking from his own limited understanding.
for him to choose a passage whose meaning had to be distorted. Through Stazio’s mistranslation, Dante communicates a number of ideas about poetry, interpretation and the Christian imagination, as many scholars have already shown. But the parallel between Stazio’s rewriting of Virgil’s text and the Menoeceus episode in Statius’ own text has heretofore been overlooked. After Menoeceus willingly gives up his life, his mother deeply mourns, lamenting “quae sacra insania menti?” (Theb. X: 804). To his mother in her grief, Menoeceus’ actions are characterized by an unholy madness that caused him to violate the pietas he owed her. It seems that Statius intentionally chose the ambiguous “sacer,” which can mean either holiness or unholiness, to describe Menoeceus’ sacrifice. Elsewhere, the poet makes it clear that Menoeceus’ actions are some of the only instances of true holiness in the entire poem. At his death, Pietas and Virtus themselves come to take his body:

    astillumamplexaePietasVirtusqueferebant
   leniteradterrascorpus;namspiritusolim
   ante louem et summis apicem sibi poscit in astris. (Theb. X:780-82)

According to his mother, Menoeceus’s actions seem to be characterized by unholy “sacer,” but as far as Thebes and the gods are concerned, they are the holiest “sacer.”

   Unfortunately, it is difficult to find any evidence that this character captured the attention of medieval readers. The medieval summaries of the Thebaid do not tend to mention Menoeceus, nor is he referenced in any of the surviving vitae or accessus to Statius.²³⁰ He is named in the longer verse argument to Thebaid X (Inc. 22), but receives only a single line—“tunc patriae vitam largitur sponte

²³⁰ Menoeceus also seems to be mostly absent from other ancillary texts and the mythographic traditions.
Menoeceus”—and is not significant enough to be named in the shorter verse forms. Even in the Lactantius Placidus commentary summary of Book X, only two sentences describe the event of Menoeceus’ death, and they focus more on Tiresias as *vates* and Creon as grieving father than on Menoeceus himself.231 Nor do any of the Dante commentators seem to mention Menoeceus, despite the fact that they often add references to Statian material not directly referenced by Dante. It does not seem that medieval readers viewed Menoeceus as significant, and certainly not as a *figura Christi*, and it is thus impossible to demonstrate that Dante viewed Statius’ portrayal of Menoeceus’ sacrifice as spiritually significant. Nonetheless, it seems unlikely that Dante, who read Statius so thoroughly at other times, would not have been struck by the suggestiveness of Statius’ account of Menoeceus’ ready self-sacrifice.232

231 “uaticinatio Tiresiae quia Thebae non posse aliter uincere nisi unus se de draconteo semine deuoueret. deuotio Menoecei, Creontis filii, qui persuadente Virtute in Mantus formam conuersa se de muro uulneratum pro patria praecipitem dedit, cum non posset eum pater pia allocutione a voluntae domouere.” Sweeney, 579-580. In both this commentary, and the verse argument tradition, Menoeceus’ death is not treated as significant as a selfless and salvific sacrifice, but only as the catalyst for Creon to refuse death rites to the Greek dead in *Thebaid* XII.

232 See *Thebaid* X: 756-82: “at pius electa murorum in parte Menoeceus / iam sacer aspectu solitoque augustior ore, / ceu subito in terras supero demissus ab axe, / constitit, exempta manifestus casside nosci, / despetique acies hominum et clamore profundo / conuertit campum iussitque silentia bello. / ’armorum superi, tuque o qui funere tanto / indulges mihi, Phoebe, mori, date gaudia Thebis / quae pepigi et toto quae sanguine prodigus emi. / ferte retro bellum captaeque impingite Lernae / reliquias turpes, confixaque terga fuentes / Inachus indecet pater auersetur alumnos. / at Tyriis templ, arua, domos, conubia, natos / reddite morte mea: si uos placita hostia iuui, / si non attonitis uatis consulta recepti / auribus et Thebis nondum credentibus hausi, / haec Amphionis pro me persoluite terris / ac mihi deceptum, precor, exorate parentem.’ / sic ait, insignemque animam urcroncus corusco / dedignantem artus pridem maestamque teneri / arrripit atque uno quaesitam uulnerum rumpit. / sanguine tunc spargit turres et moenia lustrat, / seque super medias acies, nondum ense remisso, / iecit et in saeua cadere est conatus Achiuus, / ast illum amplexae Piaetas Virtusque ferebant / leniter ad terras corpus; nam spiritus olim / ante louem et summis apicem sibi poscit in astris.” It may even be worth noting that the account of Menoeceus’ apotheosis ends with the word “astris,” just as Dante ends each canticle with the word “stelle.”
The final chapter will discuss how the term “sacer” is significant for understanding Dante’s poetics. Here, it is suggested that one of Dante’s motivations for selecting the particular Aeneid passage Stazio translates (a translation that hinges on changing the connotation of “sacra”) is to call attention to Statius’ own episode in which he both plays on the dual nature of “sacer,” and presents a hero who could be interpreted as a figura Christi. Although it does not seem that medieval readers gave Menoeceus’ narrative a theological reading, Dante himself might have read the text in this way, and wanted to encourage his own readers to consider if there were any theological content in Statius’ poems. Nonetheless, Dante would also intend his audience to perceive the flaws of Statius’ narrative when compared to Christian truth. Even if Meneoceus is a figura Christi, his narrative is imperfect, because, while Menoeceus’ actions enable Thebes’ victory, it is a victory for a new king made tyrannical out of grief for his son. Two further agents are necessary to bring lasting peace to Thebes (and solace to the Greeks): Theseus and the goddess Clementia.233 Together, Menoeceus, Theseus, and Clementia could be considered to comprise the roles of Christ as sacrificial lamb, victor over death, and giver of mercy, but in Statius’ narrative, each function is separate, and insufficient in itself. Statius (or Stazio, in Dante’s imagination) perhaps conceives of the need for Christ, but cannot present these roles combined in a single person. Moreover, even the peace finally achieved in Thebes is known to be impermanent. Statius continually reminds his reader that the generation he writes about is the fathers of the sons who will go

233 As noted above, many of the studies engaging with the subject of theology in the Thebaid focus on the figures of Theseus and Clementia. See Padoan, “Teseo,” 432-57, in particular.
to war in Troy, and the subject of his unfinished *Achilleid* is the beginnings of that war. Thus, if Dante does mean Stazio's misquotation to gesture at the “Christian” elements of Statius’ work, it is likely that he also means his readers to understand that Stazio ultimately failed as a Christian poet. This move is necessary for the ultimate end of Dante's use of Stazio—establishing himself as the pre-eminent Christian poet, who can also bridge the classical/Christian divide. The next few chapters will continue to explore how Dante constructed Stazio, including his Christian identity, so as to serve this purpose.
CHAPTER 3

DANTE’S STAZIO: CHRISTIAN EVERYMAN AND INDIVIDUAL POET

In his characterization of Stazio, Dante creates a series of parallels between Stazio and a number of other groups found in the Commedia or medieval culture generally: poets, whether classical or modern, the late-repentant, and converted pagans. At the same time, Dante draws important distinctions between Stazio and the figures in these groups. Unlike other Christian converts in the Commedia, Stazio’s conversion narrative is relatively ordinary, a characteristic that helps establish him as a Christian Everyman figure who exemplifies Dante’s ideas on Christian identity. While Stazio is also similar to Virgil in many ways, his particular Christian identity necessarily sets him apart from other classical writers. The differences between Stazio and all these other figures are ultimately characteristics Stazio shares with Dante-pilgrim and Dante-poet; nonetheless, these shared characteristics only serve to heighten the differences between the two poets. While Dante’s Stazio is a sort of proto-Dante, that means he is necessarily imperfect and incomplete, yet Stazio is also Dante’s model of the perfectly purged soul. This chapter will examine how Dante-poet combines these two very different characterizations within the same personaggio.
3.1 Conversion Narratives in the *Commedia*: Stazio as Christian Everyman

3.1.1 Conversion Narratives in the *Commedia*

Stazio’s conversion narrative is exceptional among such narratives in the *Commedia* because his conversion occurs under relatively normal circumstances. All the other conversion narratives Dante presents in the *Commedia* require extraordinary or even miraculous conditions. These narratives fall into two categories: the late converts depicted in *Purgatorio*, and the miraculous, post-death conversions described in *Paradiso*. The purgatorial souls who narrate their conversion to the pilgrim were his near-contemporaries, and would have been baptized as infants and grown up with some knowledge of the Church. Thus, their conversion accounts focus on an active pre-conversion rejection of God, and a return to Him that occurs only very late in life. As for the *Paradiso* converts, these souls lived before Christ, and could be saved only through unique divine intervention. Dante uses the differences in these conditions of conversion in order to make several separate but interrelated theological and historical points.

Many of the purgatorial “converts” are found in Antepurgatory, whose population includes the late-repentant who turned to God only at the point of death (*Purg. V*: 52-57). Since the emphasis in such accounts is on the fact that the conversion occurred at the point of death, Dante uses these narratives to show the efficacy of repentance and the boundless mercy and love of God. Moreover, since these figures are moored outside Purgatory until they are ready to begin their

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234 This division is generally true, but does not account for Guido da Montefeltro in *Inferno* XXVII or Cato in *Purgatorio* I, whose presence in Purgatory is left a mystery.
journey, they can reveal little about Christian identity and sanctification. The same is true for the other souls whose stories most resemble a conversion narrative: Sapia, purging envy in *Purgatorio* XIII, and Pope Hadrian, purging avarice in *Purgatorio* XIX. While both figures converted earlier in life than those in Antepurgatory, they are also late-in-life converts (XIII: 119-29; XIX: 106-13). Thus, the majority of conversion narratives in the *Commedia* concern only the speaker’s sinful past and point of late conversion. Through these accounts, Dante shows a sort of “negative” Christian identity, that of turning away from sin. But none of these accounts engage with what Dante considers a positive Christian identity ought to be, whether in the conversion narrative itself, or in the discussion of the process of purgation.

As for the pagan converts discussed in *Paradiso*, (as well as Cato, whose presence in Purgatory is not explained), the point of their narratives is to probe the “extremes” of God’s grace. Dante relates the narratives of Ripheus and Trajan not in order to explore what it means to be a Christian, but as part of a broader discussion of God’s justice as pertaining to the salvation of pagans. Dante responds to the problem of the pagan unaware of Christianity (*Par.* XIX: 70-76) not only by having the Eagle argue that one cannot question God’s justice (XIX: 86-90), but also by presenting the narratives of Trajan and Ripheus to show some of the extraordinary means God can use in order to lead people to him. Dante follows an existing tradition in his account of Trajan, who lived after Christ but required the intercession of St. Gregory in order to be saved (XX: 106-17), but he invents an even more remarkable account for Ripheus, who receives both special revelation and the sacrament of baptism, a thousand years before that sacrament existed (XX: 118-29).
When one sets these two remarkable conversion narratives next to that of Stazio, it becomes clear that even if all three are “pagans” that one would be surprised to find in Paradise, the similarities between Stazio and Ripheus and Trajan are of far less consequence than their differences in terms of how Dante uses these narratives within the poem. Stazio’s narrative can be summarized thus: he was intrigued by the teachings of the new Christian preachers, grew in his compassion for them and in his belief, and was baptized (Purg. XXII: 76-89). Other than his unorthodox use of Virgil, Stazio’s conversion experience is decidedly ordinary, and does not require the extraordinary measures and means of grace that were at work in the conversions of Trajan and Ripheus, given that Stazio himself could hear of Christ’s resurrection and be baptized by normal means. Indeed, Stazio’s conversion is also far more commonplace than the post-Incarnation “conversions” recounted in the rest of Purgatory.

Dante significantly alters Stazio’s biography in order to Christianize him, and he intentionally constructs Stazio’s conversion experience so that the classical poet can serve as a kind of Everyman convert, or Christian Everyman. In contrast to the more miraculous conversions depicted in the Commedia, Stazio’s conversion narrative enables him to represent the general workings of grace and redemption in a way that is broadly applicable to any Christian. Thus, Stazio is a particularly fruitful source for examining Dante’s ideas on Christian conversion and Christian identity.
3.1.2 Stazio as an Image of Christ

Even before he introduces Stazio, Dante draws his audience's attention to him in the events that precede his introduction. While on the terrace of avarice in the twentieth canto of Purgatorio, Dante and Virgil are astonished to feel something like an earthquake shake the mountain. Dante uses surprisingly strong language to depict the intensity of the pilgrim's desire to understand what has happened (Purg. XX: 145-52). As many critics have established, the earthquake that frightens and intrigues the pilgrim is an allusion to the Messianic Scriptures. In Matthew 27 and 28, the description of the death and resurrection of Christ, the text includes accounts of two separate earthquakes, one occurring at the moment of Christ’s death, and a second occurring when an angel appears to the women to reveal that Christ has risen from the dead.235 By selecting the mountainquake as the sign heralding the completion of Stazio's purgation, Dante chooses to document Stazio's entrance through one of the densest groupings of allusions to the life of Christ in the entire Commedia.236 Although the pilgrim is at a loss as to what the mountainquake might


signify, the poet signals that the answer must be related to Christian redemption and salvation history. In addition, the other penitents react to the mountainquake in a way that references Luke’s angelic proclamation of Christ’s birth: “Gloria in excelsis’ tutti ‘Deo / dicean’” (XX: 136-37). In a few lines, Dante evokes the three major events of Christ’s Incarnation: his Nativity, Crucifixion, and Resurrection. All three are necessary for the redemption of mankind, a redemption that, as Dante’s text will reveal shortly, is embodied in Stazio.

However, the pilgrim cannot understand the cry of the purgatorial penitents until Stazio explains the reason behind the celebration. The pilgrim’s lack of understanding contrasts with a third gospel allusion to the earthquakes that is only implicit in Purgatorio XX-XXI. Matthew 27:54 describes a centurion who responds to the earthquake by recognizing Christ’s divinity, even though he was not himself a follower of Christ: “centurio autem et qui cum eo errant custodientes Iesum viso terraemotu et his quae fiebant timuerunt valde dicentes vere Dei Filius erat iste.” Unlike the centurion, the pilgrim is not yet capable of interpreting the divine significance of the mountainquake, reacting with fear and perplexity rather than joy. The pilgrim’s own uncertainty contributes to the themes of perplexity and interpretation that extend throughout the cantos where Stazio is present. The mind the earthquake that frees the prisoners in Acts 16, and the ascent of the two witnesses in Apocalypse 11. Boccia, “Appunti,” 31.

237 Another possible intertext, Psalm 98, concerns both an earthquake and saints praising God on his “holy hill.” It begins: “Dominus regnavit irascantur populi qui sedet super cherubin moveatur terra. Dominus in Sion magnus et excelsus est super omnes populos” and concludes: “exaltate Dominum Deum nostrum et adorate in monte sancto eius quoniam sanctus Dominus Deus noster” (Psalmos 98: 1-2, 9, emphasis added).
pilgrim’s inability to interpret the mountainquake parallels Stazio’s conversion narrative, in which he was capable of reading signs that Virgil could not interpret.

The pilgrim’s uncertainty and deep desire for understanding is used to underline the significance of the still-mysterious event. The poet opens the next canto with a reference to “la femminetta / samaritana” (XXI: 2-3) that not only re-emphasizes his desire for understanding, but also alludes to an event in the life of Christ relevant to redemption and salvation (John 4:10-15). This allusion is adroitly chosen, for it incorporates both the necessity of Christ for salvation, and also concerns the problem of interpretation, both of which remain central themes throughout the Stazio cantos. Moreover, William A. Stephany has shown how medieval interpretations of the Samaritan woman tended to follow the example of Augustine in reading the scene as a model of conversion. “The woman is for [Augustine] both a ‘typum Ecclesiae’ and as such a type of the individual Christian, of any member of the Church....The woman herself is ‘Forma Ecclesia, non jam justificatae, sed jam justificandae}; what is narrated therefore in the gospel is, for Augustine, the paradigmatic moment of conversion.”

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239 Stephany, "Conversion," 146.
appears,\textsuperscript{240} Dante illustrates his entrance with another gospel allusion exemplifying the theme of failing to see or understand, and that is also a scene of conversion: the story of Christ appearing to two men on the road to Emmaus (XXI: 7-13).\textsuperscript{241} The poet connects Stazio’s appearance to this episode because in the gospel the two disciples are initially ignorant of Christ’s identity—“oculi autem illorum tenebantur ne eum agnoscerent”—just as the pilgrim and Virgilio cannot know that the soul they have encountered is the cause of the huge celebration witnessed in the prior canto (Luke 24:16).\textsuperscript{242}

What is most important, however, is that the allusion to the men on the road to Emmaus permits Dante to make a direct comparison between Stazio and Christ. The significance of this depiction becomes all the more apparent when one realizes how rare such comparisons are in Dante’s work. The only other instances in the

\textsuperscript{240} In a recent article, Richard Lansing has made the observation that Stazio is one of only two figures to come up to Dante and Virgil from behind. He suggests that Dante introduces Stazio in this unusual way because of the pledge Statius makes at the close of the \textit{Thebaid} to follow in the footsteps of Virgil, a passage that will be examined below. Richard Lansing, “Statius’ Homage to Vergil,” \textit{MLN} 127.1 (2012): S97.

\textsuperscript{241} “Et ecce duo ex illis ibant ipsa die in castellum quod erant in spatio stadiorum sexaginta ab Hierusalem nomine Emmaus et ipsi loquebantur ad invicem de his omnibus quae acciderant et factum est dum fabularentur et secum quaerent et ipse Iesus adpropinquans ibat cum illis” (Luke 24:13-15). Stephany, following P. C. Gardiner, has also examined and presented the readings of Augustine, Gregory, and Bede of this event. “Bede, whose development of the Gregorian tradition was to become the most influential in the exegetical tradition, made of the journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus a journey from uncertainty to the point of certainty, thereby making it, in Gardiner’s words, ‘no longer merely a literal narrative,’ but ‘the paradigm for the patterned existence of the pilgrim people.’ The story is one of conversion, of a movement from one spiritual locus to another, whether one follows the interpretation of Augustine, who would have it a movement from sin to grace, or of Gregory and Bede, who would have it a movement from doubt to certainty.” “Conversion,” 147-48. Gardiner’s work is P. C. Gardiner, \textit{The Pilgrimage of Desire} (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 1-52.

\textsuperscript{242} Franke points out that the scene also represents the importance of interpretation, and connects it to Stazio’s interpretation of Virgil’s texts, because the disciples realized Christ’s identity at the point of “the breaking of the bread,” a figure for interpretation as well as for the Eucharist. Franke, “Tradition,” 8.
Commedia involve Beatrice and the Virgin Mary. At the end of Paradiso, St. Bernard says of Mary:

Riguarda omai ne la faccia che a Cristo
più si somiglia, che la sua chiarezza
sola ti può disporre a veder Cristo. (Par. XXXII: 85-87)

Dante makes Beatrice into a figural representation of Christ in Purgatorio XXXIII by having her speak Christ’s own words:

“Modicum, et non videbitis me;
et iterum, sorelle mie dilette,
modicum, et vos videbitis me.” (Purg. XXXIII: 10-12)

These references are organized hierarchically. Stazio is compared to the embodied Christ, coming up behind the two disciples on the way to Emmaus; given that Beatrice is permitted to speak the words of Christ, she has Christ’s voice; and finally, Mary has Christ’s face, or at least, the face that most resembles Christ. The significance and degree of likeness increases, as the text moves from Stazio to Beatrice to Mary. But if Mary and Beatrice are the only other figures to be identified with Christ in the Commedia, why is Stazio accorded this privilege? Unlike Beatrice, Stazio played no personal role in Dante’s life, other than as one of the poetic auctores. Moreover, if one takes Virgil’s later words at face value, that Stazio’s texts bear no sign of his faith, then it seems highly unlikely that Stazio was

243 Critics like Giovanni Cecchetti have noted that Stazio is the only figura Christi in the Commedia, but have failed to see the link between Stazio, Beatrice and Mary established through Dante’s use of analogy. Giovanni Cecchetti, “The Statius Episode: Observations on Dante’s conception of poetry,” Lectura Dantis Virginiana 7 (1990): 96-114.

244 During the Last Supper Christ says to his disciples: “modicum et iam non videbitis me et iterum modicum et videbitis me quia vado ad Patrem” (John 16:16).
instrumental in the salvation of any other person. Yet, as the cluster of these soteriological allusions reveals, Dante means his reader to associate the figure of Stazio with the process of conversion and salvation. While Dante eventually provides Stazio with a complex characterization, from the end of *Purgatorio* XX through the first half of XXI Stazio is simply the unidentified *personaggio* who has completed his time as a penitent. Stazio is not only the first perfectly purged figure that Dante and Virgil meet, but also the only such figure in all of the *Commedia*. In addition, as was noted above, Stazio provides one of the only conventional conversion narratives in the poem. Thus, Dante uses Stazio to discuss repentance and purgation under the circumstances pertinent to the majority of humanity, and to underline this point, he compares Stazio to the Incarnate Christ.

While the joyful “*Gloria*” of the purgatorial community repeats the proclamation at Christ’s birth, the souls’ reaction also evokes several of Christ’s parables concerning repentance collected in Luke 15. To describe God’s joy when a sinner repents, Christ draws allusions to the joy of finding a lost sheep, a lost coin, and finally, in the parable of the prodigal son, to the joy in the return of a son. While Christ refers specifically to the rejoicing of the angels in Heaven, Dante almost certainly has the verses of the repentance parables in mind when he depicts the souls in Purgatory rejoicing at the successful completion of the purgation process.

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245 *Purgatorio* XXII: 55–60. Whether Virgil is assessing Statius’ texts properly will be examined further below, but it can be generally agreed that Statius’ texts do not bear overt signs of his conversion.

246 Christ explains: “*dico vobis quod ita gaudium erit in caelo super uno peccatore paenitentiam habente quam super nonaginta novem iustis qui non indigent paenitentia*” and repeats: “*ita dico vobis gaudium erit coram angelis Dei super uno peccatore paenitentiam agente*” (Luke 15:7, 10).
Moreover, the father in the last parable throws a huge communal party to celebrate his son’s return: “et adducite vitulum saginatum et occidite et manducemus et epulemur quia hic filius mortuus erat et revixit perierat et inventus est” (Luke 15:23-24). This parable is especially pertinent because it directly addresses conscious sin and intentional repentance. Shortly, Stazio will reveal his own former prodigality, behavior similar to that of the younger son: “congregatis omnibus adolescentior filius peregre profectus est in regionem longinquam et ibi dissipavit substantiam suam vivendo luxuriose” (15:13). Dante’s Stazio becomes not only a type of Christ, but also a type of the prodigal son. In his Confessions, Augustine uses the prodigal son as a frequent point of comparison for his own state prior to conversion: “defluxi abs te ego et erravi, deus meus, nimis devius ab stabilitate tua in adolescentia et factus sum mihi regio egestatis” (Conf. II.10). Moreover, he describes the time shortly before his conversion with language similar to the depiction of the prodigal returning to his father: “Et inde admonitus redire ad memet ipsum...et inveni longe me esse a te in regione dissimilitudinis” (VII.10).247 Stazio’s own prodigality was characterized by lavish overspending, but “prodigality” can ultimately stand for any sort of sin, in that sin is a wasting of God’s gifts.

Similarly, one can consider Stazio’s sloth as a generic vice, as well as a specific one. Virgil describes acedia as failing to do one’s duty: “L’amor del bene, scemo / del suo dover, quiritta si ristora” (Purg. XVII: 85-86) and as a “lento

247 See also “et longe peregrinabar abs te, exclusus et a siliquis pororum, quos de siliquis pascebam” (Conf. III. 6); and “itaque mihi non ad usum, sed ad perniciem magis valebat, quia tam bonam partem substantiae meae sategi habere in postestate, et fortitudinem meam non ad te custodiebam, sed profectus sum abs te in longinquam regionem, ut eam dissiparem in meretrices cupidates” (Conf. IV.16). Augustine also refers to this parable in Confessiones I.28 and VIII.3.
amore” (XVII: 130). Thus, acedia applies to almost every conceivable situation of the moral life; in a sense, it signifies failing to act in a sufficiently Christian manner.

Stazio spent so much time on that terrace because he was silent about his conversion, and one might interpret this as a silence of action (failing to live out the Christian virtues) as well as a verbal silence. Thus, both of the primary vices Dante attributes to Stazio can also be characterized as the most broadly applicable vices, as generic sins against Christian morality. Stazio can be an effective Christian Everyman convert precisely because he was an Everyman sinner first.

Dante does not use the dense set of allusions in the transition between Purgatorio XX and XXI to call attention to Stazio’s historical identity, but in order to foreground the transformative moment when the reader, along with the pilgrim, first meets Stazio. The pilgrim’s deep thirst for knowledge, which Dante repeatedly underlines, is satisfied once he understands the cause of the mountainquake (XXI: 58-75). At this point, Stazio’s individual identity is incidental because what matters most is his likeness to Christ. Initially, Dante describes Stazio’s appearance solely through the allusion to Christ, illustrating the Pauline command for Christians to be imitators of God (Eph. 5:1). Since Stazio’s introduction coincides with the completion of his penance, his identification as being like Christ is a depiction of the process of sanctification, through which one comes to resemble Christ. Romans 8:29 reads: “nam quos praescivit et praedestinavit conformes fieri imaginis Filii eius.”

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248 In Ephesians 4, Paul also commands his readers “deponere vos secundum pristinam conversationem veterem hominem qui corruptitur secundum desideria erroris renovamini autem spiritu mentis vestrae et induite novum hominem qui secundum Deum creatus est in iustitia et sanctitate veritatis” (4:22-24).
Moreover, Dante specifically likens Stazio to the post-Resurrection Christ, in the only such explicit reference in the *Commedia*. Through Stazio, Dante renders literal the words of Romans: “consepulti enim sumus cum illo per baptismum in mortem ut quomodo surrexit Christus a mortuis per gloriam Patris ita et nos in novitate vitae ambulemus si enim conplantati facti sumus similitudini mortis eius simul et resurrectionis erimus” (Rom. 6:4-5). Thus, Dante’s Messianic allusions do not signal a special status for Stazio; since Stazio represents the Everyman with regard to Christian conversion, he stands for all Christians. The mountainquake and the *Gloria* resound for every soul that has completed its purgation—“ita dico vobis gaudium erit coram angelis Dei super uno peccatore paenitentiam agente”—and readers should realize that the poet could justly compare any fully-purged soul to Christ (Luke 15:10). Although Dante might appear to give Stazio special treatment through his assemblage of Messianic references and the air of suspense he creates, ultimately, the point the poet is making is that every believer is remarkable and important within the framework of Purgatory, as well as in the eyes of God.

3.2 Stazio and Virgil: Stazio as a Purgatorial Poet

It does not take long for Dante to reveal Stazio’s particular identity, and to establish the other dominant theme of these cantos: the possibility of the conversion of classical culture to Christianity, particularly in the medium of poetry. Ronald L. Martinez explains that the scenes between Stazio and Virgil are “implicitly Dante’s dramatization of the conversion of that tradition, the transformation of the Latin canon that renders it accessible to Dante—a *poeta* both Christian and
vernacular.” It is important that Stazio be established first as the Everyman Christian in order to accomplish this end. However, the specific characteristics with which Dante endows him in the second canticle reveal that Dante is also making a very particular argument, one that relates to the regard he feels for Virgil, as well as the sort of poet he himself wants to be. As Michelangelo Picone writes: “In effetti, affabulando il ritorno di Stazio all’Eden, Dante si interroga sulle possibilità che la cultura classica ha di compiere un simile viaggio. Egli si pone in definitivo il problema del rapporto fra auctoritas e salvezza, fra poesia classica e verità cristiana.” Dante’s exploration of this theme involves the implicit comparison of Stazio first with Virgil, to contrast the Christian poet with the non-Christian master, and then with Dante, to demonstrate that, until the writing of the Commedia, the process of the conversion of poetic culture was not fully complete.

3.2.1 Stazio, (Virgil), and Sordello

Dante’s discourse on poetry and what it means to be a poet is part of one of the major ongoing themes of Purgatorio, particularly in the second half of the canticle. Most of the work on Stazio as a poetic figure has been limited to what can be gleaned from his interactions with Virgil. However, the similarities and contrasts between Stazio and the vernacular poet Sordello, found in Purgatorio VI-VIII, are another fruitful subject that has been mostly neglected by scholars, apart from a


comparison of their respective attempted embraces of Virgil. A closer look at Sordello in relation to Stazio sheds light not only on Stazio’s characterization as a fully purged Christian, but also provides further insight into Dante’s Virgil.

In terms of how they are depicted and how they function in the narrative, the vernacular poet Sordello has more in common with the classical poet Stazio than he does with the other vernacular poets of Purgatorio. Like Stazio, Sordello features in several cantos, serves as a sort of guide to Virgil and Dante, is an exemplar of negligence, and reveres Virgil. In addition, Dante significantly alters the biography of both subjects to serve the purposes of his text. Dante’s reshaping of Sordello’s life is not as striking as his treatment of Stazio, but it differs sufficiently from the existing vidas to make critics like C. M. Bowra speculate that “Dante knew something” additional about Sordello to have placed him among the late-repentant who suffered violent deaths. Rather, it seems that Dante uniquely “knew” additional facts about Sordello; the poet claims special knowledge about Sordello, as he does with Stazio, in order to accomplish the structural and thematic intentions of his work. By meeting Sordello in Antepurgatory and Stazio at the point when he completes his purgation, Dante is able to have two poets bookend the pilgrim’s experience of

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252 C. M. Bowra, "Dante and Sordello," Comparative Literature 5.1 (Winter 1953): 4. The subject of whether Sordello is among these late-repentant, belongs in the Valley of Princes, or is a transitional figure for some unspecified third category is also debated among critics, although his belonging to the first category seems to be the most likely. Marco Boni provides a critical edition of Sordello’s existing vidas in Marco Boni, Sordello, le poesie (Bologna: Palmaverde, 1954).
Purgatory, which ought to be borne in mind when interpreting the span of cantos that take place on the mountain.

There may be an additional common reason as to why Dante gave such prominence to these two figures: Stazio and Sordello are safe interlocutors for him because they failed at the specific poetic challenges in which Dante demonstrates his own excellence in the *Commedia*. Dante praises Sordello in *De vulgari eloquentia* for deserting the vernacular of his hometown for a better one:

\[ \text{Dicimus ergo quod forte non male oppinantur qui Bononienses asserunt pulcriori locutione loquentes, cum ab Ymolenibus, Ferrariensis et Mutinensis circunstantibus aliquid propio vulgari adsciscunt, sicut facere quoslibet a finitimis suis conicimus, ut Sordellus de Mantua sua ostendit, Cremone, Brixie atque Verone confini: qui, tantus eloquentie vir existens, non solum in poetando, sed quomodocunque loquendo patrum vulgare deseruit. (DVE I.xv.2)} \]

Dante offers this praise within the context of his earlier, and abandoned, preoccupation with the selection of a refined Italian vernacular. However, Sordello’s “desertion” also means that he offers no threat to Dante’s establishment of himself as the paramount Italian poet, because Sordello failed the challenge of being a poet in his mother tongue. Perhaps too, since the historical Sordello chose not to write in Italian, Dante creates a *personaggio* that shows no interest in Dante as a poet. Instead, Sordello lavishes his attention on Virgil, only belatedly acknowledging the pilgrim as a person, and never engaging with him on the level of poetry. Similarly, Stazio is a safe interlocutor for Dante (as both pilgrim and poet) because he did not write openly Christian poetry, a task in which Dante wants to show his mastery. Like Sordello, Stazio engages primarily with Virgil, rather than with the pilgrim, especially on the subject of poetic influence. Through these two distancing
techniques, Dante makes these characters into overt foils for Virgil, while he more subtly promotes his own unique literary supremacy.

Sordello’s poetic “failure” is relevant here because Dante uses the cantos with Sordello and with Stazio to address the subject of the value and purposes of poetry. Several critics, including Teodolinda Barolini, have noted that the pilgrim’s experience with Sordello should be read alongside his encounter with Bertran de Born, another Provençal poet, in Inferno. Bertran is placed among the schismatics, since he is “‘quelli / che diedi al re giovane i ma’ conforti’” and himself admits: “‘Io feci il padre e ’l figlio in sé ribelli,’” which has been interpreted as his sowing dissension through his poetry (Inf. XXVIII: 134-36). In contrast, Sordello apparently receives a more favorable position in the afterlife because his poetry could be put to positive use. The fact that he serves as a sort of guide to Dante and Virgil also suggests that the poet looks favorably on Sordello’s powers of discernment and communication. Although Bertran is generally deemed to be the greater poet, he meets an infamous end in Dante’s moral system, whereas Sordello receives a fairly positive treatment. The way Dante seems to invert the existing critical hierarchy may be a simplified version of how Dante chooses to position Stazio and Virgil in relation to one another. It is generally acknowledged that Virgil is the far superior poet, but Dante places him in Hell, while he saves Stazio.


254 Of course, the relationship between Stazio and Virgil is necessarily more complicated than this, since Dante uses these figures to convey more complex ideas. Dante uses Stazio’s conversion narrative to demonstrate that Virgil’s poetry is both good in itself, and can be put to productive use; however, Dante must condemn Virgil to Hell, while he promotes Stazio into
While Stazio and Sordello are superficially similar, the differences between them are ultimately more significant. In that Sordello is still caught up in the world and its affairs, he is a typical representative of Antepurgatory, whereas Stazio has already been made perfect through purgation. The differences between the poets are immediately apparent from their first appearance and their first words in the poem. Whereas Sordello’s haughtiness towards the pilgrims only eventually melts into welcome once he knows the identity of Virgil, Stazio begins with words of Christian charity: “O frati miei, Dio vi dea pace” (Purg. XXI: 13). Also, while Sordello ceases to pay attention to Dante once he learns Virgil’s identity, Stazio remains interested in both pilgrims. The difference in attitude is particularly exemplified by a comparison of how each responds to a question initially posed by the pilgrim. In Purgatorio VIII, Dante notices that the stars have changed since the morning, and Virgil responds with a brief explanation. Sordello joins this conversation, but speaks specifically to Virgil alone. In contrast, on the sixth girone, when Dante has a question that Virgil can answer only incompletely, Stazio readily helps, and addresses the pilgrim rather than Virgil. Stazio is just as starstruck in Virgil’s presence as Sordello, but, unlike the vernacular poet, he does not allow himself to be blinded to the pilgrim’s importance, because his purgation has perfected him in charity.

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Purgatory and Paradise, even though the fact that he neglected to communicate his Christian status in his life and poetry merits him centuries on the terrace of acedia.

255 “Com’ei parlava, e Sordello a sé il trasse / dicendo: ‘Vedi là ’l nostro avversaro’; / e drizzò il ditto perché ’n là guardasse” (VIII: 94-96, emphasis added).

256 “Se le parole mie, / figlio, la mente tua guarda e riceve,/ lume ti fiero al come che tu die” (XXV: 34-36).
Dante also emphasizes Sordello's solitude, and his apparent lack of concern about beginning his purgation, as seen when he initially ignores Virgil's question about the right way to proceed.\textsuperscript{257} In contrast, although Stazio is by himself when he first appears, he immediately seeks the community of other pilgrims, and is happy to accompany them on their journey. Sordello's standoffishness has often been associated with the virtue of magnanimity, a virtue more prized in pagan moral systems than Christian ones, since pride seems to be a necessary component of the virtue.\textsuperscript{258} Sordello's behavior resembles that of Farinata, whom Dante had described as \textit{magnanimo}; of Sordello he says

\begin{quote}

come ti stavi altera e disdegnosa  
e nel mover de li occhi onesta e tarda!  
Ella non ci dicea alcuna cosa,  
ma lasciavane gir, solo sguardando. (Purg. VI: 62-65)
\end{quote}

Farinata and Virgil are the only \textit{Commedia} characters Dante expressly names as \textit{magnanimi}, and both are damned to Hell. If Sordello's standoffishness resembles Farinata's behavior, his actions seem questionable in the context of Purgatory. However, Dante uses Sordello to demonstrate the state of the soul before it has begun and undergone purgation. Sordello's more questionable characteristics are

\textsuperscript{257} “Ma vedi là un’anima che, posta / sola soletta” (VI: 58-59); “Pur Virgilio si trasse a lei, pregando / che ne mostrasse la miglior salita; / e quella non rispuose al suo dimando, / ma di nostro paese e de la vita / ci ‘nchiese” (VI: 67-70).

\textsuperscript{258} While the groundwork is laid for a Christian understanding of magnanimity in Thomas Aquinas ST II.I. Q 129, most Dante scholars, including John Scott and Fiorenzo Forti, tend to promote a negative reading of the term as used in Dante's work. Fiorenzo Forti, \textit{Mannanimitade: studi su un tema dantesco} (Bologna: Patron, 1971); John Scott, \textit{Dante magnanimo: studi sulla Commedia} (Florence: L. S. Olschki, 1977). However, Dante seems to use the term with positive (Virgil, Inf. II: 43-45; Aeneas, Conv. IV.xxvi.7-8) and negative (Farinata, Inf. X: 73-75) connotations in the \textit{Commedia} and \textit{Convivio}. More recent work, such as that of Massimo Seriacopi, promotes a more moderate reading of the term. Massimo Seriacopi, \textit{La dialettica magnanimità-prudenza in Dante} (Florence: Firenze Libri, 2006).
the negative reflection of the behavior of Stazio, who has fully purged his sinful dispositions. Once Sordello is actually undergoing purgation, readers can assume that he will exude a similar charity and graciousness as Stazio. By juxtaposing these two closely related poetic figures, and drawing attention to their similarities and their differences, Dante can illustrate what the process of sanctification achieves. Their differences highlight the characteristics appropriate to Stazio's identity as the emblematic representative of the fully purged soul.

It is also their differences that explain why the action that most obviously groups Sordello and Stazio together—the attempted embrace of Virgil—turns out so differently, and thus, distinguishes them clearly from one another. Sordello succeeds in embracing Virgil twice—once, when he hears that Virgil also comes from Mantua (VI: 71-75), and a second time, when he learns Virgil's identity (VII: 7-15). Stazio is similarly moved to embrace Virgil when he learns the poet's identity, but Virgil stops him, reminding the younger poet that “‘tu se’ ombra e ombra vedi’” (XXI: 132). Dante also experienced the impossibility of embracing an incorporeal shade early on in Purgatorio, when he met his old friend Casella (II: 76-81). Yet, since Sordello and Virgil successfully embraced a mere dozen cantos earlier, Virgil's reminder that he and Stazio are both ombre refers not to the physical constraints of that state, but to the additional limitations inherent in what being ombre signifies, which can be understood by examining the circumstances behind Virgil's embrace with each poet.

Sordello first embraces Virgil when he learns that Virgil is a fellow Mantuan. Sordello's enthusiastic response contrasts starkly with the haughtiness he initially
displays towards the pilgrims (VI: 72-75). Thus, this first embrace reveals more about Sordello’s isolation and patriotism than about his relationship with Virgil; while Virgil’s acceptance of the embrace indicates no more than his appreciation or respect for this patriotism. The second embrace is more telling (although neither one seems problematic except in retrospect, after Stazio’s embrace has been denied). When Sordello finally asks to which Mantuan in particular he is speaking, Virgil’s response prompts a reaction of wonder and meekness in Sordello, rather than of proud patriotism (VII: 1-2, 10-19). The humility of Sordello’s reaction clearly contrasts with his earlier hauteur. When Virgil was simply a Mantuan, Sordello was willing to acknowledge him as an equal, but when he learned that the Mantuan was the great Virgil, Sordello recognizes his own inferiority. Sordello’s praise is clearly rooted in his own identity, for the Mantuan in him still values Virgil as “pregio eterno del loco ond’ io fui,” whereas the poet in him praises Virgil as “O gloria di Latin...per cui / mostrò ciò che potea la lingua nostra” (VII: 18, 16-17). Virgil neither demurs from nor comments on this praise, probably because it is offered in recognition of genuine aspects of his identity. Sordello’s reaction to Virgil resembles Dante’s own in Inferno I, which Virgil accepted just as readily.


261 “O de li altri poeti onore e lume, / vaglimami l’ lungo studio e ’l grande amore / che m’ha fatto cercar lo tuo volume. / Tu se’ lo mio maestro e ’l mio autore, / tu se’ solo colui da cu’ io tolsi / lo bello stilo che m’ha fatto onore” (Inf. I: 82-86).
However, this pattern of Virgil readily accepting tribute is broken when Stazio and Virgil meet, even though their interaction initially seems to mirror those earlier meetings. Virgil easily accepts Stazio’s praise that he both inspired and nourished him as a poet (XXI: 94-99). In fact, Virgil seems to take a little glee in postponing the revelation of his identity, knowing that Stazio will react strongly to this news.262 Yet, once Stazio learns Virgil’s identity, and, like Sordello before him, moves to embrace Virgil, Virgil does not permit him to do so, saying: “Frate, / non far, ché tu se’ ombra e ombra vedi” (XXI: 131-32). Stazio accepts the gentle rebuke, responding only that his love is so great that it made him forgetful of fundamental realities (XXI: 133-36).263 By overwriting the established narrative of the possibility of non-corporeal embraces, Dante draws special attention to the interaction between Stazio and Virgil.

Dante sowed the clues for the interpretation of Virgil’s response at the beginning of the canto, when Stazio and Virgil first speak to each other, and Stazio offers a cheerful greeting befitting souls in Purgatory (XXI: 13). Notably, this is one of the only instances in Purgatorio of a non-interrogative greeting. The majority of conversations in the second realm begin because the pilgrims seek to learn something from the shades they meet, or the shades want to know about the

262 Winthrop Wetherbee offers a different interpretation of Virgil urging Dante to keep his identity silent: “The silence by which Vergil is concealed suggests the restricted, and in a sense the negative, character of his authority, the fact that his poetry does not possess an inherent capacity to reveal truth” Winthrop Wetherbee, The Ancient Flame: Dante and the Poets. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 198. While this interpretation is interesting and possible, it tends to assess the value of Virgil’s poetry too negatively.

263 As many scholars, including Domenico Consoli, have noted, Dante’s Commedia is itself predicated on the idea that Dante can “trattare l’ombre come cosa salda,” which adds another interesting layer to Stazio’s apology. Domenico Consoli, Significato del Virgilio Dantesco (Florence: Le Monnier, 1967), 132. This theme will be explored further in the final chapter.
pilgrims, especially as to how Dante can travel through Purgatory while still alive. Dante may use Stazio’s uniquely disinterested goodwill to signal his completed purgation. Nonetheless, Virgil’s response to this greeting is strangely terse, though still couched in his characteristic gracious language:

“Nel beato concilio
   ti ponga in pace la verace corte
   che mi rilega ne l’eterno essilio.” (XXI: 16-18)

While Virgil has openly discussed his damnation in previous conversations, he rarely used such strong language, and only discussed the subject when it was relevant to the pilgrim’s instruction. When one compares Virgil’s various self-introductions (to Dante, to Beatrice, to souls in Hell, to Cato, and to Sordello) with this speech to Stazio, the contrast is striking. When Virgil first introduces himself to Dante, he mentions that he lived “nel tempo de li dèi falsi e bugiardi” (Inf. I: 72), but does not address the personal ramifications of this statement until he describes how he will lead Dante through the realms of the afterlife. In this instance, he says far more about “‘quello imperador che là sù regna’” (I: 124) than he does about himself, and his speech does not contain the melancholy that will characterize his later conversations on the subject. As the journey goes on, Virgil reveals more of the sorrow he feels in his damnation, but always in response to particular prompting. He speaks about the hopeless desire suffered by Limbo’s inhabitants as Dante meets them in Inferno IV: 34-42, and returns to the subject in Purgatorio III: 40-45 when discussing the human thirst for understanding. In these passages, Virgil acknowledges his own role in his damnation (the defect of lacking baptism and not loving God sufficiently), and specifically brings up these topics in order to contribute
to the pilgrim’s education. When Virgil explains his status to Cato, he groups himself with Cato’s wife Marcia in Limbo, and makes no complaint about the sorrow that state entails, or against the justice that placed him there (Purg. I: 76-82). While there is a greater degree of self-justification in his speeches to Sordello, his self-description resembles his earlier words to Dante, noting the historical impossibility of his salvation, while affirming that he was otherwise morally perfect (VII: 4-8, 25-36).

Dante’s presentation of Virgil is particularly ambiguous on the subject of whether the poet agrees that Virgil’s damnation is undeserved or not, or believes it is necessary in terms of divine justice. While Dante’s use of Stazio to illuminate certain aspects of Virgil’s character is explored in most scholarship on Stazio, the significance of Virgil’s self-presentation to Stazio has been mostly overlooked. In response to Stazio’s gracious hope that God will give the two pilgrims peace, Virgil replies by wishing that very peace for Stazio, while emphasizing that he is in “essilio,” cut off from peace (XXI: 18). Not only is this response unusual in terms of Virgil’s earlier self-presentations, it stands out from other instances in Purgatory where Virgil has employed a captatio benevolentiae involving goods that he will never achieve without drawing attention to his exclusion from these. It is possible that Dante has made Virgil react in this way to Stazio to suggest that Stazio’s identity as a fully purged soul makes Virgil self-aware and self-knowing to a degree that he

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264 For instance, Virgil could have modeled his reply to Stazio on his words to other shades in Purgatorio III: “O ben finiti, o già spiriti eletti, / ...per quella pace / ch’i’ credo che per voi tutti s’aspetti” (III: 73-75). Another similar example appears in XI: 37-39. In each case, Virgil wills for his audience a spiritual good he cannot attain, without acknowledging the vanity of such a hope for himself. Although the conversational function of these utterances differs from that of Purgatorio XXI, the difference in the later canto is striking enough to be worth interrogating.
has never experienced before. As the earlier section demonstrated, Dante gives a number of indications that Stazio, as a perfectly purged soul, may possess characteristics that set him apart from the still-journeying shades, particularly in his “resemblance” to Christ.

The knowledge of his own damnation has been weighing on Virgil more and more as he journeys, but it seems that it is the encounter with the purified Christian soul that finally makes him completely conscious of his status as an exile from God, cut off from the peace that Stazio wishes for him. Moreover, as Amilcare Iannucci has pointed out, while the mountainquake heralding Stazio’s appearance evokes the crucifixion and resurrection for Dante, it would remind Virgil of his own more limited experience of the same events: the Harrowing of Hell, which he speaks of in Inferno IV and XII. While Virgil lacks the Scriptural familiarity necessary to recognize all the signs by which Stazio is identified with Christ, he has experienced an event that would help him interpret the mountainquake, and this memory may make him more sensitive to the implications of Stazio’s good wishes.

265 The self-knowledge the pilgrim experiences in Beatrice’s presence is a related, though not identical, phenomenon.

266 There is a valid objection to this assertion, in that Virgil in Limbo did not seem to react thus to Beatrice, who is also a purified soul explicitly bearing the image of Christ. But in Virgil’s retelling of that encounter, he is full of the praise Beatrice apparently gave him, and only seems to pay attention to Beatrice in terms of her extraordinary beauty (Inf. II: 52-118). Moreover, it is Virgil’s journey through the previously unknown Purgatory that intensifies his self-knowledge; perhaps it is the experience of seeing punishments that not only are temporary, but also have a redeeming purpose and which work toward an end he will never attain that undoes him to this extent.

267 Iannucci, “Mountainquake,” 50. Iannucci explains: “In Limbo, Dante has changed the Harrowing’s earthquake’s meaning to bring into focus Virgil and the virtuous pagans’ tragic plight. In Limbo the Harrowing highlights not the release of the Hebrew Fathers but the incompleteness of Virgil and pagan civilization....The earthquake underscores Statius’ liberation from Purgatory, but it also serves to reinforce Virgil’s tragic plight as the exchange between Statius and Virgil indicates.”
Dante may have had in mind a passage in Statius’ own work that depicts what Virgil is experiencing, and that illuminates how appointing him to the task of guiding the pilgrim puts Virgil in a difficult position. Statius describes how the shade of Laius was summoned from the afterlife to deliver a message to his grandson on earth, and how another shade taunts him as he leaves:

“uade ait “o felix, quoscumque uocaris in usus,
seu louis imperio, seu maior adegit Erinys
ire diem contra, seu te furiata sacerdos
Thessalis arcano iubet emigrare sepulcro,
**heu dulces uisure polos solemque relictum
et uirides terras et puros fontibus amnes,**
**tristior has iterum tamen intrature tenebras.”** (Theb. II: 19-25, emphasis added)

Like Laius, Virgil can derive some pleasure from moving beyond his place in Limbo, but these experiences in Purgatory, among souls whose fate in Paradise he cannot share, will make the return to his “blind prison” all the more painful: “tristior has iterum tamen intrature tenebras” (Theb. II: 25). It is little wonder that Virgil speaks with sorrow when he meets another soul who is journeying on to a place of peace and knowledge. It may be that Virgil rejects Stazio’s embrace because his intensified self-awareness makes him feel unworthy to accept this tribute. In the following canto, in response to Stazio’s polite question about where in the afterlife the other auctores dwell, Virgil emphasizes the blindness inherent in Limbo, and how its inhabitants continually lament their distance from the Muses, representatives of transcendent beauty and truth:

“nel primo cinghio del carcere cieco;
spesse fiate ragionam del monte
che sempre ha le nutrice nostre seco.” (Purg. XXII: 103-105, emphasis added)
The longing of the souls in Limbo contrasts with the peace and knowledge Virgil knows Stazio will attain.

It is also important to consider what “abbracciar li piedi” signifies in light of other similar instances in the *Commedia*, as well as how it pertains to the historical Statius. Embracing the feet of another has very specific connotations in the *Commedia*, and Dante only depicts this practice in a few cases. In *Purgatorio* IX, the pilgrim and Virgil are on the verge of entering Purgatory and Virgil advises the pilgrim to beseech the angel guardian for permission to enter. Dante obeys by falling at the feet of the angel (“Divoto mi gittai a’ santi piedi”; IX: 109), who explains the gesture’s effectiveness. Dante also enacts a similar, but figurative, bow in the pilgrim’s encounter with Beatrice in *Purgatorio* XXXII:

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Così Beatrice; e io, che tutto ai piedi
d’i suoi comandamenti era divoto,
la mente e li occhi ov’ ella volle diedi. (XXXII: 106-108)
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Dante’s use of the metaphor shows that Dante intends bowing at someone’s feet to connote a specific and recognized meaning: the pilgrim’s gesture signifies a stance of humility and recognition of the authority and superiority of the one to whom he bows. Moreover, he bows while requesting a gift he hopes and expects to receive.

It seems that Stazio’s attempt to honor him makes Virgil uneasy, because, as Nicolae Iliescu explains, Virgil recognizes the great divide that separates an

268 In the only instance of such an embrace outside *Purgatorio*, Ugolino weaves into his manipulatively touching story an account of his son throwing himself at Ugolino’s feet, begging his father to help him when they are locked in the tower (*Inf.* XXXIII: 67-69). Ugolino includes this detail to provoke pity in his audience, but this embrace also reveals the power differential between the figures that characterizes all other such acts in the *Commedia*.

269 “Da Pier le tegno; e dissemi chi’ erri / anzi ad aprir ch’a tenerla serrata, / pur che la genti a’ piedi mi s’atterri” (*Purg.* IX: 127-29, emphasis added).
inhabitant of Limbo from someone who has undergone all the trials of Purgatory. Even if Virgil is correct that he is innocent of all the vices that are corrected on the mountain, he lacks the theological virtues that are a necessary part of this process of sanctification. As Virgil’s response to Stazio’s greeting demonstrates, Virgil is aware that any real claim of superiority belongs to Stazio, for not only does Stazio possess both theological and cardinal virtues, he will also receive the eternal peace denied to Virgil as an exile from God. Thus, he cannot accept Stazio’s gesture of honor, because Virgil’s earthly claims of superiority are hardly significant when compared to eternal reality.

What is more, the phrase “Già s’inchinava ad abbraciar li piedi / al mio dottor” (XXI: 130-31) recalls the ending of the Thebaid: “nec tu diuinam Aeneida tempta, / sed longe sequere et uestigia semper adora” (Theb. XII: 816-17). In Purgatorio XXI, Dante gives Stazio the opportunity literally to “adore the feet” of his idol, or at least, permits him to try to do so. While Virgil had heard of Stazio’s “adoration” from their fellow-poet Juvenal, it nonetheless probably surprises him to find Stazio in Purgatory, still professing his love for Virgil. It is not until the next canto that the full reason that Stazio loves and venerates Virgil so highly is


271 For instance, see Smarr, “Greeting.” Martinez has also pointed out that Virgil refusing the embrace resembles the actions of Pope Adrian V in Purg. XIX: “like the pilgrim’s respect for Hadrian’s rank, meaningless now that both he and the pilgrim are conservi to a higher power, Stazio’s gesture preserves a secular ranking that is meaningless now that he has perfected his purgation.” Martinez, “Canons,” 156.

272 Martinez has written about how “Statius’ envoi to the Thebaid was one of the most influential formulas of closure in the late Middle Ages.” “Canons,” 158.

273 However, in accordance with his own words in the Thebaid envoi, Stazio does not successfully “temptare”, that is, touch, Virgil.
revealed—Stazio credits his own salvation to Virgil’s works—but Dante is already building up to that final revelation here, especially when Stazio asserts that

“E per esser vivuto di là quando
visse Virgilio, assentirei un sole
più che non deggio al mio uscir di bando.” (Purg. XXI: 100-102)

It is absolutely shocking to hear such a view being expressed by an inhabitant of Purgatory, when almost all the other souls the pilgrim has met on the mountain have stressed their eagerness to finish their time of penitence and draw nearer to God. Virgil cannot yet know the entire reason for Stazio’s love for him, but perhaps he senses that this reverence is of a greater or altogether different character than Sordello’s. Stazio loves Virgil in great part for something Virgil “accomplished” without cognizance or intention: illuminating his way to salvation. Thus, when Stazio attempts his wholeheartedly appreciative embrace, Virgil must slow and stop him by reminding him that both are only shades. Virgil’s reaction is proven correct when Stazio admits his mistake. Stazio longs to embrace and honor Virgil not only for Virgil’s poetic mastery, like Sordello, but also for Virgil’s role in his salvation. Upon reflection, he realizes Virgil’s authorship was also an ombra of

274 Heilbronn explains Stazio’s action by characterizing it as an act of the passions, specifically of love, not of reason. Virgil reminds Stazio that his action is inappropriate according to rational principles. Heilbronn, “Sorrisi,” 70-71. While this interpretation may help explain why Stazio starts to act out his feelings, it is only a limited account of what is going on in this scene.

275 Smarr has pointed out how fitting a term “ombra” is for Virgil to use. Not only does the term have a Neoplatonic significance, “[ombra] is one of Virgil’s favorite words, one on which he ended his first and final eclogue and the entire Aeneid, thus surrounding his own poetry with the dark and melancholy shadows that surround him still in the Comedy.” Smarr, “Greeting,” 231. Thus, Virgil may be acknowledging that Stazio is not only overvaluing Virgil’s presence, but also the value of his poetry.
the true cause of his conversion, which is the divine inspiration that enabled Stazio’s extraordinary and salvific reading.276

It seems possible that the exchange between Virgil and Stazio also influences Stazio’s choice of metaphor in the following canto. While Dante probably drew the image of holding a light behind oneself from Augustine,277 the poet may also have intended this image as a literal application of Virgil being only an *ombra*. After all, when one holds a light source, one often casts a shadow as a consequence of blocking the light. If Virgil holds the light behind his back, he cannot see the light itself, but only the *ombra* he casts before himself. Stazio, on the other hand, could perceive that light as well as Virgil’s shadow. Through the metaphor, Stazio shows he recognizes that Virgil himself was not the light, and thus, not worthy of the reverence Stazio had tried to give him through the embrace.

276 This interpretation is not being offered to the exclusion of other scholarly explanations of this scene. Rather, it attempts to illuminate one of the multiple messages Dante attempts to communicate at this juncture. Martinez provides an excellent examination of the literary import of this scene: “The non-embrace of Stazio and Virgilio is thus not only a complex instance of the vestigial topos but itself an illustration of the moment of tradition, of the act of constructing the tangency between two texts; a tangency between texts that belies the contact interdicted at the narrative level by Virgilio in canto 21 of the *Purgatorio*, which itself alludes to the contact with the *Aeneid* forbidden in Statius’ final lines to his poem. The meeting of Stazio and Virgilio is the trace of a transfer of poetic inspiration, of *translatio ingenii*.” Martinez, “Canons,” 160. Stepnany has also offered a fascinating suggestion, arguing that the failed embrace is yet another Messianic allusion: “what seems to be re-enacted is the dramatic interchange that took place on Easter morning between Mary Magdalen and the newly resurrected Jesus. This is the moment usually depicted in Christian iconography as the *Noli Me Tangere*, after the words spoken by Jesus to the kneeling Mary Magdalen, ‘Noli me tangere, nondum ascendi ad Patrem meum’ (John 20:17).” Stepnany, “Conversion,” 143. Rachel Jacoff has suggested an additional reference, that of Cornelius kneeling before St. Peter, in Acts 10. As Stepnany points out, that intertext would be especially fitting, because Cornelius, like Stazio, is a pagan convert to Christianity. Stepnany, “Conversion,” 149, fn. 22.

277 Charles Singleton seems to be one of the first scholars to make this suggestion in his commentary to canto XXI. Martinez traces the image further, finding that it seems to originate with Enninus, but that Augustine probably encountered it in Cicero. Martinez, “Canons,” 162. Thus, it is noteworthy that, by the time Dante used it, the image had a rich heritage of representing the transition from classical culture to Christianity.
3.2.2 Stazio and Virgil

Dante suggests in the first lines of Stazio's autobiography that the reader ought to pay close attention to the interactions of Virgil and Stazio, even before he reveals Stazio's particular regard for Virgil. Both Virgil and Stazio locate themselves in history with very similar language, but the differences are key. Virgil is aware that he lived “nel tempo de li dëi falsi e bugiardi,” but recognizing a false religion does not require the same Christian understanding as Stazio's characterization of Titus as a vindicator of Christ (Inf. I: 70-72, Purg. XXI: 82-84). Moreover, while both almost immediately present themselves as poets, Virgil uses the title to talk about his own works, whereas Stazio’s use downplays the very significance of this title, in that although he was a famous poet at that point, he had not achieved the greater status of having faith (Inf. I: 73-75, Purg. XXI: 85-87). Dante shapes Stazio's autobiography to resemble not only the vita tradition, but also the autobiography he earlier gave to Virgil, so that the differences between these two autobiographies will be readily apparent. As Janet Levarie Smarr has explained, “the two poets present not only two historical moments but two views of history: as human and as providential.”278 The way the interactions between the poets develop is naturally consequent on how they perceive and present themselves.

Dante uses Stazio’s autobiography and Stazio’s cantos to express some of the highest praise Virgil receives in the Commedia, but additionally he uses these scenes to provide a concentrated set of examples of Virgil’s inadequacies. As Barolini

278 Smarr, “Greeting.” 227. Smarr also points out that while Dante presents Stazio through a number of Christ-referents, he introduces Virgil by having the pilgrim ask him a question that echoes Virgil’s own work, Aen. I: 328.
writes, “the meeting with Statius, the episode that ...furnish[es]—with respect to Vergil’s persona—simultaneous accolade and displacement, and—with respect to his text—simultaneous citation and revision.” While what follows will focus on these failings, it is important to note that these issues are merely the subtext accompanying the lavish praise and sincere respect both Dante and Stazio direct toward Virgil. Following upon Stazio’s attempt to embrace Virgil, in *Purgatorio* XXII Virgil tells Stazio that he has heard of Statius’ “affezion” for him (XXII: 15). Dante’s other usages of “affezion” include his own love for Beatrice (*Par.* IV: 121-23), his thirst for understanding (*Par.* XXIV: 7-9), his devotion to Mary (*Par.* XXXII: 148-50), and the affection between St. Peter and St. James (*Par.* XXV: 19-24). Dante uses “affezion” not only to convey brotherly love, but also to portray the highest and holiest forms of human relationship, so it is significant that Stazio directs this degree of affection to Virgil, and this may be an instance of Dante using Stazio to express his own feelings about Virgil. Moreover, as Giovanni Cecchetti has written, Virgil is exalted twice—once as the guide who leads to the ‘nome che più dura e che più onora’ [XXI:85] and again as he who points the way to supernatural truth, and thus to eternal salvation. This is the highest celebration that has ever been made of


280 As is noted elsewhere, the subject of how Dante regarded Virgil is a very contentious one in Dante scholarship. In recent decades, the balance seems to have shifted to the majority of critics assessing Dante’s Virgil negatively, but there remains variety among critics in the extent and characteristics of this negative assessment. Glenn A. Steinberg has recently produced a reasonably accurate assessment and bibliography on this issue in Glenn A. Steinberg, “Dante, Virgil, and Christianity: Or Statius, sin, and clueless pagans in *Inferno IV*,” *Forum Italicum* 47: 3 (2013): 476. However, he does err in aligning Iannucci against Kenelm Foster (*The Two Dantes and Other Studies* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1977)) who takes a largely positive view of Virgil. Iannucci explicitly disagrees with the negative view of Virgil characteristic of much American Dante scholarship, and asserts that he is closer to Foster’s views in “Mountainquake” 56-57, fn. 11.
Nonetheless, Dante also uses Stazio to expose Virgil’s limitations. Even in Hell, Virgil makes occasional mistakes, and he relies on advice and commonsense to guide Dante through Purgatory, where he lacks personal experience. However, once Stazio appears, Virgil defers to him more than usual, asking Stazio to explain both the mountainquake and the workings of the aerial bodies. Virgil has been able to use what he later refers to as “ingegno e arte” (Purg. XXVII: 130) to lead Dante through Purgatory, but when it comes to explaining metaphysical and spiritual realities, Virgil is at a loss. While both Virgil and Stazio possess the wisdom to be...
poeti, Dante suggests that Stazio can understand and convey deeper metaphysical truths by virtue of his Christian identity.

Stazio's attentiveness and perceptiveness is a significant aspect of Dante's portrayal of the Christian poet. When Stazio reveals his great love for Virgil, and Virgil wants Dante to remain silent about his identity, the pilgrim nonetheless gives the barest hint of a reaction (XXI: 105-109). Stazio observantly notes this subtle reaction, and questions the pilgrim about it (XXI: 110-14). While much of Stazio's perspicacity is likely attributable to his poetic identity, some may also derive from his Christianity, for Dante contrasts his perceptiveness with the mistakes Virgil makes in how he assesses Stazio—mistakes rooted in fundamental misunderstandings about the nature of Purgatory, and even of sin itself. In Purgatorio XXII, Virgil asks how Stazio could have fallen prey to avarice (XXII: 19-24). Stazio replies graciously, but points out that Virgil has made an erroneous assumption: even though Stazio appears on the terrace that seems primarily concerned with the vice of avarice, his own failing was that of prodigality (XXII: 25-37, 42, 49-54). None of the other purgatorial terraces purge both a sin and its opposite, so one could excuse Virgil's mistake, were it not for Stazio's reference to Hell's fourth circle (XXII: 37, 42), which contains both the avaricious and the profligate, who run around reproaching each other for their sins (Inf. VII: 25-30).

Thus, Virgil’s incorrect assumptions about Stazio’s vice stem from two separate

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284 However, Dante’s Virgil still has a deep understanding of the human condition, especially as relates to sin and free will, as he demonstrates in his teachings at the center of Purgatorio.

285 Barberi Squarotti discusses Stazio in relation to the avaricious and profligates found in Hell, in “Stazio,” 285-312.
failures of understanding. Virgil misunderstands the relationship between moral
perfection and authority, and the role of God’s grace in relation to both. Moreover,
he fails to recall his own experience of Hell, and in applying his knowledge of the
schema of sins to Purgatory.

Additionally, Dante may be implying that Virgil relies too much on
appearances in assuming that Stazio was not yet a Christian when he wrote the
*Thebaid* (*Purg.* XXII: 55-60). Stazio gently corrects him again, explaining that he did
convert partway through his writing of the *Thebaid* (XXII: 88-91). This mistake
seems more defensible than Virgil’s other errors, for Stazio admits to keeping his
Christianity secret, which means he left no overt sign of this in his work. However, it
is possible that Dante means to suggest that there are veiled indications of
Christianity within Statius’ work, ones that Dante was able to see and that prompted
him to “reveal” Stazio's Christianity to the rest of the world, since other readers
lacked sufficient powers of perception.\(^\text{286}\)

This possibility is particularly suggestive because Dante situates the
conversation about the time of Stazio’s conversion within Stazio’s general account of
his moral and spiritual conversions, both of which hinge upon Stazio perceiving
truths in Virgil’s work that Virgil had not intended to communicate. Stazio not only
corrects Virgil’s assumption about his vices, but also explains that reading Virgil’s
work caused him to swear off prodigality (XXII: 37-42). As Stazio translates Virgil’s
words: “Quid non mortalia pectora cogis, / auri sacra fames?” into Italian, he adapts

\(^{286}\) The previous chapter provided an account of the various attempts made by critics since
the Middle Ages and Renaissance to read Statius’ work for signs of a Christian understanding.
them to signify the exact opposite of Virgil’s intention. Yet, in Dante’s rendering, Stazio’s reading of the *Aeneid* is “correct,” or at least, acceptable, because it inspired Stazio to turn away from sin.  

Dante audaciously suggests that Stazio is a better reader than Virgil of the poetry that Virgil had written. Although Virgil was chronologically disadvantaged with regard to the coming of Christ, Dante seems to argue that his timing does not excuse his inability to see signs of Christ within his own work. Dante creates a surprising hierarchy in which Stazio is placed above Virgil, and where the master’s failings concern his understanding of reality, because Dante’s hierarchy is entirely rooted in the relationship of each poet to God and to divine truth. What Virgil presents is limited to what is intelligible by unaided human reason. As Picone explains:

Virgilio non penetra quindi dentro i fatti e le persone, ma rimane bloccato all’esterno di essi. Si profila così un modulo oppositivo che vedremo sviluppato nel resto del canto: mentre Virgilio interpreta il mondo come apparenza e fenomeno, Stazio va oltre le apparenze, scoprendo le essenze immutabili. Detto in termini retorici: Virgilio si ferma al significato *litteralis* della storia, Stazio al contrario arriva fino al suo significato allegorico.

While Virgil can teach about the “forma sustanzial” of the human and its “vertute” and “effetti,” he professes ignorance of the source of man’s knowledge of first 

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287 The final chapter will examine further the subject of Stazio’s “mistranslations” in relation to Dante’s view of poetry. A large number of critics has discussed this issue, including Paolo Baldan, “Stazio e le possibili ‘vere ragion che son nascose’ della sua conversione,” *Lettere italiane* 38 (1986): 149-65; and Ronald L. Martinez, “La sacra fame dell’oro (*Purgatorio* 22, 41) tra Virgilio e Stazio: dal testo all’interpretazione,” *Lettura Classensi* 18 (1989): 177-193. L. A. Mackey points out that if Dante were not actively making a point about interpretation, there are multiple options in the *Aeneid* and *Georgics* for passages that directly critique prodigality that he could have selected. L. A. Mackay, “Statius in Purgatory,” *Classica et Mediaevalia* 67 (1965): 303.

principles (XVIII: 49-57). Stazio, as with Dante’s other Christian guides, is necessary for explaining matters only ascertainable through knowledge of Christian truth. Stazio’s *Purgatorio* XXV speech builds on Virgil’s earlier teachings, including the important explanation that “Io motor primo / ...spira / spirito novo” (XXV: 70-72).

Dante shows that the sensitivity to spiritual matters Stazio displayed in his conversion carries over into his perceptive ability in this spiritual realm, where Virgil’s abilities are ultimately inadequate, despite his poetic mastery on earth.

### 3.3 Stazio and Dante: Stazio as Christian Poet

Dante also works to subvert the assumed poetic hierarchy by how he describes the interactions of Virgil and Stazio with each other, and with the pilgrim. Even as Virgil rejects Stazio’s attempt to embrace him, he calls him “Frate,” which is the only instance in the *Commedia* of Virgil using that Christian mode of address (XXI: 131). As the three journey on together, Dante initially groups the two poets together as the pilgrim’s superiors, while the pilgrim follows behind them as their student (XXII: 127-29, XXIII: 7-9). As they ascend, however, Dante subtly changes his language so as to align the pilgrim with the other poets.289 Before long, the purgatorial inhabitants group them together without distinction, as when the angel asks them: “Che andate pensando si **voi sol tre**?” (XXIV: 133, emphasis added).290

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289 By *Purgatorio* XXIV, Dante explains: “[i]o rimasi in via con esso i due / che fuor del mondo si gran marescalchi” (XXIV: 98-99) and groups “Virgilio e Stazio e io” together (XXIV: 119).
By *Purgatorio* XXVII, Dante presents himself first, explicitly joining the ranks of the *saggi*:

> E di pochi scaglion *levammo i saggi*,
> che 'l sol corcar, per l'ombra che si spense,
> sentimmo dietro e io e li miei saggi. (XXVII: 67-69, emphases added)

Because it is so clear that Dante uses Stazio as a foil for Virgil, scholars have often overlooked the fact that Stazio also serves as a foil for Dante, as both pilgrim and poet, but the close of *Purgatorio* demonstrates that Stazio has been set apart so that readers will compare Stazio to Dante himself. Both figures are poet-*auctores*, inspired by Virgil, midlife “converts” to Christianity, formerly sinful, and undergoing the process of sanctification. No other character in the *Commedia* shares this set of characteristics with the pilgrim, and these qualities are among the most important in the poet’s self-presentation, as well as for his development of the concepts of Christian identity and Christian poetics. But as he often does, Dante creates this resemblance in order to show the point at which it fails; Dante shows how he is superior to Stazio, who is ultimately only a shadow of the poet of the *Commedia*. As was noted in Chapter 2, Stazio’s presence is necessary to help illustrate a stage in the process of Dante’s self-justification: showing that it is possible to be both formerly vice-ridden and an *auctor* if judged according to Christian criteria, because Christianity recognizes redemption. Moreover, since the pilgrim and Stazio pass through the final stages of Purgatory and Earthly Paradise together, Dante suggests

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290 In *Purgatorio* XXV, Dante no longer mentions the order of precedence: “così intrammo noi per la callaia, / uno innanzi altro prendendo la scala / che per artezza i salitor dispaia” (XXV: 7-9).
that the pilgrim too has been fully purged of his vices, while sanctification provides Dante with the auctoritas to write the Commedia.291

In Stazio’s interactions with Virgil and the pilgrim, Dante demonstrates the qualities of perception that are necessary to be a poet, and, more importantly, that Dante himself also possesses these abilities to an even greater degree.292 As Martinez writes, “what we witness in canto 21 is Dante’s construction of the grounds for his own inclusion in the canon, the invention of the premises of his own authority and dignity as a poet—in short, his own claim to be a writer who follows the dictations of Love, which is one of the names of the Spirit.”293 Both Stazio and Dante venerate Virgil as a poet, but more than that, they also both read his works attentively and creatively. Only Stazio and the pilgrim are given the privilege of directly translating and paraphrasing Virgil’s writings in the Commedia—Stazio in Purgatorio XXII: 40-41 and 70-72, and the pilgrim in Purgatorio XXX: 46-48—and both transform and recontextualize their text.294 Not only does Stazio read well, but,

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291 Although Dante and Stazio do not seem to share the same vices, Smarr has suggested one potential commonality: “The last line in canto XXI, in which Statius confesses to ‘treating the shades as one treats solid things’ bears a striking resemblance to Dante’s own sin as defined by Beatrice in Canto XXX and as confessed by Dante in canto XXXI. Dante’s problem has been precisely that he treated as solid, valuable, and enduring things that are only deceitful images or shadows of the true Good.” Smarr, “Greeting,” 231. Critics have tended to read “treating the shades as solid things” in application to Dante’s own work in a positive light, as a figure of the vividness of the poetry of the Commedia, and the skill with which he brings his personaggi to life. However, it is possible for this figure to apply to Dante’s sins in a negative way simultaneously.

292 Consider too Dante’s description of himself as poet to Bonagiunta: “I’ mi son un che, quando / Amor mi spira, noto, e a quel modo / ch’è ditta dentro vo significando” (XXIV: 52-54)


294 Hawkins writes about Dante’s “translation” of Virgil in this canto in “Dido,” 127-30.
like Dante, he is also portrayed as being extremely attentive to the world around him:

“e la parola tua sopra toccata
si consonava a’ nuovi predicanti;
ond’io a visitarli presi usata.” (XXII: 79-81)

Stazio is not saved by reading Virgil, but through reading the world and Virgil against one another; as Martinez has explained, “it is a key feature of Dante’s account of Stazio that the adherence to Virgil’s text is matched almost word for word by parallels drawn from Scripture, as Stazio suggests by claiming that the meaning of the Fourth Eclogue “agreed with the new preachers.”

Stazio even reads the events of his own life as a text to be interpreted under a Christian lens, such as his in bono characterization of the Emperor Titus (XXI: 82-84). Such a reading resembles Dante’s own ability to sift and examine texts and experiences for the truths they might contain. Moreover, the Commedia’s author also read Virgil for signs of a Christian understanding, as can be seen in his decision to put Virgil’s Ripheus in Paradise, as well as the Messianic reading of the Fourth Eclogue that Stazio repeats.

However, Dante establishes these similarities in order to give prominence to the ways Dante—pilgrim and poet—stands on his own. To return to the material that opens this chapter, the fact that the majority of the Commedia conversion

295 Martinez, “Canons,” 161. He goes on to say: “In this sense, Stazio’s language for his inspiration by Virgil mediates classic and Christian use—the Muses and the Paraclete.”

296 Franke suggests that this ability results from Statius living after the Incarnation: “Dante similarly emphasizes how Statius’ recognition of the Christian truth latent in Virgil’s text stems from his own personal experience in a world in which Christ is made present, is literally disseminated, in Christian worship and preaching,” Franke, “Tradition,” 9.
narratives depict a near-death or post-death conversion draws more attention to the three midlife converts Dante does depict: Guido da Montefeltro, Stazio, and the pilgrim himself. Guido’s “conversion,” though in middle life, was ultimately proven to be false, for despite the fact that he changed certain of his behaviors, he failed to understand what truly Christian behavior entailed. While Stazio’s conversion was true and sufficient for salvation, Dante shows him to be guilty of certain failures pertaining to Christian identity and Christian writing. In Stazio’s conversion account, he acknowledges that while he grew in Christian charity and compassion, in both feeling and action, he failed in one major way, in proclaiming his newfound faith to others (XXII: 83-93). Dante directs many of his strongest reproaches in the *Commedia* toward those who fail to act; for instance, he considers the indecisive angels in *Inferno* III not even worthy to be spoken of, and he places souls of delayed response, and those who broke their vows in the lowest spaces within Purgatory and Paradise. Moreover, as the pilgrim’s dream of Leah and Rachel demonstrates, Dante is extremely concerned with the union between the contemplative life and the active life, a union that is possible, as well as necessary, in the field of writing, where one contemplates, and then works to articulate and share those thoughts (XXVII: 97-108). Thus, for Dante, Stazio falls short not merely because he was not open about his new faith to his contemporaries, but in particular because he did not use his gifts of poetry and understanding to write Christian poetry.\(^{297}\) Much of Dante’s

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\(^{297}\) This failure may be considered ironic, in light of what Wetherbee identifies as one of the dominant themes of Statius’ work: “Statius is capable also of affirming more active forms of virtue, and one of the striking features of the *Thebaid* is the recurring suggestion that virtuous action can attain a spiritual reward.” Wetherbee, *Ancient Flame*, 173.
construction of Stazio is dedicated to demonstrating that the need for a Christian auctor has yet to be fulfilled in world history; the whole of the Commedia is Dante’s affirmation that he is that Christian auctor.298

As many scholars have noted, when Virgil departs, Dante uses the same set of rhyme words that Stazio had used when discussing Virgil’s influence.299 Since both passages address the speaker’s relationship to Virgil, Dante means for his readers to read these passages against one another. In his passage, Stazio describes the Aeneid as his inspiring fire, and as his mother and nurse.300 The medieval reader would likely recall the conclusion to the Thebaid, where Statius writes of himself as a humble follower of Virgil. Even in the close of his own epic, Statius characterizes his achievement in relation to his poetic forebear, both blatantly—“nec tu diuinam Aeneida tempta, / sed longe sequere et uestigia semper adora”—and more subtly—“o mihi bissenos multum uigilata per annos / Thebai” (Theb. XII: 816-17, 811-12).301

298 As Picone writes, “La salvazione di Stazio diventa in tale prospettiva un modo per fissare la posizione di questo auctor nella gerarchia dei valori poetici; un modo soprattutto per affermare la superiorità della letteratura di ispirazione cristiana su quella di ispirazione pagana.” Picone, “XXI I,” 345.

299 “volsimi a la sinistra col respitto / col quale il fantolin corre a la mamma / quando ha paura o quando elli è afflitto, / per dicere a Virgilio: ’Men che dramma / di sangue m’è rimaso che non tremi; / conosco i segni de l’antica fiamma’” (XXX: 43-48) and “’Al mio ardor furo se me le faville, / che mi scaldar, de la divina fiamma / onde sono allumati più di mille; / de l’Eneida dico, la qual mamma / fummi, e fummi nutrice, poetando: / sanz’ essa non fermai peso di dramma’” (XXI: 94-99). Martinez provides a very insightful account of the relationship between these two passages in “Canons,” 158-164. It is also worth noting that the other set of rhymes in Statius’ passage: “Achille/ faville/ mille” is an echo of Inferno XXVI: 61-66.

300 Olga Grlic has also pointed out that Augustine used similar language, the metaphor of fire, in order to depict the love of philosophy he found on reading Cicero. Olga Grlic, “Dante, Statius and Augustine: Intertextuality in Conversionary Narrative,” Medievalia et Humanistica 21 (1995): 79.

301 This quotation appears numerous times in this work not only because it has been pertinent to Dante’s depiction of Stazio and Virgil, but also because it is one of the passages of Statius
It seems that Statius can only praise himself as a poet with reservations, because he is constantly aware of the greater praises due to his predecessor.

When Dante-poet repeats Stazio’s rhymes in *Purgatorio* XXX, he is, in a sense, quoting Stazio, but Dante deploys this “quotation” in a very different context. In contrast to Stazio’s straightforward praise of Virgil, Dante-poet uses the words to honor Virgil as the pilgrim also bids him farewell. Dante has already shown how Stazio appropriated and creatively interpreted the works of Virgil; in *Purgatorio* XXX: 43-48 he simultaneously adapts Stazio’s rhymes and Virgil’s own poetry in a context meant to illuminate both Stazio’s praise of Virgil and the limitations of Virgil’s poetry. Like Stazio, Dante refers to Virgil as his “mamma,” but he adapts “fiamma” to refer to his great love for Beatrice, rather than to the inspiring fire of Virgil as Stazio had done. Dante does truly love Virgil, and the pilgrim sorrows greatly at Virgil’s departure (*Purg.** **XXX: 49-54), but the poet ensures that the pilgrim’s feelings are immediately undercut by Beatrice’s strong reproaches (XXX: 55-57). Dante never denies his love for Virgil, but he does show that this affection should be subordinated to more important loves, such as his loves for God and for Beatrice. As Peter S. Hawkins has argued, Dante is consciously demonstrating that, unlike Stazio, he must not follow Virgil's *vestigia*. *Purgatorio* XXX shows unmistakably that Virgil's adored footprints are not the ones to follow. To venerate them by following in their path would be, in fact, to lose the “vera via” and circle back to hell. Instead, the vestiges to keep track of are the ones Beatrice left behind her in Limbo, summoning Virgil out of the kingdom of death and starting the pilgrim on a journey of desire that leads

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most quoted in *accessus*, and in the commentaries to both Statius and to Dante. Dante could certainly expect his educated readers to pick up on the various places he refers to this text in the *Commedia*. 152
him not only beyond the author of the *Aeneid* but also beyond Beatrice herself to God.\(^{302}\)

Dante's unique calling means that he must reject the subservience to Virgil that Statius' poetry seems to represent, and Stazio's presence—along with reminiscences of Statius' poetry—helps highlight Dante's choice.

It is essential for Dante—as pilgrim and as poet—to leave Virgil behind at the end of *Purgatorio*. Whereas Stazio defined his work in terms of Virgil's example up to the very end of his writing his epic, Dante declares that Virgil can no longer guide him with more than a third of his journey remaining (though Dante continues to draw on the work of all the classical poets in *Paradiso*).\(^{303}\) It is also important to note that when Dante overtly says farewell to Virgil, and mourns his loss, his words may also acknowledge Statius' poetry. Scholars have long recognized in Dante's “…Virgilio…/…Virgilio…/ Virgilio…” (*Purg.* XXX: 49-51) an echo of Virgil's own: “…Eurydicen…/…Eurydicen…/ Eurydicen” (*Georg.* IV: 525-27). But it has been only relatively recently acknowledged that Dante is not the first to imitate this passage—Statius also chose to do so at the close of the *Thebaid*, shortly before he more overtly ties his work to that of Virgil.\(^{304}\) Statius' “Arcada…/ Arcada…/ Arcada” conveys the


\(^{304}\) Martinez has identified references to all three of Virgil's works in the close of the *Thebaid*. “That triple repetition [of 'Arcada'], which just precedes Statius' final envoy to his poem, alerts the reader to the symphonic Virgilian closure of the *Thebaid* with citation from the *Aeneid*, the *Georgics*, and the Fourth *Eclogue*—Virgil's three major works. Statius weaves a Virgilian selvedge to keep the hem of his poem from unraveling, but also, from the perspective of my argument, to enact in his text
lamentation over the death of the youth Parthenopaeus expressed by his mother and both armies (Theb. XII: 805-807). Thus, as Rachel Jacoff argues: “Dante’s farewell to Virgil may be retrospectively seen as a farewell to Statius, or at least to the Thebaid.” However, if Dante does mean to gesture to Statius’ work in addition to Virgil’s with this anaphora, it should equally be noted that the form of Dante’s adaptation more closely follows Virgil’s lines. While Statius opts for a simpler metrical form, repeating “Arcada” at the beginning of each line, both Dante and Virgil give the name a post-positive position in the first two lines, withholding the name from the initial position until the closing line for emphasis. If Dante selected the repetition to pay honor to both guides, he shows how Virgil is his primary inspiration both overtly—in that these lines openly mourn Virgil—and in how Dante responds to both poets’ work.

To emphasize his independence and superiority further, Dante subtly plays on Statius’ work several cantos later, in the opening to Paradiso, as some commentators have noted.306 Dante draws on the classical commonplace of the

that tangency with Virgil’s steps which he restrains his personified poem from performing.” Martinez, “Canons,” 167.

305 Rachel Jacoff, “Intertextualities in Arcadia: Purgatorio 30: 49-51,” in The Poetry of Allusion: Virgil and Ovid in Dante’s Commedia, ed. Rachel Jacoff and Jeffrey Schnapp (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 144. Jacoff goes on to claim: “The Thebaid virtually disappears as a major intertextual presence in the Commedia at just about this juncture...the Aeneid remains a powerful presence in the Paradiso, while both Statius and his poem, technically ‘saved’ in Dante’s fiction, remain external to its final cantica.” The following chapter will demonstrate how Jacoff overstates this case to some degree, but it is true that there are far fewer overt signs of Statius’ influence in Paradiso than of Virgil’s influence, and much fewer instances than in the other two canticles. Both Wetherbee and Martinez discuss Dante’s use of the Aeneid and Thebaid, as well as Statius’ decision openly to emulate Virgil at the end of the Thebaid. Wetherbee, Ancient Flame, 220; Martinez, “Canons,” 267. The following chapter examines other instances where Dante seems to be drawing on both poets together.

306 Enrico Proto and Charles Singleton have identified the Thebaid’s close among the sources Dante synthesizes in Paradiso II. Enrico Proto, “Dante e i poeti latini,” Atene e Roma 13 (1910): 83-88;
imagery of ships and sailing to describe both his pilgrimage and his process of writing poetry. In his epic, Statius shows a similar affinity for sailing imagery, and deploys an instance of this trope immediately before the close of his poem, explaining that even with Apollo’s inspiration he could write no more, and that his ship deserves its rest: “ux novus ista furor ueniensque impless set Apollo, / et mea iam longo meruit ratis aequore portum” (Theb. XII: 809-10). As seen above, a few lines later, Statius declares that his Thebaid should merely follow and venerate Virgil (XII: 816-17). Dante’s proem to Paradiso repeats a number of the same elements—the use of sailing as a metaphor for writing, the inspiration of Apollo, and a meditation on the prospect of continuing the poetic journey—but comes to the opposite conclusions as Statius (and the rest of the classical tradition).

While Statius uses the sailing image to close his poem, and other classical poets invoke it to reassure the reader that they will soon return to shore (e.g. Georg. II: 41, Carm. IV: 15, 1), Dante asserts the opposite: timid readers should turn back on their own at

Charles S. Singleton, The Divine Comedy with a Commentary, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970-75), Paradiso II: 3; Wetherbee also recognizes another Thebaid passage, the account Hypsipyle gives of the Argonauts, as particularly influential on this passage. Wetherbee, Ancient Flame, 237. Of course, the opening to Paradiso draws on a number of other poetic texts in addition to the Statian passages.

307 For instance, Virgil urges the pilgrim: “qui è buono con l’ali e coi remi, / quantunque può, ciascun pinger sua barca” (Purg. XII: 5-6), and Dante opens Purgatorio by writing “Per correr miglior acque alza le vele / o mai la navicella del mio ingegno” (Purg. I: 1-2).

308 While sailing imagery is a classical commonplace, present in the minor works of Virgil and in Horace, both Dante and Statius draw on such imagery more frequently than their epic forebears.

309 “O voi che siete in piccioletta barca, / desiderosi d’ascoltar, seguiti / dietro al mio legno che cantando varca, / tornate a riveder li vostri liti: / non vi mettete in pelago, ché forse, / perdendo me, rimarreste smarriti. / L’acqua ch’io prendo già mai non si corse; / Minerva spira, e conducem ci Appollò, / e nove Muse mi dimostran l’Orse. / Voialtri pochi che drizzaste il collo / per tempo al pan de li angeli, del quale / vivesi qui ma non sen vien satollo, / metter potete ben per l’alto sale / vostro navigio, servindo mio solco / dinanzi a l’acqua che ritorna equale” (Par. II: 1-15).
this point, for the rest of the journey will be difficult. Unlike Stazio, who though he “drizzò / poscia dietro al pescator le vele” neither attempted to surpass Virgil nor took up the challenge of writing Christian poetry, Dante requests Apollo’s inspiration and beats a new path with his poetry (Purg. XXII: 62-63, Par. I: 13-15).

He is not content merely to follow any other poet—and he has left behind Virgil in Purgatory—but will strive to surpass all his models, and will take on followers himself, if they can keep up.

Nonetheless, though Dante may have exhausted Statius’ usefulness as a poet, he takes pains to remind the reader that Stazio remains by his side until the end of Purgatorio: “la bella donna mossessi, e a Stazio / donnescamente disse: ‘Vien con lui’” (XXXIII: 134-35). Even when the pilgrim’s attention is almost entirely focused on Beatrice, the poet draws attention to Stazio’s presence, writing:

La bella donna che mi trasse al varco  
e Stazio e io seguitavam la rota  
che fé l’orbita sua con minore arco (XXXII: 28-30)

and

“Modicum, et non videbitis me;  
et iterum, sorelle mie dilette,  
modicum et vos videbitis me.”  
Poi le si mise innanzi tutte e sette,  
e dopo sé, solo accennando, mosse  
me e la donna e ’l savio che ristette. (XXXIII: 10-15)

It is worth noting that Stazio is not referred to as a “poeta” in any of these passages; after Purgatorio XXVIII: 146, where he and Virgil are “poeti,” Dante uses other words to refer to Stazio. While Stazio’s identity as a poet is a necessary and important part of his characterization, it is his identity as Christian Everyman that
makes his presence necessary up to the end of Purgatorio, so that Dante can prove the legitimacy and completion of his own purgation process.\textsuperscript{310}

Christian identity is one of Dante's major themes in the Commedia, but Stazio's place within Dante's discourse on this theme has not always been adequately appreciated. The complexity of Dante's Stazio may not be readily apparent, but analysis demonstrates the great care that Dante took in constructing this personaggio, and how Stazio's creation serves many of Dante's purposes in the poem. Dante uses Stazio simultaneously as a symbol—the Christian Everyman and an image of the resurrected Christ—and as a real, dynamic person, who can shed further light on how Dante depicts both Virgil and the pilgrim. Dante's representation shows how Stazio possesses certain virtues of vision and action because he is a Christian and a poet. However, he also uses his treatment to expose Stazio's faults, and to make it clear that he himself is active in ways in which Stazio failed. Stazio's arc in the Commedia is Dante's own journey in miniature, but also, crucially, in an imperfect form, so that Dante can ultimately stand alone as the Christian poet \textit{par excellence}.

\textsuperscript{310} It is also possible that Dante ceases to describe Stazio as a "poeta" in order to indicate Stazio's literary limitations.
CHAPTER 4

STATIUS’ WORKS IN THE COMMEDIA

While a great deal of critical work has been done on how Dante incorporates the works of Virgil and Ovid into the Commedia, work on Dante’s use of the other classical poets, including Statius, Lucan, and Horace, has been far more limited. This chapter will present an account of existing scholarship on Statius’ works and the Commedia, and use this work to create an overview of how Dante uses Statius’ epics over the course of his poem.311

4.1 Existing Criticism on Dante and Statius’ Works

Commentaries on the Commedia, the type of criticism that forms the bulk of work on the subject of Dante and Statius’ works, tend to be less critically incisive, or at least, more apt to assert simply than to prove their assertions. Nonetheless, gathering together the references commentators have agreed upon as possible or

311 While this treatment will also attempt to acknowledge Dante’s use and adaptation of the other classical authors when paired with Statius, thoroughness on that score would be impossible in a project of this scope. Thus, any assessment given as to how Dante uses Statius over the course of his work is never meant to suggest that such treatment is unique to Statius, unless explicitly stated. Moreover, while classical works will be the main point of comparison for Dante’s treatment of Statius’ works, it is not intended to minimize how Dante also drew from many other sources including mythographies, commentaries, and compilations on subjects covered by the classical texts.
likely produces a reasonably accurate overview of many of the major ways Dante drew upon Statius’ work, and how this use varies over the course of the text. Moreover, a number of individual commentators have offered unique and thought-provoking suggestions for parallels between Dante’s work and Statius’ poems; investigating these individual assertions further could be very profitable work for the future. The commentaries this chapter focuses on are drawn from those written in the century and a half after the composition of the *Commedia*, in addition to those from the last fifty or so years, and all are taken from the corpus of commentaries collected by the Dartmouth Dante Project. The focus on these works allows readers both to come closer to reading Dante as his contemporaries would have read his poem, and also to benefit from the more rigorous scholarship of the last few decades.

While commentaries are often the best source for identifying and illuminating Dante’s briefer references to Statius’ works, when Dante gives a more extended treatment of a character or figure from Statius, most of the time the best resources are the various *Lecturae Dantis*, or other similar long-form treatments of individual cantos. Thus, for instance, when investigating how Dante’s portrayal of Capaneus or Achilles corresponds to Statius’ treatment of these figures, one of the

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best resources is the Lecturae Dantis on Inferno XIV, or on Inferno V and Purgatorio IX. Similarly, for the major figures, the entries in the Enciclopedia Dantesca also tend to be helpful for establishing a foundation and providing a bibliography. There are also a few cases where a scholar has found that the critical tradition has tended to diminish Statius as a source in particular cantos, such as Suzanne Hagedorn on the figure of Ulysses. But on the whole, there are far fewer articles about Dante’s treatment of Statius as a source than exist for Virgil and Ovid, even when one accounts for the disparity in terms of the frequency of references between Statius and the other two poets.

Statius’ works have also received attention in recent years primarily from critics who strive to show that in certain instances, Dante’s program of usage from Statius (and sometimes in conjunction with his use of Ovid and/or Lucan) is calculated for the purpose of challenging the supreme authority of Virgil. For instance, Robert Hollander, a proponent of the “negative” view of Dante’s Virgil, has authored lengthy treatments of the soothsayers of Inferno XX, and particularly Manto, alongside Purgatorio XXII, where Manto is listed among the shades in Limbo rather than in the fourth bolgia of the eighth circle. According to his argument, Dante has structured his treatment of Manto so that Virgil is forced to contradict his own poem on the subject of Mantua, and that Dante calls attention to this episode

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also by having Virgil allege later that Manto resides in Limbo instead. Statius is pertinent to this discussion because the *Thebaid* depicts in detail three of the major figures of prophecy Dante describes in *Inferno* XX, including Manto, and Dante draws from Statius’ accounts of these characters. Moreover, it is to Stazio that Virgil attests that Manto is in Limbo, in the context of explaining to him which of Stazio’s characters can be found in the first circle. More recently, George F. Butler has examined Dante’s portrayal of the giants in *Inferno* XXXI as a demonstration of another case where Virgil is forced to contradict his own texts in favor of the accounts of Statius and Lucan. On the other hand, Statius’ texts have also been invoked so as to assert the opposite, namely, that Dante is intentionally hewing to his Virgilian model. For instance, David Quint has argued that in *Inferno* IX, Dante sets up two epic models that he can follow: returning to earth from the underworld, as in Lucan and Statius, or delving deeper into the afterlife to complete his journey, as in Virgil. Dante chooses the way of Aeneas, and in a manner that makes it clear that he is rejecting the way of the other poets. In either case, it would be not be exaggerated to say that critics tend to pay the most attention to Statius’s works when they can use him as support for their own theories about Dante’s view of Virgil.

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315 Thus, both critics offer a particularly strong, and rarer, form of the argument against Virgil, arguing not merely that as a figure he is ultimately an inadequate guide for Dante, but also that Dante means to prove that Virgil’s actual poetry was flawed. George F. Butler, “Statius, Lucan and Dante’s Giants: Virgil’s Loss of Authority in Inferno 31,” *Quaderni d’italianistica* 24.2 (2003): 5-21, and George F. Butler, “Statius and Dante’s Giants: the *Thebaid* and the *Commedia,*” *Forum Italicum* 39.1 (2005): 5-17.

Much of the rest of the work covering the subject of Dante’s engagement with Statius’ works, while excellent in one way, is lacking in another. Several critics have authored convincing treatments of what Dante might have been drawn to in Statius’ works, especially C. S. Lewis, A. Teresa Hankey, and Winthrop Wetherbee.\textsuperscript{317} However, these same critics have treated the subject of how Dante actually draws on and adapts Statius’ texts in the \emph{Commedia} far more minimally, although they have provided a few original and worthwhile insights. Like many critics, they have been more preoccupied with Dante’s depiction of the \textit{personaggio} Stazio, and mostly focus on how Statius’ works relate to this portrayal. It is notable how Wetherbee, in \textit{The Ancient Flame}, does examine Dante’s engagement with the works of Virgil, Ovid, and Lucan in the respective chapters devoted to those poets, but his chapter on Statius mostly contains his (very plausible) conjectures on Dante’s reading of Statius, and analysis of Stazio as a \textit{personaggio}, rather than an examination of how Dante uses Statius’ poetry.\textsuperscript{318} Similarly, in the collection \textit{Dante e “la bella scola,”} edited by Amilcare Iannucci, most of the essays serve to illuminate what medieval readers knew about each of Dante’s classical literary influences, and also engage with Dante’s use of those authors.\textsuperscript{319} Conversely, the essay on Statius focuses, like the majority of the critical work on Statius, on the subject of Statius’ potential

\textsuperscript{317} These works were assessed in the second chapter. C. S. Lewis, “Dante’s Statius,” \textit{Medium Aevum} 25 (1957): 133-39; A. Teresa Hankey, “Dante and Statius,” in \textit{Dante and his Literary Precursors} (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), 37-50; Winthrop Wetherbee, \textit{The Ancient Flame: Dante and the Poets} (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008).

\textsuperscript{318} This assessment is not meant as a criticism of Wetherbee, whose work is excellent, but merely as a gesture towards the work left to be done. Wetherbee is one of the few critics to have looked at the use of Statius in \textit{Purgatorio}, which is an important and worthwhile subject.

Christianity in the medieval tradition, and engages hardly at all with Statius’ works. While much of this scholarship is worthwhile in itself, and admirably done, it does mean that there is still a lot of room for more detailed engagement with Dante’s use of Statius’ texts.

Finally, the critic who has best combined these approaches is Ronald L. Martinez, beginning with his doctoral dissertation “Dante, Statius, and the Earthly City,” insights from which he has developed in various articles touching on Statius in Dante, and also in the commentary jointly authored with Robert Durling. In his dissertation, Martinez explores aspects of Statius’ works that would have attracted Dante, and also shows how Dante incorporated some of these ideas and language into the *Commedia*. However, his research was focused primarily on the *Inferno*, with the exception of some notes about the *personaggio* Stazio, and his later work on Statius has also focused on the *personaggio*. *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* have yet to receive the same depth of analysis on the subject of Dante’s engagement with Statius’ texts, despite the fact that at least *Purgatorio* still contains signs of Statius’ influence.

Therefore, the methodology used here for determining references to Statius relies, first of all, on Dante’s early commentators, additionally on instances where a high number of modern commentators or scholars has attested a relationship between the poets, and finally on cases where a philological link between a Dante


passage and a Statius passage can be established. Despite the fact that there is much still to be done on the subject of Statius’s works and Dante, it is possible to draw together all these resources to form a picture of how Dante generally incorporates pieces of Statius’ corpus into the Commedia. The following treatment will not be exhaustive, but it will explore the basic trends of Dante’s uses, how this use changes over the course of the Commedia, and offer some considerations about what these usages suggest for Dante’s view of Statius as a poet.

4.2 Statius in the Inferno

4.2.1 Statius and the Infernal Setting

One major way Dante seems to have drawn on the texts of Statius may be less evident to modern readers than it was to his medieval contemporaries. Medieval commentators are especially quick to find parallels between Statius’ work and the way Dante establishes the setting of Inferno. In most cases, Statian scenes are evoked alongside similar ones from the other classical poets. Statius is appropriately viewed as one of the major influences on Dante’s Inferno, but only rarely cited as the sole inspiration for an element. Rather, those early readers, as well as a number of commentators today, recognized that Dante is evoking not only the otherworld of the afterlife, but the otherworld that is literature itself.

In the first cantos of the Commedia, Dante evokes several poetic tropes that have precedence in many of the classical poets, including Statius. In Dante’s opening lines (Inf. I: 4-6), he has recourse to the ineffability topos, a theme he will return to
in *Inferno* XXVIII: 1-6, as well as on multiple occasions in *Paradiso*, in the latter in the sense that what the pilgrim sees is too marvelous for the poet to depict adequately, rather than too horrifying.\(^{322}\) In the second canto, he draws on poetic commonplaces about day's end (*Inf.* II: 1-3),\(^{323}\) and later adapts the trope of reminiscing over the sweeter days of the past (VI: 88-89).\(^{324}\)

Statius’ texts, along with those of the other poets, also help supply Dante with the stock figures and characters of the underworld, such as Pluto's court,\(^{325}\) the river Styx,\(^{326}\) Phlegyas,\(^{327}\) the Furies,\(^{328}\) and Phlegethon.\(^{329}\) A number of commentators


also cite poetic figures from Statius and his peers that help describe the atmosphere of Hell and the behavior of those Dante finds inside. Several modern commentators have noted that Dante may be thinking of a passage in Statius when he describes the cacophony the pilgrim experiences in Hell (Inf. III: 25-30). Statius writes of Taenaros, believed to contain a cave with an entrance to the underworld:

\[
\text{stridor ibi et gemitus poenarum, atroque tumultu feruet ager; saepe Eumenidum uocesque manusque in medium sonuere diem, Letique triformis ianitor agricolas campis auditus abegit. (Theb. II: 51-54)}
\]

Both the passage from Dante and that from Statius vividly describe the experience of being trapped in such a clamor.

The Statian passages referenced in commentaries to the early cantos of the *Inferno* are pertinent to these cantos not only for the particular textual parallels that are named, but also for the contexts in which these *Thebaid* passages appear. The text of *Thebaid* I: 93-96, another discussion of Taenaros, is frequently cited in medieval and modern commentaries to the early *Inferno* cantos:


tristibus exiluit ripis: discedit inane
tulgeus et occursus dominae paeut. illa per umbras
et caligantes animarum examine campos
Taenariae limen petit inreameable portae.

Modern Dante critics tend to focus on the first part of these lines, arguing that Dante’s “‘la trista riviera d’Acheronte’” (III: 78) is an echo of Statius’ “tristibus ... ripis.” But several medieval readers bring up this passage in annotations to the opening of the same canto, which describes the inscription on the gate to hell (III: 1-9). Dante’s “Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch’intrate” is cited as a dramatic rendering of the idea of the “Taenariae limen petit inreameable portae,” along with similar passages in Virgil and Ovid. All three poets evoke the image of the threshold of hell that no one ought to be able to cross twice.

Boccaccio’s introduction to the Inferno, which attempts to answer some of the questions about the nature of Dante’s poetry, also cites these passages in relation to Dante’s gate to hell, and notably recognizes that the context of the Statius passage is important for understanding the complexity of Dante’s task. Boccaccio explains the background to and context for Statius’ description of the threshold to hell: “di quindi dice essere, a’ tempi di Edippo, re di Tebe, d’inferno venuta nel mondo Tesifonè, pregata da lui, a mettere discordia tra Etiocle e Pollinice suoi figliuoli, così scrivendo.” Although the story of Aeneas’ descent into the

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331 Proto, 32; Padoan, Note on Inf. III: 78; Mazzoni, Note on Inf. III: 78; Chiavacci Leonardi, Note on Inf. III: 78; Fosca, Note on Inf. III: 76-78. In addition, Proto has pointed out that a similar scene to “discedit...paeut” is described in Inferno IX: 76-85.

underworld is Dante’s primary and most overt model, he is conscious of the other literary journeys that precede his, and each of those journeys has different resonances with Dante’s own.

In the Statius passage, it is one of the Furies who crosses the boundary of Taenaros, and she does so in response to Oedipus’ curse against his sons, the shameful act that sets in motion all the other horrors of the epic. Dante’s own “lasciate ogne speranza,” if applied to this point of the *Thebaid* text, would refer to the result of Oedipus’ actions; once Oedipus calls for the curse on his sons, tragedy cannot be evaded, and all attempts to save Thebes and its people from a tragic fate (attempts to reconcile the brothers, Menoeceus’ sacrifice, Theseus’ intervention, petition to the goddess Clementia) can only achieve a partial success. Statius’ text, and the trips to the afterlife he describes (those of Tisiphone, Mercury, Laius, and Amphiaraus), perhaps hover in the background of the *Inferno* for Dante and for Dante’s readers, as is shown by the many references to the *Thebaid* that appear in early commentaries to these opening cantos. Dante consciously chooses a very different path for his own poem as he rewrites the existing poetic narratives, and it is worthwhile to note not only which narratives he emulates at times, but also those the poet chooses not to follow.

Dante’s depiction of the heavenly messenger in *Inferno* IX is another passage that may be partially inspired by Statius. A number of mostly modern

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333 *Inferno* Intro. Nota.

334 Each of these events is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.
commentators has noted the resemblance between this messenger and the figure of Mercury, whom Jove sends down to the underworld to fetch the shade of Laius, an action that is part of Jove’s plan to bring just punishment to Thebes and Argos for their past crimes. Like Dante’s messenger, who

dal volto rimovea quell’aere grasso,
menando la sinistra innanzi spesso;
sol di quell’ angoscia parea lasso (Inf. IX: 82-84).

Mercury too must fight against the atmosphere of the underworld:

undique pigrae
ire uetant nubes et turbidus implicat aer,
nec Zephyri rapuere gradum, sed foeda silentis
aura poli. (Theb. II: 2-5)

The differences in the context of where these similar passages appear point to the wide disparities in tenor and philosophy between Statius’ epic and Dante’s work. While Inferno describes the just punishments the Christian God doles out for sins, the sinners themselves suffer the due punishment, not their descendants. The pagan concept of justice is necessarily distinct from the Christian system. Moreover, Laius’ retrieval from the underworld is what sets in motion the war that leads, on the personal level, to fratricide, and on the civic level, to the downfall of both Argos and Thebes. In Dante’s epic, the angelic messenger enables the travelers to reach the

335 Pietro Alighieri (1), Note on Inf. IX: 82-90; Pietro Alighieri (2), Note on Inf. IX: 61-90; Pietro Alighieri (3), Note on Inf. IX: 80-90; Proto, 41-42; Quint, 202; Chiavacci Leonardi, Note on Inf. IX: 84; Durling and Martinez, Note on Inf. IX: 81-85, (151-52); Robert Hollander, Inferno, trans. Robert and Jean Hollander (New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 2000), Note on Inf. IX: 82-83; and Fosca, Note on Inf. IX: 76-81.

336 See also “Or drizza il nerbo / del viso su per quella schiuma antica / per indi ove quell fummo è più acerbo” (IX: 73-75).

337 As Quint writes, “His mission is not the revelation of meaning, but the instigation of further violence,” 205.
realms where treacheries—like those depicted in the *Thebaid*—are punished, but Dante’s journey continues past the ninth circle, when he succeeds in ascending back out of the Inferno. Thus, Dante’s rewriting doubly inverts the scene from the *Thebaid*. The messenger arrives to help him descend in order to convey truth and promote civic harmony rather than ascend, deceive, and bring about tragic consequences.

4.2.2 Statius’ Characters in the *Inferno*

Nonetheless, although Dante writes a redemptive path through hell rather than following the grimmer one offered by Statius, the Latin poet’s texts remain a major inspiration for how Dante-poet populates and describes this realm. Commentators tend to identify fewer generic parallels with Statius’ works in the middle cantos of *Inferno*, perhaps because Statius’ main characters become important to this part of Dante’s narrative. In Statius, Dante finds several archetypes for the sins he needs to embody. However, Dante’s relationship to his source texts seems to grow more complicated as he also moves deeper into Hell.

One of the first distinctively Statian characters that Dante and Virgil meet is Chiron, one of the centaurs who accompany the wrathful in Inferno XII.\[338\] Dante’s depiction follows Statius in showing Chiron to be different from his centaur

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\[338\] While Chiron also appears in other classical texts, commentators tend to give more weight to Statius’ portrayal. Statius describes Chiron in some detail in the opening of the *Achilleid*. Of course, Dante and Virgil also encountered Achilles in *Inferno* V, but that portrayal does not seem to draw from Statius’ treatment of the character, because the event Dante references does not appear in the *Achilleid*. See Sapegno, Notes on *Inf.* XII: 65, XII: 71; Bosco and Reggio, Notes on *Inf.* XII: 65, XII: 70-71; Chiavacci Leonardi, Note on *Inf.* XII: 71; Durling and Martinez, Note on *Inf.* XII: 71, (195); Hollander, Note on *Inf.* XII: 70-71; and Fosca, Notes on *Inf.* XII: 64-66, XII: 70-72.
brethren.\textsuperscript{339} As they approach the centaurs, Virgil singles out Chiron as his desired intercessor (XII: 64-65), and then describes him as “quel...ch’al petto si mira, / è il gran Chirón, il qual nodri Achille” (XII: 70-71). As they approach, Chiron is the one to note that Dante must be alive, as his feet disturb the ground (XII: 80-82), and he acts as commander of the other centaurs (97-99). This brief characterization aligns with Statius’ portrayal, which featured Chiron turning to contemplation and medicine later in life, and described him as a figure of authority.\textsuperscript{340}

It seems that Dante is also generally faithful to his source in the portrayal of proud Capaneus.\textsuperscript{341} Statius’ description of Capaneus can be considered one of the strongest parts of his epic, and it is difficult to conceive of a better archetype of blasphemy for Dante to depict than Capaneus. Commentators often cite Capaneus’ speech that his own abilities are the only god he respects: “uirtus mihi numen et ensis / quem teneo!” (\textit{Theb.} III: 615-16), and that “gods” are only human’s imagined fears: “primus in orbe deos fecit timor’” (III: 661). In the same speech, Capaneus

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\textsuperscript{339} Statius writes: “at intra / Centauri stabula alta patent, non aqua nefandis / fratibus: hic hominum nullos experta cruores / specula nex truncae bellis genialibus orni / aut consanguineous fracti crateres in hostes / sed pharetrae insontes et inania terga ferarum” (\textit{Achill.} I: 110-15). Statius also briefly mentions Chiron’s compatriot Pholus, “che fu sì pien ‘ira” (XII: 72), in \textit{Theb.} II: 563-65, but this figure also appears in the works of Virgil and Ovid, so his portrayal is not unique.

\textsuperscript{340} Although Chiron had been a fierce warrior in his youth, in his old age he turned to poetry and the healing arts: “nam tunc labor unus inermi / nosse salutiferas dubiis animantibus herbas, / aut monstrare lyra veteres heroas alumno” (\textit{Achill.} I: 116-18).

deplores pagan attempts at prophecy, a view Dante could agree with, but Capaneus’ argument relies on the idea that any gods who would listen to human’s prayers must be weaklings, an assertion Dante would never have accepted. Capaneus escalates his contempt for the gods when he goes into battle against Thebes, once more praying to his right hand (IX: 547-50). As he assaults the city’s walls, he calls out “nullane pro trepidis...numina Thebis / statis?” (X: 899-900). Jove himself comes to answer this taunt, and, as Dante’s Capaneo boasts, strikes him down with his lightning. Statius’ Capaneus would certainly proclaim, as Dante’s rendering does: “Qual io fui vivo, tal son morto” (Inf. XIV: 51). Although Capaneo has now experienced Jove firsthand, he remains utterly disdainful. The fiery rain does not disturb him because he scorns even lightning blasts. As many commentators have noted, Dante’s initial description of the figure recalls Capaneus’ last appearance in the Thebaid; the travelers come upon Capaneo— “quel grande che non par che curi / lo ‘ncendio e giace dispettoso e torto”—a description that calques Statius’ presentation of his dead body: “ille iacet lacerae complexus fragmina turris, / toruus adhuc uis.” (Inf. XIV: 46-48, Theb. XI: 9-10, emphases added). The fact that Dante uses Capaneus to stand for blasphemy, despite the fact that he blasphemes the pagan, not Christian, gods, may be a sign of Dante’s appreciation of

342 “tua prorsus inani / uerba polo causas abstrusa atque omina rerum / eliciunt? miseret superum, si carmina curae / humanaeque precis” (III: 657-60). Of course, Dante will shortly engage more directly with the subject of pagan prophecy, in Inferno. He also discusses the efficacy of prayer in pagan culture with Virgil in Purgatorio VI: 28-48.

343 “magnanimus Capaneus, telumque inmane lacerto / hortatur librans: ‘ades o mihi, dextera, tantum / tu praesens bellis et ineuitabile numen., / te uoco, te solam superum contemptor adoro.’”

344 Sapegno, Note on Inf. XIV: 47; Bosco and Reggio, Note on Inf. XIV: 47-48; Singleton, Note on Inf. XIV: 47; Fosca, Note on Inf. XIV: 43-48.

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Statius’ vivid treatment of Capaneus’ temperament and behavior. However, one ambiguous feature of Dante’s adaptation is his use of the adjective “grande” (XIV: 46). Does Dante mean to translate Statius’s “ingenti” in reference to his size (*Theb*. III: 598), or his status as “magnanimo,” a term Statius used to describe Capaneus in the passage where he prays to himself (IX: 547), as well as immediately after his death (XI: 1)? Statius certainly viewed the character as great, explaining that even Jove who struck him down admires Capaneus’ deeds (XI: 10-11), but such admiration cannot fit within Dante’s system of Christian values.

It is notable and appropriate that Statius’ characters first appear prominently within the circles of the violent. While none of Statius’ characters appear in the *Inferno* XIII, the canto bridging those containing Chiron and Capaneus, Dante’s depiction of the wood of the suicides synthesizes elements from Virgil and Ovid, and similar descriptions in Lucan and in Statius.\(^ {345}\) As Durling and Martinez explain in their commentary to these lines, “the unnatural forest is a commonplace of ancient accounts of the approaches to Hades.”\(^ {346}\) The classical wood sets the stage for a scene based on Virgilian elements, including the Harpies, and the souls in trees that bleed and talk, which Dante manipulates into the *contrapasso* for suicide. The same canto also contains the *contrapasso* for squandering, which is derived from the fate of Actaeon, in addition to other literary models. However, this punishment may also

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345 "un bosco / che da neun sentiero era segnato. / Non fronda verde, ma di color fosco; / non rami schietti, ma nodosi e ’nvolti; / non pomi v’eran, ma stecchi con tòsco. / Non han si aspri sterpi / né si folti / quelle fiere selvage che ’n odio hanno / tra Cecina e Corneto i luoghi cólti” (XIII: 2-9).

346 Durling and Martinez, Note on *Inf. XIII*: 3-6.
bear signs of Statius’ work. The sinister grove Statius describes lies in Thebes beside the plain of Mars, where Cadmus sowed the dragon’s teeth that sprang up into the violent *terrigenae*. In addition to the textual parallels that other critics have identified, the scene of Jacopo and Lano being chased and ripped apart by dogs may also recall Statius’ explanation of how the *terrigenae* rise in the night as ghosts to recommit their bloody crimes:

\[
\text{ingentes infelix terra tumultus} \\
\text{lucis adhuc medio solaque in nocte per umbras} \\
\text{expirat, nigri cum uana in proelia surgunt} \\
\text{terrigenae.  (Theb. IV: 438-41)}
\]

Statius’ passage highlights the blood-soaked earth (“putria sanguine prata”), a feature of Thebes’ history that continually affects both present and future events in the city. Although Dante more overtly refers to Thebes in the circles of fraud and treachery, Thebes’ long history of violence makes the city a suitable referent for the circle of violence as well. In addition, the unnamed suicide identifies himself as being “‘de la città che nel Batista / mutò ‘l primo padrone [Mars]; ond’ei per questo / sempre con l’arte sua la farà trista’” (143-45). The association of the violent sinner with the city of Mars possibly represents another link to the *terrigenae*, as well as to other violent events spurred on by Mars’ intervention, including the Theban war depicted in the *Thebaid*. The unnamed suicide means to signify Florence, which Dante establishes as an analogue to Hell along with Thebes. Over the course of these cantos dedicated to the sins of violence, Dante calls attention to the violence in epic

\footnote{“extra inmane patent, tellus Mauortia, campi; / fetus ager Cadmo, durus qui uomere primo / post consanguineas acies sulcosque nocentes / ausus humum uersare et putria sanguine prata / eruit” (IV: 434-38). This story also appears in Ovid.}
poetry. Although Capaneus exemplifies blasphemy, his presence would also remind readers of the many deaths of the *Thebaid*; similarly, the setting of *Inferno* XIII might also have been intended to call to mind Thebes’ violent events.348

Dante also seems to look to Statius as a major source for his depiction of Jason as the archetypical seducer in *Inferno* XVIII. However, his adaptation of Jason is slightly more complex than his earlier treatment of Statius’ characters, in that he draws together multiple sources, and in that Jason’s tale recurs several times in the poem, and with a different significance on each occasion. It is interesting that, as Umberto Bosco remarks, Dante uses very similar language to indicate Jason as he did with Capaneus: “‘Guarda quel grande che vene, / e per dolor non par lagrime spanda: / quanto aspetto reale ancor ritene!’” (*Inf.* XVIII: 83-85).349 Notably, the speaker here is Virgil, whereas it was the pilgrim who characterized Capaneus as noble before Virgil scorned the blasphemer for his pride and his crimes. Although Virgil also eventually condemns Jason’s crimes, he begins with Jason’s accomplishments as the leader of the Argonauts.350 As with many of the literary and mythical characters Dante brings into the *Inferno*, a reaction of mixed admiration is the most appropriate response to Jason. Commentators tend to think that Ovid likely supplied the account of Jason’s heroics, and Ovid’s works also address the seduction

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348 This presentation is certainly an oversimplification of this canto and the great number of classical references it contains; it is not intended to challenge existing scholarship, but merely to add the possibility that Dante may also have drawn on Statius in this canto. Durling and Martinez have also called attention to the commentary of Gmelin on *Inf.* XIII: 112-14, in which he identifies these lines as an adaptation of a simile from *Thebaid* IV: 494-99. Note on *Inf.* XIII: 112-14.

349 Bosca, Note on *Inf.* XIV: 43-72.

350 One may wonder whether Virgil’s attitude is less condemnatory because Jason’s behavior towards Hypsipyle does not differ much from Aeneas’ towards Dido (although Hypsipyle had the happier ending).
and abandonment of Hypsipyle and Medea (XVIII: 88-96). Yet, Statius also provides a long, first-person account of Hypsipyle’s trials in *Thebaid* V. Although Hypsipyle is named twice in *Purgatorio*, and explicitly linked to Statius in *Purgatorio* XXII: 88-89 and XXII: 112, in *Inferno*, the story of Jason seems to follow Ovid more closely. As Durling and Martinez have pointed out, Dante’s account matches *Heroides* VI: 61-62, in which Hypsipyle is pregnant when Jason leaves, rather than the *Thebaid*, which asserts that she had already given birth. Moreover, Statius’ Hypsipyle explicitly describes her experience with Jason as rape, not as the “*segni e...parole ornate*” more characteristic of Ovid’s account. Dante may prefer Ovid’s Jason because it is easier to amplify his qualities of greatness than the characteristics of Statius’ version of Jason, who is both more of a cipher and yet also more reprehensible. However, since the number of references to Hypsipyle suggests that Dante found her a sympathetic character, it also seems possible to suppose that Dante chooses Jason to be his archetype of seduction because he found Hypsipyle’s narrative of Jason’s treatment to be affecting and persuasive, even though he follows Ovid’s characterization of Jason more closely in *Inferno* XVIII. Statius gives over one of the middle books of the *Thebaid* almost entirely to Hypsipyle, who tells own her story at great length.

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351 *Metamorphoses* VII: 1-424, and *Heroides* VI and XII. Guido da Pisa, Note on *Inf.* XVIII: 18:82-84; Benvenuto da Imola, Note on *Inf.* XVIII: 88-96; Sapego, Note on *Inf.* XVIII: 86; Singleton, Note on *Inf.* XVIII: 86; Bosco and Reggio, Note on *Inf.* XVIII: 86; Pasquini and Quaglio, Note on *Inf.* XVIII: 86-87; Durling and Martinez, Notes on *Inf.* XVIII: 83-96, XVIII: 88-94; Fosca, Notes on *Inf.* XVIII: 82-87, XVIII: 88-90, XVII: 91-93, XVIII: 94-96. Some scholars also identify Valerius Flaccus (*Argonautica* II, 77-425) as a source on Hypsipyle. In addition, as with many of his classical references, Dante may have drawn from the mythographers, compilations, or commentaries. Both the first and second Vatican Mythographers relate the stories of Hypsipyle and Jason.

The issue of judging between the truth of different poetic accounts is a central concern in the portrayal of the remaining Statian figures inhabiting Dante’s Hell. The poet’s depiction of the soothsayers in *Inferno* XX is so complex that several scholars have taken this canto to be a meditation on poetry as a medium for expressing the truth. As critics have suggested, Dante seems to have selected a soothsayer to represent each of the great Latin epic poets—Amphiaraus for Statius, Tiresias for Ovid, Arruns for Lucan, and Manto for Virgil. At the same time, the *Thebaid* heavily features not only Amphiaraus, but also Tiresias and Manto, since their many attempts at seeing into the future help dramatize one of the major themes of the epic—the ineluctability of fate. Statius portrays these characters sympathetically as people, although his assessment of augury is similarly condemnatory to Dante’s apparent position in *Inferno* XX. However, Dante characterizes Tiresias by his experience being both male and female, a story that is briefly mentioned in Statius, but told more fully in Ovid’s text; thus, it seems most likely that Ovid is the primary source Dante wishes to evoke for Tiresias. For

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353 *Inferno* XX has drawn a lot of scholarly attention, particularly because Dante seems to contradict himself between *Inferno* XX and *Purgatorio* XXII, but it is uncertain whether this discrepancy concerning Manto’s fate is an intentional contradiction or a mistake. Most of the criticism has focused on why Dante might have done this intentionally. A short bibliography on this subject includes: Richard Kay, “Dante’s Damnation of Manto,” *Res Publica Litterarum* 1 (1978): 113-28; Ettore Paratore, “Il canto XX del *Inferno*,” *Studi danteschi* 52 (1979-80): 149-70; Robert Hollander, in both “The Tragedy of Divination” and “Dante’s Misreadings of the Aeneid”; Teodolinda Barolini, “True and False See-ers in *Inferno* XX,” *Lectura Dantis* 4 (Spring 1989): 42-54; and Winthrop Wetherbee, 73-82. Hollander provides an alternative of Dante’s other sources in *Inferno* XX, but he argues: “Dante is crucially misreading his classical texts….I hope to show that the misreadings are based on the original text and are deliberate;” and “It is clearly Dante’s purpose in *Inferno* XX to undermine diviners who are treated favorably (or neutrally) by their classical authors,” “The tragedy of Divination in Inferno XX,” 169, 186. While this argument has some truth, it oversimplifies Dante’s response to Statius’ texts, which the poet both affirms and changes in this canto. Nonetheless, Hollander is the scholar who has engaged the most with the relationship between this canto and classical poetry, including Statius.
Amphiaraus, on the other hand, Dante translates Statius’ own lines: “Dove rui / Anfiarao?” (Inf. XX: 33-34) adapts “at tibi quos...manes, qui limite praeceps / non licito per inane ruis?” (Theb. VIII: 84-85), although in Statius Pluto speaks these words, and not the Thebans.

As for Manto, she appears in Dante’s text in a way that requires some explanation. Despite her clear placement among the soothsayers in Inferno XX, Virgil later groups her among Stazio’s women who are in Limbo (Purg. XXII: 113). It is this self-contradiction that has attracted the most attention and need for explanation. Richard Kay has argued that Dante is trying to create a distinction between historical figures and literary ones, while Hollander has written at length about how Dante contrives to undermine the authority of Virgil and that of his texts by having Virgil provide a different origin for Mantua from the one he had given in the Aeneid. Moreover, critics including Durling and Martinez, have pointed out that an additional way in which Dante calls the Aeneid’s account of Manto into question is by following the Thebaid in calling Manto “la vergine cruda” (XX: 82), rather than Virgil’s account in which she is the mother of Ocnus.354 In addition to the specific dialogue Dante is carrying on with Virgil’s poetry, it could be said that the canto’s major theme is not only prophecy, but also poetic succession and syncretism, and the conflicts that arise from the process of reconciling conflicting authorities.355


355 Most scholars acknowledge that the real subject of Inferno XX is poetry, and a common reading has been that Dante is asserting his authority over the Latin poetic tradition. It may be more appropriate to read the canto as part of Dante’s process of reconciling his poetic authorities to each other and to his own poetic endeavor, in which Dante adapts, rather than misreads, his sources.
Dante calls attention to this canto as a poetic artifice in its opening, naming it as “l’ventesimo canto / de la prima canzon” (*Inf.* XX: 2-3). Moreover, considering Apollo’s dual inspiration of prophecy and poetry (he is acknowledged as Amphiaraurus’ great patron, even by impious Capaneus), this canto is the perfect place for such a discussion. Dante may not be making an argument about Statius’ own depiction of soothsayers in *Inferno* XX, but the poet does seem to be using Statius’ works to further his argument about Virgil’s poetry, and about poetic creation and reception in general.

Dante’s readers have long been fascinated with the character of Ulysses, and his canto is one of the most discussed in scholarship. Nonetheless, few scholars have noted that Statius’ Ulysses could be a source for Dante along with Virgil, Ovid and a number of other classical and medieval sources, other than in a token acknowledgement of Dante’s reference to Deidamia’s experience (XXVI: 61-62).

Suzanne Hagedorn has written at length about the *Achilleid* as a potential source for Dante, and while Statius’ Ulysses should not be claimed as the only, or primary model, for Dante’s *personaggio*, her argument has illuminated the characteristics shared between Dante’s account and Statius’. The mention of Deidamia, in

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357 Hagedorn, 19-43. Hagedorn particularly points out “Dante’s brief description of Deidamia’s suffering at the loss of Achilles reminds the reader of the part of Ulysses’ story that he hero leaves out—namely Penelope’s feelings at being left behind by her husband. Dante’s allusion to the *Achilleid* casts Ulysses in a negative light and provides support for the view that Dante condemns the hero for the social destruction wrought by his fraudulent rhetoric,” 19. Other scholars that have more briefly addressed the subject of the *Achilleid* influencing Dante’s portrayal of Ulysses include: Giorgio Padoan, “Ulisse ‘fandi factor; e le vie delle sapienza: momenti di una tradizione (da Virgilio a Dante),” reprinted in *Il pio Enea e l’empio Ulisse. Tradizione classica e intendimento medievale in Dante*
addition to the comparison of Ulysses and Diomedes to Eteocles and Polynices, should perhaps be interpreted as evidence for the need to consider Statius’ account along with the other sources. Both Ovid and Statius portray the negative effects of Ulysses’ oft-praised rhetorical skills, which scholars have surmised may be Dante’s motivation for placing Ulysses in the circle of fraud. Moreover, as Hagedorn has argued, the narrative context of Ulysses’ actions in the Achilleid bring out how his famed skills of persuasion have negative ramifications for the community, which is one of the major concerns determining placement in Dante’s scheme of the sins of Hell. Thetis worked hard to keep her son out of the war, and both she and her daughter-in-law suffer greatly because of Ulysses’ determination to persuade Achilles to join the fighting. Dante does not forget these women and their sufferings, as they appear in Virgil’s list of Statius’ women in Limbo, as well as in Virgil’s acknowledgment that one of Ulysses’ three crimes is “l’arte per che, morta, / Deidamia ancor si duol d’Achille” (Inf. XXVI: 61-62). While Dante’s Ulysses is his own masterful creation, part of Dante’s mastery is in depicting a character that he knows will be read against previous versions. Since, as the first chapter showed, the


358 Musa writes: “To claim that Virgil was the main source of Dante’s knowledge of Ulysses is to forget the Achilleid of Statius where Ulysses is truly seen in action and which shows the spell-binding effect of his works, and not only on Achilles. Worse is it to forget the scene in Ovid’s Metamorphoses XIII in which Ulysses claims his right to the armor of the dead Achilles, reminding the council of his many mighty deeds in the Trojan cause, and winning them over with his truly remarkable eloquence.” Virgil’s Ulysses and Ulysses’ Diomedes,” 188.

359 Hagedorn writes: “Ulysses’ rhetorical display, his tailoring of his message to suit his audience’s reaction, and his invocation of glory, fame, ‘virtus’, and pride in high birth as reasons for action should make any Dantist reading the Achilleid feel a shock of recognition—this is the Ulysses that Dante condemns to burn in Inferno XXVI, where he will use nearly the same strategy to persuade his small company to join him in his ‘folle volo’ to death and destruction,” 28-29.
Achilleid may have been covered in the school curriculum, Dante may have been anticipating his readers to have Statius' version in mind, in addition to the ones by Ovid and Virgil, or to other accounts his medieval readers might have known. The stirring speech of Dante's Ulysses does resemble the one Statius's Ulysses directs to Achilles, especially when one considers the outcome of both speeches: none of the listeners succeed in returning home.

The last of Statius' characters to have a place in Hell are named only briefly by both Dante and Statius: the giants imprisoned in Inferno XXXI. But as George F. Butler has argued, this canto may be another instance where Dante is using both Statius and Lucan in order to offer a more critical reading of Virgil and his works. Many commentators have noted that Dante's description of Briareus ("smisurato Briareo") resembles Statius' "immensus Briareus" in Thebaid II: 596. Butler adds the insight that Dante's use of "le ritorte" to signify Ephialtes' chains evokes a passage from Statius' description of the underworld: "solidoque intorta adamante Gigantum / uincula" (Theb. IV: 534-35). Butler contrasts the negative treatment of the giants offered by Statius, Lucan, and Dante with Virgil, who renders the giants as less fierce. He argues that Dante follows Statius in characterizing the violent tendencies of the giants, along with their idiocy, as reflections of the moral status of the giants in a way that contrasts with the portrayals given by other epic poets, who

\[^{360}\text{Butler, “Statius, Lucan and Dante’s Giants,” 11-12.}\]

\[^{361}\text{Butler writes: “The descriptions of the belligerent giants in the Inferno and the bloodthirsty offspring of earth and Mars in the Thebaid contrast with Virgil’s characterization of the giants in the Aeneid (Aen. VI: 581)...In Virgil’s account, the vanquished giants convulse fretfully within the put of Tartarus, and the pit itself is sufficient to contain them.” Butler, “Statius and Dante’s Giants,” 12.}\]
focus only on the giants’ rebelliousness and pride. It is Butler’s basic argument that by shaping so much of lower hell according to aspects of the *Thebaid*, Dante is showing that that text can serve as a moral authority, thereby laying a foundation to justify the prominent role Stazio will play in the next canticle.\(^{362}\) As noted above, one of the major ways that critics have read Dante’s adaptations of Statius, especially in recent years, is to see in these treatments a subtle criticism of Virgil. This argument is probably be overstated, especially in the cases discussed here, but it seems reasonable to say that Dante was aware that his readers would consider his poem in relation to his sources, and try to assess what meanings he was conveying through his use of these texts.

Whether or not Dante’s portrayal of the giants is intended to cast doubt on Virgil’s text, at the least, most commentators seem to agree Statius’ text is the most prominent poetic source behind Dante’s representation of the giants in *Inferno*. However, these figures are more minor *personaggi* than the Statian personages examined above, because they function as a transition to the final way Dante tends to use Statius texts in the *Inferno*: he clusters many brief references to Statian and Theban material in the lowest rungs of hell, where the sins of fraud and treachery are punished. Thus, the treatment of Jason and of Ulysses can also be grouped thematically with the Statian references that will be examined shortly. Statius not only portrayed violence in detail, he also depicted many different forms of fraud and betrayal in his two epics. In recent years, critics have recognized further potential

\(^{362}\) Butler, “Statius and Dante’s Giants,” 14. This argument has some merit, although Butler bases it at least in part on suggesting that Virgil’s authority is called into question, and he may take this point too far.
hidden references to Statius’ works. A. Teresa Hankey seems to be the first to point out that Dante’s description of Guido da Montefeltro’s death scene, in which an angel and a devil both come to argue over rights to Guido’s soul, may be an intentional echo of Statius’ account of the death of Tydeus. Athena, who had long been Tydeus’ patron, visits the dying Tydeus’ to bring glory to the hero, but she feels deep aversion for his bestial treatment of Menalippus, an act inspired by Tisiphone, who remains standing over him while Athena flees.363 Dante will reproduce Tydeus’ vile act in his depiction of Ugolino in Inferno XXXII and XXXIII, in order to signify the moral depths to which the personaggio has sunk. The echo of Tydeus in Inferno XXVII is also effective in conveying the seriousness of Guido’s crime.

Thebes (and Statius’ depiction of it) is such an inspiration for the lower depths of Hell that Dante uses “Theban” as a shorthand designation to mean a fierce and cruel person. He writes:

Ma né di Tebe furie né troiane
si vider mai in alcun tanto crude,
non punger bestie, nonché membra umane,
quant’io vidi in due ombre smorte e nude,
che mordendo correvan di quell modo
che ’l porco quando del porcil si schiude. (Inf. XXX: 22-27)

Although Dante suggests that the citizens of Lower Hell surpass the Thebans and Trojans in ferocity, he does make Thebes and Troy the point of reference for the sort of inhumanity he depicts in the lowest parts of hell.\textsuperscript{364}

In the next canto, Dante continues to build on the conceit that Hell is a city that mirrors the city of Thebes. In one of his most noteworthy Theban references, Dante calls on “quelle donne .../ch’aiutaro Anfione a chiuder Tebe” to help him find the appropriate language adequately to portray the lowest parts of hell (Inf. XXXII: 10-11). While Horace provides a more thorough account of Amphion’s construction of the walls of Thebes, and certainly an account more focused on the poetic aspects of the tale, Statius also refers to the story at the end of his work, locating it in between the deaths of Menoeceus and of Capaneus, and not long before the brothers will engage in their fateful duel.\textsuperscript{365} While Dante uses Amphion mainly as a figure to convey the idea that he too is “constructing the walls where horrors will occur;” it is possible he also recalled how Statius used the story of Amphion to dramatize how the crimes committed inside and outside Amphion’s city were causing the city to crumble, both figuratively and literally.\textsuperscript{366} Moreover, the Durling and Martinez

\textsuperscript{364} In addition, Butler has argued: “the Italian poet’s description of the giants in terms of both literal towers and the characters of the Thebaid develops his metaphor of the city of the damned” Butler, “Statius and Dante,” 14.

\textsuperscript{365} Ars Poetica 394-96; Thebaid X: 873-77. The story of Amphion appears in other sources in addition to Horace and Statius, but these two sources are those generally cited by medieval (and modern) commentators, although Guido da Pisa also quotes lines from Seneca.

\textsuperscript{366} It is actually Capaneus who recounts Amphion’s story in a mocking way as he is about to make his assault against the walls on Thebes: “humilesne Amphionis arcæ, / pro pudor, hi faciles, carmenque imbelle secuti, / hi, mentita diu Thebarum fabula, muri? / et quid tam egregium prosternere moenia mollis / structa lyra?” (Theb. X: 873-77). Pietro Alighieri notes how Statius acknowledges at the beginning of the Thebaid that Amphion is foundational to the story he will tell
commentary also points out that Statius too compares himself to Amphion in the opening to the *Achilleid*, albeit in a more positive way: “meque inter prisca parentum / nomina cumque suo numerant Amphione Thebae” (*Achill. I*: 11-12). While Statius invokes Amphion to point to his own achievements, Dante does so to indicate the grave seriousness and difficulty of his poetic undertaking.

Ronald L. Martinez in particular has made an excellent case for Dante having placed several other echoes of Statius and Thebes in the lowest parts of hell. Dante and Virgil come upon two souls “si strettii, / che ’l pel del capo avieno insieme misto” (*Inf.* XXXII: 41-42). Martinez has pointed out that these lines translate Statius’ “amplexu miscent avide lacrimasque comasque” (*Theb. XII*: 385-86). Statius’ passage describes the grief of Antigone and Argia when they find the body of Polynices. Thus, the reference evokes both treachery and fratricide, and the grief caused by and the social costs of such crimes. Dante strengthens the connection to Eteocles and Polynices some lines later, when he reveals that the shades, like the twins, “‘D’un corpo usciro’” (*Inf.* XXII: 58). Moreover, Martinez has observed that the


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367 Durling and Martinez, Note on *Inf.* XXXII: 10, 507.

368 See “Chapter III: Theban Ugolino,” “Chapter IV: Dante and Amphion,” and “Chapter V: Statius the New Man,” in “Dante, Statius, and the Earthly City.” Martinez also addresses this point in brief in the note to *Inf.* XXXII: 41-42. Martinez also suggests two Statian parallels in *Inferno* XXVIII, though both instances also have multiple analogues in Virgil as well. He links Dante’s use of ineffability topos in XXVIII: 1-6 with Statius’ list of the victims of the Theban war in *Thebaid* XII: 797-99, in addition to *Aeneid* II: 361-62, and VI: 625-27. Moreover, he finds two Statian precedents for the act of holding one’s head as a lantern, described in *Inf.* XXVIII: 121-22. Martinez points out that such as scene is described in both *Thebaid* IX: 132 and X: 452, as well as *Aeneid* IX: 466 and the account of Perseus holding Medusa’s head. The Virgilian analogues suggest that these elements cannot be regarded simply as Statian references, but they are another example of how Dante uses Statius to depict the atmosphere of lower inferno.
metaphor Dante uses here: “ond’ ei due becchi / cozzaro insieme, tanta ira li vinse” 

(*Inf.* XXIII: 50-51) also resembles a figure Statius had used to describe Polynices and Eteocles:

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similes uideo concurrere tauros;  
    idem ambobus honos unusque ab origine sanguis;  
    ardua conlatis obnixi cornua miscent  
    frontibus alternaque truces moriuntur in ira. (*Theb.* IV: 397-400)
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If these lines refer to Statius’ work, they are more covert than Dante’s previous adaptations of the *Thebaid*. Nonetheless, Dante might have expected his careful readers to recognize the subtext to the episode in *Inferno* XXIII. Dante observes the figures in Caina, which is named after the biblical Cain, but Dante also reminds his readers of literary exemplars of fratricide in Eteocles and Polynices, who are portrayed vividly in Statius’ work.

The final part of *Inferno* XXIII features one of the most distinctive instances of Dante’s Statian adaptation. He uses Statius’ depiction of Tydeus’ macabre retribution on the man who kills him to characterize both Ugolino and his betrayal of his city.370 This is a rare case where the Statian referent does not necessarily align with the sin being punished; while Tydeus’ act is gruesome, and results in dishonor, it was committed against an enemy, not against his own people. But Dante uses this

369 As Durling and Martinez have observed in their commentary, so too Statius writes: “stat consanguineum campo scelus, uniis ingens / bellum uteri, coeuntque pares sub casside uultus” (*Theb.* XI: 407-408). Note on *Inf.* XXII: 58.

striking crime, so obviously a transgression against social morality ("'si bestial segno'"), to convey how horrific he finds the crime of betraying one's patria (Inf. XXXII: 133). As many commentators have noted, in the next canto, Dante translates Statius’ “lumina torua” into “li occhi torti” (Theb. VIII: 756, Inf. XXXIII: 76). However, Dante transposes these “mad eyes” from the head of Tydeus’ victim, Menalippus, into the head of Ugolino himself as he gnaws on the head of Ruggieri. This allusion to Tydeus is one of the many ways in which Dante suggests that readers should question Ugolino’s narrative. Dante’s transposition of Statius’ scene to the infernal context also demonstrates how a cycle of violence begins and continues: the wronged one wishes revenge and becomes the aggressor. Dante closes the encounter with Ugolino by calling Pisa, Ugolino’s city, a “novella Tebe” for punishing Ugolino’s innocent children for his crime (XXXIII: 89). The theme of children suffering on account of their forebears’ sins is present throughout the stories of Thebes, whether gathered in Statius, Ovid, or other sources. The first book of the Thebaid features Jove explaining that he has allowed Oedipus’ impious request for vengeance against his sons to be granted so that both Argos and Thebes will finally be punished for their ancestral crimes, even though the other gods argue that it is unfair to punish living Argives and Thebans for sins committed generations in the past. Dante is characterizing Hell as a sort of Thebes, which coheres with his

371 Ugolino has, of course, been written about extensively, but few scholars have probed in depth into the connection between Dante’s treatment and Statius’ work. In his dissertation, Martinez offers a very interesting reading of Ugolino’s speech, that finds other parallels with the Thebaid, but some of these are weak, and he did not make much of them in his later work.

372 Sapegno, Note on Inf. XXXIII: 76; Singleton, Note on Inf. XXXIII: 76; Pasquini and Quaglio, Note on Inf. XXXIII: 76; Fosca, Note on Inf. XXXIII: 76-78.
consistent usage of Statian and/or Theban characters and elements in his depiction of the inferno.\footnote{In reference to this line, Pietro di Alighieri cites the first two lines of the \textit{Thebaid}: “fraternas acies alternaque regna profanes / decertata odiis sontesque evoluere Thebas” Pietro Alighieri (1), Note on \textit{Inf. XXXIII: 89}; Pietro Alighieri (2), Note on \textit{Inf. XXXIII: 79-90.}}

This overview demonstrates that the horrors of the \textit{Thebaid} are easily adapted to Dante’s hell. In fact, there is so much Statian and Theban material in the \textit{Inferno} that Dante could have expected his readers to start questioning why Statius had not been mentioned in Limbo. However, Dante will not reveal the answer to that question until \textit{Purgatorio}, where the poet continues to adapt and incorporate material from Statius’ work.

\section*{4.3 Statius in \textit{Purgatorio} and in \textit{Paradiso}}

Dante so thoroughly demonstrates that Statius’ Thebes is vitally appropriate for depicting the infernal realm that it almost comes as a surprise that he should continue to draw on his works in \textit{Purgatorio}, much less portray Stazio himself as a significant \textit{personaggio}. Some of the references to Theban or Statian characters in the second canticle serve the same purpose as those in the \textit{Inferno}: Dante uses them as negative examples of vice, such as the references to Briareus and the other giants, and Alcmaeon and Eriphyle in \textit{Purgatorio} XII (28-31, 49-51). Commentators have also proposed Statian parallels for a number of Dante’s metaphors in \textit{Purgatorio}, but in each case, Statius is just one among several sources for Dante’s imagery, so that it
is difficult to argue that Statius was more influential than another writer.374

However, there are several *Purgatorio* cantos in which Dante adapts a scene from Statius in a very striking way.

Some of the earliest significant *Purgatorio* adaptations of Statian scenes are found in the conversion narratives recounted in Antepurgatory. Dante may have been foreshadowing the revelation of Stazio’s own conversion by associating these stories of conversion with scenes from Statius’ texts. The first of these adaptations is found in *Purgatorio* III, when Dante meets the Emperor Manfred, who introduces himself “Poi sorridendo disse: ‘Io son Manfredi, / nepote di Costanza imperadrice’” (*Purg.* III: 112-13). Manfred does not want to follow the typical convention of identifying himself by his male ancestors, because these forebears were cruel and sinful.375 Thus, he points to his grandmother, as a relation he is proud to acknowledge. Here Dante seems to imitate an early *Thebaid* scene in which Adrastus, coming upon his future sons-in-law Polynices and Tydeus, asks them who they are and from whence they came. Polynices is too ashamed to name his father Oedipus, who is guilty of patricide and incest. Instead, he reveals his identity more elliptically, by naming Cadmus as his forebear, Thebes as his land, and Jocasta as his mother.376 Although the names of Thebes, Cadmus, and Jocasta evoke sad histories,

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375 *Inferno* X: 119 makes clear that Manfred’s father, Frederick II, is condemned for heresy.

376 He tells Adrastus: “‘non super hos diuum tibi sum quaeendus honores, / unde genus, quae terra mihi, quis defluat ordo / sanguinis antiqui: piget inter sacra fateri. / sed si praecipitant
Polynices prefers these associations to that of his father. Like Statius with Polynices, Dante causes Manfred to align himself with his honorable female relative instead of his dishonorable male ones. This identification is also notable in that it shows a character reading his own history in a redemptive way, which, as the previous chapter explored, is a major theme in Dante’s presentation of Stazio. Moreover, this adaptation seems to be an early sign of the sort of redemptive reading Dante begins to apply to Statius’ works in Purgatorio. Despite Oedipus, despite Polynices, despite the horrors that helped Dante to give substance to the Inferno, the poet also manages to find redemptive elements in Statius’ work, and, by extension, in Stazio as a poet.

Two other late conversion scenes, depicted in Purgatorio V, evoke Statius’ work by echoing elements from the deaths of Crenaeus and of Hippomedon in the river Ismenos, both recounted in Thebaid IX. While commentators have often associated Dante’s scenes with generic Virgilian death scenes, the description of suffering a violent death in the river and of calling out to Mary at the point of death were almost certainly in part inspired by Statius. Jacopo del Cassero describes “li profondi fóri / ond’ uscì l sangue in sul quale io sedea”:

miserum cognoscere curae, / Cadmus origo partum, tellus Mauortia Thebe, / est genetrix locasta mihi.” (Theb. I: 676-81). Benvenuto da Imola seems to be the first to have noted this parallel, in his Note on Purg. III: 112-20. More recently, both Hollander and Fosca have addressed this episode in their commentaries. Hollander, Note on Purg. III: 113; Fosca, Note on Purg. III: 113. Manfredi Porena also points out that this Thebaid scene is featured in Convivio IV.xxx.10, Manfredi Porena, La Divina Commedia di Dante Alighieri commentata da Manfredi Porena (Bologna: Zanichelli, Grafiche Galeati Imola, 1981), Note on Purg. III: 112-13.

Caron Ann Cioffi sees the three Purgatorio V interlocutors (as well as Manfred) as part of Dante’s program of rewriting Virgil’s Palinurus. Caron Ann Cioffi, “Fame, Prayer, and Politics: Virgil’s Palinurus in Purgatorio V and VI,” Dante Studies 110 (1992): 179-200. On the other hand, Winthrop Wetherbee has argued that these same scenes derive primarily from Ovidian exemplars, linking Jacopo with Narcissus and Buonconte with Philomela. Wetherbee, 123-25. Both analyses seem
This depiction resembles the death scene of Hippomedon, one of the Seven Against Thebes, who, after killing many Thebans in the river Ismenos, is set upon by the river-god and ultimately dies:

omnisque patet leto; tunc uulnera manant, quique sub amne diu stupuit cruar, aere sudo soluitur et tenues ueanrum laxat hiatus, incertique labant undarum e frigore. procumbit. (Theb. IX: 528-32)

Both men are wounded and become trapped in the river, and see their blood flow out into the water around them. However, Dante also creates a significant contrast between the characters. While Hippomedon was slain because of his pride and hubris, Dante situates his rewriting of that scene in the context of humble pleading for intercessory prayer. Even the less blameworthy heroes of the classical tradition cannot be Dante’s Christian heroes without significant rewriting.

Buonconte da Montefeltro immediately follows Jacopo’s narrative by recounting his own death and repentance: “Quivi perdei la vista, e la parola / nel nome di Maria fini’, e quivi / caddi” (Purg. V: 100-102). In having Buonconte end his life on the name “Maria”, as a salvific mother-figure, Dante imitates Statius’ account of the death of Crenaeus, who dies calling out to his own mother, the nymph Ismenis: “ultimus ille sonus moribundo emersit ab ore, / ‘mater!’, in hance miseri

plausible, but rather than promoting the Ovidian or Virgilian inspiration over the Statian, or the Statian over other texts, this canto should be regarded as another example of Dante’s poetic syncretism.
ceciderunt flumina uocem” (Theb. IX: 349-50). Like Mary for Buonconte, Crenaeus’ mother intercedes on his behalf—she calls for vengeance against his killer, Hippomedon. Critics have often looked upon the three accounts of untimely death portrayed in Purgatorio V—these two, along with that of La Pia—as a triptych, or as an example of the rhetorical practices of amplificatio and abbrevatio. However, it has generally been overlooked how the first two accounts also both echo and rewrite Statius. Dante reverses the order of the deaths, removing their causal relationship, and alters the object of intercession from vengeance to salvation. Here, Dante begins to perform the sort of redemptive reading and rewriting of Statius that Stazio will later apply to Virgil’s work.

Midway through Purgatorio, Dante again shapes the narrative as a reimagining of the scene between Polynices and Adrastus. However, this time it is Dante who is evasive about personal details. When Dante comes upon Guido del Duca and Rinieri da Calboli, they ask him

"per carità ne consola e ne ditta
onde vieni e chi se'; ché tu ne fai
tanto maravigliar de la tua grazia,
quanto vuol cosa che non fu più mai." (Purg. XIV: 12-15)

These questions resemble Adrastus’ inquiries about the identities of Tydeus and Polynices, but the poet inserts a different motivation behind the questions. Adrastus seeks to know the identity of the guests to whom he offers hospitality, whereas Guido and Rinieri suggest that answering their questions and sharing the pilgrim’s

experience of divine grace would be a charitable act.\textsuperscript{379} The pilgrim’s reply, like Manfred’s, echoes Polynices in hesitating to name himself directly. Unlike Polynices or Manfred, however, the pilgrim is not ashamed of his relatives, but rather, is reluctant to name himself because his name would be unknown to his audience (\textit{Purg. XIV: 20-21}).\textsuperscript{380} Instead, the pilgrim adapts the strategy of indirect explanation to evoke Florence without having to call it by name, to show that he is ashamed of his city:

\begin{quote}
E io: “Per mezza Toscana si spazia
un fiumicel che nasce in Falterona,
e cento miglia di corso nol sazia.
Di sovr’ esso rech’ io questa persona.” (\textit{Purg. XIV: 16-19})
\end{quote}

The pilgrim’s interlocutors call attention to both the wayfarer’s approach and its message. Rinieri asks his friend why the pilgrim spoke so elliptically, and Guido explains: “‘ma degno ben è che ’l nome di tal valle pèra’” (\textit{Purg. XIV: 30}), because, as Rinieri phrases it, Florence is among “‘l’orribili cose’” (XIV: 28). However, they do not call attention to how Dante-pilgrim frames his self-disclosure. While he humbly states that his name “‘non suona,” he also appends a confident “‘ancor molto’”; although he is not known now, he is certain his name will one day resound, and unlike Polynices in the model passage, Dante will have fame, not infamy.

\textsuperscript{379} Adrastus asks first: “‘sed prodite tandem / unde orti, quo fertis iter, quae iurgia? nam uos / haud humiles tanta ira docet, generisque superbi / magna per effusum clarescunt signa cruorem’” (\textit{Theb. I: 443-46}) and then again: “‘inde haec stat a sacra quotannis / sollemnes recolunt epulae, Phoebeaque placat / templ a nouatus honos. has forte insitis aras / uos quae progenies? .../ clamor iit, tibi iura domus. tu pande quis Argos / aduenias, quando haec uariis sermonibus hora est’” (\textit{Theb. I: 666-69, 71-72}). Pietro Alighieri pointed out this parallel, but it has otherwise been overlooked. Pietro Alighieri (1), Note on \textit{Purg. XIV: 28-30}.

\textsuperscript{380} Of course, the poet is also motivated by wanting to hold back his name until the climactic point where Beatrice will name him.
The pilgrim’s certainty regarding his future poetic fame is particularly appropriate for this canto, because the poet’s presentation of this scene can be read as a dramatization of the act of interpretation. When the interlocutors cannot make sense of the pilgrim’s enigmatic words, they turn aside, and together try to puzzle out his meaning (Purg. XIV: 22-30). The fact that Dante seems to be reworking a passage of Statius is especially fitting, since the poet will shortly use Stazio to expound on the value of poetry, and to exemplify an unusually creative form of interpretation. Thus, there is an extra level of meta- and intertextuality in Dante’s adaptation of a Statian episode that concerns self-presentation, veiled speech, and interpretation. Dante is leading up to the revelation of Stazio’s Christianity, and specifically to the manner of his conversion, which, notably, occurred through texts, although these clues are only apparent in retrospect.

Earlier chapters have shown how Dante draws from Statius’ works in his characterization of Stazio. Dante may also engage in a little foreshadowing of Stazio’s fate in Purgatorio XVIII, which describes the terrace of sloth. Dante compares the penitent slothful enacting their contrapasso to the mad Bacchantes of Thebes, rushing along the banks of the Ismenos and Asopos (XVIII: 88-96). This reference is significant because Stazio will reveal that he spent centuries on the terrace of sloth, and it seems that Dante might have chosen a Theban reference in tribute to Stazio’s time there. Additionally, however, this reference connects to other

381 Thebaid VII and IX describe this practice, as well as Metamorphoses III and IV and Virgil’s Eclogue VI, although most commentators highlight the Statian passages. Robert Hollander points out: “This is a fairly rare occurrence in Purgatorio, a simile based explicitly on classical materials,” and further points to another Statian example, in Purgatorio IX: 34-42, which refers to the Achilleid. Hollander, Note on Purg. XVIII: 91-96.
instances where Dante draws on Statius’ works in the canticle. In *Purgatorio V*, the poet seemed to be incorporating elements from Statius’ accounts of the deaths of Hippomedon and Crenaeus in the same river Ismenos. Moreover, when Stazio discusses his conversion, he relates it to the point that in his narrative he brought “i Greci a’ fiumi / di Tebe” (XXII: 88-89). That passage explicitly links the Theban rivers to the rite of baptism, which may suggest that *Purgatorio V* and XVIII should be read in light of baptism as well.

The section on the *Inferno* already mentioned how Dante repeatedly draws on certain of Statius’ characters, particularly Hypsipyle and Manto, and how, in recalling them, he always reframes their treatment. It seems that Dante may be especially drawn to several of Statius’ female characters, since he not only refers to them several times, but also portrays them sympathetically. In fact, Dante’s sympathies with Statius’ female characters were apparently so deeply felt that he aligned himself in relation to both Thetis and Hypsipyle. The similes in which they appear are unusual when compared to most of the other instances where Dante compares himself to a figure from the classical tradition. In most of the latter cases, Dante employs the classical tradition either to describe the divine effects he experiences on his journey, such as the comparison to Glaucus in *Paradiso I*, or in similes that are eroticly tinged, such as quoting Dido upon seeing Beatrice again or expressing his desire to join Matelda through Ovidian allusions. Through these Statian examples, on the other hand, Dante conveys and affirms other types of intense emotion. Dante chooses to compare himself to the sons of these two Statian mothers. In *Purgatorio IX*, the poet compares the pilgrim’s surprise when he awakes
to Achilles’ confusion after waking once Thetis had transported him to the isle of Scyros (Purg. IX: 34-39). Later, in Purgatorio XXVI, he explains that he feels like the sons of Hypsipyle being reunited with their mother when he meets Guido Guinizelli (Purg. XXVI: 94-96).

In both of these instances, Dante puts his pilgrim self into the position of a son whose mother has relinquished him in an attempt to save her child. As the first reference explicitly notes, Thetis’ attempt to evade fate was unsuccessful, because Ulysses and Diomedes later lured Achilles to war. Nonetheless, Dante emphasizes Thetis’ care for her son, and her close embrace as she attempted to carry him to safety. The second Statian simile could be seen as completing the cycle of motherly care, in that Hypsipyle, who left her sons behind as infants when her own life was endangered and she could offer little security to them, is reunited with her sons as grown men. Through his use of these two Statian similes, Dante depicts loving hopes that are initially unfulfilled, but ultimately realized when loved ones reunite.

Notably, these two similes bookend the pilgrim’s experience of Purgatory; Dante compares his pilgrim self to Achilles when he was unknowingly transported to the first terrace of the mountain, and he compares the pilgrim to the sons of Hypsipyle shortly before he will brave the flames purging the final vice of Purgatory. The poet suggests, through pairing the Statian similes and deploying them at certain places in the narrative, that when vices are purged, there need be no more estrangement. The Thebaid is an effective negative exemplar for this point, because it is precisely the sins, vices, and selfish desires of mankind that result in the destruction of Thebes. Moreover, perhaps the poet locates these stories in Purgatorio in order to show that
the active hopes of the Statian women, with which Dante seems to find such sympathy, may be ultimately and gloriously fulfilled through Christianity.

Dante also uses the two Statian similes to emphasize the success of the pilgrimage through the afterlife. Like the sons of Hypsipyle and Thetis, Dante-pilgrim has been sent on a journey by his mother-figures Mary and Beatrice in order to turn him back from the path of destruction. Beatrice’s intervention is able to prevent Dante’s possible (doomed) future, because divine providence supports and aids her attempt. Her victory contrasts with the failure of Thetis, who tried to save her son by avoiding the decrees of providence; as Chapter 1 discussed, the fruitlessness and immorality of Thetis’ endeavor to evade Achilles’ decreed fate was much discussed in the medieval accessus tradition on the Achilleid.

While Dante’s treatment of Statius’ female characters suggests that Dante appreciates more than just the depictions of vices and infernal realms in Statius’ work, Statius’ range of influence is narrower once the pilgrim leaves Hell, and again, even more so once the pilgrim meets Stazio himself. The traces of Statius in Paradiso seem even fainter. While commentators have suggested a few dozen parallels between Paradiso and Statius’ works, none of their suggestions have been persuasively argued, and very few of these (supposed) parallels have been attested by more than a single critic. Dante may draw some imagery from Statius in Paradiso, but there is no critical consensus on what Dante is adapting from Statius, or even if he is drawing from Statian works at all. When Statius does seem to be a source for certain Paradiso lines, he is one authority among many. Commentators have also
identified Statian sources behind certain of the characters Dante mentions in *Paradiso*, including Dione, Cupid, the Muses, and Europa; however, none of these figures receives more than a brief mention in Statius.\(^{383}\) Dante does remain very interested in responding to Theban material, incorporating references to the Sphinx in *Purgatorio* XXXIII,\(^{384}\) Alcmaeon in *Paradiso* IV,\(^{385}\) and Semele in *Paradiso* XXI,\(^{386}\) but if the poet’s main source for these references is classical poetry, Dante would find Ovid to be informative than Statius. Ovid tells these stories in detail in the *Metamorphoses*, whereas for Statius, these figures are only the history and the future, respectively, of the main events he focuses on in the *Thebaid*. It seems that Statius’ poetry has little resonance for the story Dante needs to tell in *Paradiso*. The few possible exceptions—*Paradiso* I and II, and XXIII and XXV—will be treated more fully in the final chapter, in the context of exploring Dante’s “sacred” poetics.

\(^{382}\) Proto and Fosca have suggested that *Paradiso* XXIII: 1-9 echoes *Achilleid* I: 212-16, among other sources. Pietro Alighieri (I) suggested a resemblance between *Paradiso* XXIV: 10-12, and *Thebaid* I: 708. Singleton and Chiavacci Leonardi suggest a source for *Paradiso* XXVI: 85-87 in both *Thebaid* VI: 854-57 and an *Aeneid* passage. Sapegno, Singleton, Bosco and Reggio, Chiavacci Leonardi, Hollander, and Fosca have found a parallel between *Paradiso* XXVI: 130-35 and *Thebaid* VI: 799-801. Finally, both Bosco and Reggio have suggested that Dante was inspired by *Thebaid* I: 537-39 when writing *Paradiso* XXVII: 28-36.

\(^{383}\) Pietro Alighieri (I), Bosco and Reggio, and Chiavacci Leonardi all call attention to *Thebaid* I: 288 in notes on Dione and Cupid in *Paradiso* VIII: 7-9; Durling and Martinez point to *Thebaid* I: 115-17 in reference to Europa and Ulysses in *Paradiso* XXVII: 84; Proto suggested Statius’ lines about the Muses, *Thebaid* VIII: 553, and IX: 317, in relation to *Paradiso* XXIII: 55-59.

\(^{384}\) Sapegno, Singleton, Bosco and Reggio, Pasquini and Quaglio, Chiavacci Leonardi, and Durling and Martinez all make reference to *Thebaid* I: 66-67, as well as passages from *Metamorphoses*, in Notes on *Purgatorio* XXXIII: 47.


\(^{386}\) Sapegno, Bosco and Reggio, Chiavacci Leonardi, Hollander, and Fosca call attention to *Thebaid* III: 184-85, as well as *Metamorphoses* III: 253-315, in Notes on Par. XXI: 5-6.
those instances, Dante’s adaptations of Statius have as much to do with Dante’s creation and deployment of Stazio as with Statius’ works themselves. Perhaps Statius’ works have a place in *Paradiso* inasmuch as they can be mediated through the redeemed figure of Stazio.

While this chapter has largely offered a simplified overview, it is possible to discern some patterns in how Dante draws on Statius, and how his manner of adaptation shifts over the course of the *Commedia*. Medieval readers of Dante viewed Statius as one of the major influences on how Dante created and fleshed out his infernal setting. Moreover, once the pilgrims pass the gate of Dis, they encounter a number of Statius’ characters representing the sins of violence, fraud, and treachery. The *Thebaid* was an especially rich source for Dante in populating and describing the lower parts of his Hell. In addition, there is a final cluster of subtler Statian references concentrated in the lower circles of fraud and that of the traitors. Dante uses such references to Statius’ works in *Inferno* in order to help him describe the sins punished therein with great vividness, but also as part of a program of a complex meditation on literature and authority. Dante is often working to synthesize different poetic accounts or even to undermine other accounts in favor of his own depiction. But on the whole, Dante is fairly faithful to Statius’ original presentations in *Inferno*.

*Purgatorio* adds a different dimension to Dante’s reception of Statius, for it seems that one of his purposes there is to show that even the poet of such horrors as appear in *Thebaid* (or *Inferno*) can produce redemptive poetry, or, at least, find
personal redemption. Nonetheless, Dante must use more innovation to adapt some of his source material in *Purgatorio*, because apart from his portrayals of various women, who are honored in *Purgatorio* XXII and elsewhere, there is little in the *Thebaid* or *Achilleid* fit for *Purgatorio*, aside from additional exempla of vice.

*Purgatorio* also illuminates another interesting tendency of how Dante deals with characters that appear in Statius. It seems that Dante likes to explore classical stories from multiple perspectives, across generations, and by considering them in different frameworks of interpretation. Among characters drawn from Statius, Achilles, Thetis, Jason, Hypsipyle, Amphiaraus, Alcmaeon, and Ulysses all appear or are referenced in at least two of Dante’s canticles, but to different ends in each instance. There is more fruitful work to be done in discovering and analyzing other more subtle instances of Dante adapting Statius’ work, and what implications these adaptations might have for Dante’s view of Statius. There are certainly fewer evident incorporations of Statius’ works in *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* than in *Inferno*.

If Dante continues to use Statius’ works in *Paradiso*, then he chooses to do so in a concealed way. While it seems likely that Dante admired and appreciated Statius’ poetry, since there are so many instances where the Italian poet adapted Statius’ work into the *Commedia*, the figure of Stazio created by Dante may be the most important usage of Statius for the latter half of the *Commedia*. 
CHAPTER 5

PURGATORIO XXV AND DANTE’S “SACRO” POETICS

An examination of Dante’s treatment of Stazio is incomplete without looking at Stazio’s perplexing speech in Purgatorio XXV. Purgatorio XXV is a challenging canto, and Stazio’s discourse seems to be a digression in the middle of a series of cantos in which Dante engages with the nature of poetry and of the poet. Indeed, a number of critics over the past half-century have demonstrated that this “digression” is actually an integral part of Dante’s discourse on poetics, as well as providing philosophical principles foundational to Dante’s conception of man and the afterlife. Zygmunt G. Barański has provided an excellent account of the three main branches of criticism on this canto, as well as a convincing argument as to how Dante’s work cannot be understood without integrating these themes that scholarship tends to separate,\(^\text{387}\) in that one of Dante’s purposes here is to

\(^{387}\) The work of scholars such as Nancy Lindheim and Rachel Jacoff, who look at Purgatorio XXV as part of the conversation about the human body that Dante carries on throughout the Commedia, do a better job of bringing together these themes, because they recognize how Dante also integrates these seemingly disparate aspects elsewhere in the Commedia. In Nancy Lindheim, “Body, Soul, and Immortality: Some readings in Dante’s ‘Commedia,’” MLN 105 (1990): 1-32, Lindheim examines how Dante conveys his theories on the relationship between the body and the soul across Inferno XIII, Inferno XV, Purgatorio III, Purgatorio XVI, Purgatorio XXV, Paradiso VII, and Paradiso
demonstrate that poetry is not only a possible medium for doctrinal expression, but may be the best one. Many (mostly) American critics, Giuseppe Mazzotta, John Freccero, Dino Cervigni, have focused on the metapoetic themes within

XXIV-XXVI. This work is particularly valuable on how these cantos reveal the relationship between the body and writing poetry (11-15); Lindheim argues: “The primary significance of Statius’ speech, I think, lies in its justifying a ‘purged’ poetry that does not have to apologize for or repent its connections with the body” (15). Jacoff, in Rachel Jacoff, “Our Bodies, Our Selves’: The Body in the Commedia,” in Sparks and Seeds. Medieval Literature and its Afterlife. Essays in Honor of John Freccero, ed. Dana E. Stewart and Alison Cornish (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 119-38, focuses on Dante’s statements concerning the body in the afterlife, as found in Inferno VI, Purgatorio XXV, and Paradiso XIV, which, as she notes, are all spoken by poets. Ronald L. Martinez, in “Canto XXV: Statius’s Marvelous Connection of Things,” in Lectura Dantis, A Canto-by-Canto Commentary, ed. Allen Mandelbaum, Anthony Oldcorn, and Charles Ross (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2008), 277-87, has also sought to bridge these discussions. He builds upon Nardi’s argument (noted below), that Dante draws significantly on Albertus Magnus in this canto in order to show how such theories of generation and the possible intellect relate to Dante’s conception of poetry and inspiration.

388 Zygmunt G. Barański, “Canto XXV,” in Lectura Dantis Turicensis II, Purgatorio, ed. Georges Güntert and Michelangelo Picone (Florence: Cesati, 2001), 389-406. For his discussion of this theme, see particularly pp. 395-96. “Sono convinto da tempo che, nel caso del ‘poema sacro’, non si possa artificiosamente separare la dottrina (per non dire la ‘struttura’) dalla poesia. Purg XXV illustra questo fatto con grandissima efficacia e sofisticazione.... Dante spingeva la poesia in aree che tradizionalmente, nel mondo cristiano, costituivano l’appannaggio privilegiato della teologia e dell’esegesi biblica....la ragione che Dante sembra qui offrire è che esistono questioni...che la poesia, particolarmente quella di uno scriba Dei, può illuminare meglio della prosa teologica, per non parlare di quella dei filosofi” (396). Barański also shows how biblical texts are a far more important source for this canto than has previously been appreciated, and how these sources are necessary to effectuate the examination of human-divine synthesis at the heart of the canto (399).

389 Giuseppe Mazzotta, “Literary History,” in Dante, Poet of the Desert: History and Allegory in the Divine Comedy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 192-218. Mazzotta explains how Dante presents his ideas on poetics in the span of Purgatorio XXI-XXVI, and situates Purgatorio XXV as a vital part of the progression. Purgatorio XXV serves as the theological center between Purgatorio XXIV and Purgatorio XXVI, where Dante more directly engages with the question of how to be a poet (both by rejecting other models and presenting one of his own.)

390 Freccero’s writing on this subject includes John Freccero, “Manfred’s Wounds and the Poetics of the Purgatorio,” in Dante: The Poetics of Conversion, ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 195-208, where the author explores how Dante’s unorthodox depiction of Manfred relates to his presentation of the principles by which the aerial body operates. He argues that Stazio’s speech demonstrates overtly the analogy between the aerial bodies and Dante’s poem, but that this directness is unnecessary, since the principle is written all over the poem (202-203). However, Stazio’s speech is also a gloss upon the literary reflections in Purgatorio XXIV, and an expansion on the analogy between writing and procreation (203-207).

391 Dino Cervigni, “XXV” in Dante’s Divine Comedy Introductory Readings. II: “Purgatorio”, ed. Tibor Wlassics (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Printing Office, 1993), 362-79. Cervigni explores the implications of Dante’s definition of a human as a “fans;” or speaking being, seeing this
Purgatorio XXV. Additionally, scholars including Bruno Nardi, Etienne Gilson, Patrick Boyde, and, more recently, Manuele Gragnolati have written persuasively on the nuances of Dante's philosophical and theological beliefs, as point as a fundamental aspect of Dante's poetics. This move not only provides a foundation for Dante's claims about the possibilities of the vernacular, but also forges a link between man's creation and God's creation, in that God's creation of man, the Incarnation itself, and any divine communication with humans occurs through verbal acts (369).


393 Etienne Gilson, "Dante's Notion of a Shade: Purgatorio XXV," Mediaeval Studies 29 (1967): 124-142. Gilson staunchly argues that Dante's main doctrinal inspiration for the first part of the speech is the works of Thomas Aquinas, along with Aristotle as interpreted by Thomas (127-29). He also adds the interesting suggestion that Thomas may have inspired the treatment of the aerial bodies as well, through his discussion of the mechanics of the apparition of angels (133), though he also acknowledges Dante's Virgilian source (140).

394 Patrick Boyde, Dante Philomythes and Philosopher. Man in the Cosmos (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 270-81. Boyde’s argument includes the assertion that the main purpose of Stazio’s speech is to describe what is fundamental to human nature: "Man's immortality is a consequence of our unique mode of coming into being; and so too is everything else that is distinctively human in our nature. Our loves and our 'natural place', our language and its defects, our capacity to know the truth and the limits set upon our knowledge, our freedom to choose and the near impossibility of choosing well—these are all rooted in the same ground" (271). His work provides a foundation in the deficiencies in Aristotle's theory of change, especially as it affected accounts of human development, and the philosophical options available to Aristotle's interpreters, on the way to suggesting that Dante's account more closely follows Albert the Great than Thomas Aquinas, although both were utilized (273-76). Stazio emphasizes the embryo's continuity of development, until he wants to highlight a massive discontinuity—the divine intervention that transforms an animal into a man (276).

395 Manuele Gragnolati, “Embryology and Aerial Bodies in Dante's Comedy,” in Experiencing the Afterlife: Soul and Body in Dante and Medieval Culture (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 53-77. Gragnolati provides a very thorough account of the philosophical problem underlying the question of the development of the embryo, as well as the historical controversies resulting from attempts to solve this problem. He contrasts Thomas Aquinas with Bonaventure, rather than with Albert the Great. Gragnolati argues that Purgatorio XXV is intended to take an ambiguous stance on these matters, reflecting the existing debates and taking the best from either side, rather than firmly favoring one side over the other. By doing so, Dante creates his own unique theory of embryological development. Gragnolati also gives a convincing explanation as to why the first part of the speech is a necessary groundwork for the theory of the aerial bodies, and the anthropology Dante creates through both parts of the speech, including how he uses these ideas to support the idea his work creates of the soul's experience between death and the Last Judgment, which is a definite break with Thomas Aquinas' explanations.
displayed in this canto, and about the range of sources on which Dante draws in the expression of his views, although no consensus has been reached as to which of Dante's sources was primary to him. Finally, a third set of scholars, including Vittorio Russo, Giorgio Padoan, and Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, along with Zygmunt Barański, has more effectively combined these approaches, within the context of an examination of existing literary traditions, in order to consider the richness of Dante's approach in this canto. The treatment in this chapter will also focus especially on the metaliterary aspects of the canto, as they seem to be the most relevant to the figure of Stazio, but Dante's poetic and doctrinal sources and principles must also inform the assessment that follows.

Despite all this work, few scholars have attempted to answer why Dante calls upon Stazio in particular to give the *Purgatorio* XXV speech, although several plausible answers have been offered. The fact that Dante first requests an answer from Virgil, who then appeals to Stazio, indicates that it is a question Virgil is not really equipped to answer, which is a continuation of the rivalry and/or tension

396 Vittorio Russo, “A proposito del canto XXV del Purgatorio,” in *Studi di filologia romanza offerti a Silvio Pellegrini* (Padua: Liviana, 1971), 507-43. Russo examines the way the literary tradition was already engaging with doctrinal questions.

397 Giorgio Padoan, “Il canto XXV del ‘Purgatorio,’” in *AA.VV. ‘Purgatorio’ Letture degli anni 1976-79* (Rome, Bonacci, 1981), 577-600. Padoan strives to account for why Stazio gives this speech, including pointing out a relevant passage from the *Thebaid*, and why it occurs at this juncture. He also discusses the Virgilian source for the aerial bodies in the second part of the speech. Padoan emphasizes that Dante's position regarding his own work is always that he is providing the real, sole, divinely-given truth on a matter.


399 Padoan and Martinez have addressed this question, as has Winthrop Wetherbee, in *The Ancient Flame: Dante and the Poets* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008).
Dante has created between the two poets.\textsuperscript{400} Moreover, it is necessary that a Christian poet give this discourse, which features philosophy and theology brought together into a doctrine with rich, though veiled, implications for poetics. Virgil, though a poet, lacks the capacity to understand the theology underpinning Dante’s anthropology and personal poetics. The veiled poetic themes within this canto, which will be discussed in more detail shortly, also require a poet to present them, both so that the speaker himself understands the unspoken themes of his speech, and so that the reader can know to read the speech in light of poetics. Stazio is an especially ideal candidate because, as Martinez writes: “as a Christian imitator of Vergil he ideally mediates pagan and Christian civilization.”\textsuperscript{401} Finally, Dante might need this speech to fall at a particular point in the narrative, and Stazio is the most suitable speaker among the available poets. While all of these answers have some validity, they do not fully account for Dante’s motivations in choosing Stazio to present the speech on embryology and aerial bodies. A small number of critics have suggested that Stazio’s \textit{Purgatorio XXV} speech is related to his earlier speeches in \textit{Purgatorio} XXI and XXII, especially in relation to his conversion, and this chapter will make a similar contention. To understand why Stazio gives the \textit{Purgatorio XXV} speech (and why it is significant that he does so), one must look at several cantos between which Dante established numerous verbal and thematic connections: \textit{Purgatorio} XXI, XXII, and XXV, as well as \textit{Paradiso} XXIII and XXV. A consideration of

\textsuperscript{400} It could be noted, as other critics have observed, that Virgil has demurred from answering a similar question before, in \textit{Purgatorio} III: 31-44.

\textsuperscript{401} “Canto XXV: Statius’s Marvelous Connection of Things,” 284.
these cantos together will show that Dante uses Stazio in order to define the
Commedia, and to impart important truths about being a writer and reader.

5.1 The Statian Cantos

A close reading of Stazio’s cantos demonstrates that Dante took great care to
set up many parallels between Purgatorio XXI and XXII and Purgatorio XXV. Many
critics have noted some of these parallels, but these correspondences have generally
been treated individually, rather than in relation to one another. When added
together, an impressive web of connections between these cantos is formed, and
one that gestures to some of the reasons why Dante selected Stazio to give the
Purgatorio XXV speech. One of the first points worth noting is that Dante establishes
Stazio as an authority on the physics and metaphysics of the afterlife in Purgatorio
XXI, when the ancient poet explains that the mountainquake has a soteriological
explanation rather than a meteorological one (XXI: 40-72). As he also does in
Purgatorio XXV, Stazio provides a more thorough and contextualized answer than
the actual question seems to require. It is not sufficient for him to explain that the
mountain shook because his soul was ready to ascend without also clarifying that
there could be no physical changes on the mountain because this would violate
God’s law. Stazio’s description of the change in his will also establishes that the poet
depdeeply understands the workings of the soul, especially in the purgatorial
environment, matters he expands on in Purgatorio XXV when depicting the divine
in-breathing of the human soul (XXV: 67-75) and the capacity of the soul,
temporarily divided from its body until Judgment Day, to will an aerial body into being (88-108).

In addition, Dante fills *Purgatorio* XXV with a number of thematic and verbal reminiscences of *Purgatorio* XXI and XXII. Stazio echoes Virgil’s reference to the Fates—

“Ma perché lei che di e notte fila
non li avea tratta ancora la conocchia
che Cloto impone a ciascuno e compila” (XXI: 25-28)

—as his discourse shifts from the creation of the human soul to the workings of the soul in the afterlife: “‘Quando Làchesis non ha più del lino, / solvesi da la carne’” (XXV: 79-81). Moreover, both cantos address the physical manifestations of inner thoughts and feelings. When Virgil desires Dante not to reveal his identity, Dante keeps silent, but finds himself unable to keep his composure, “‘ché riso e pianto son tanto seguaci / a la passion di che ciascun si spicca’” (XXI: 106-107). Stazio observes the resulting smile, and asks what prompted it, for he too understands the connection between passions and their expression. Later in *Purgatorio* XXV, Stazio stresses that the shade bodies continue to possess the powers of expression, for the form of the aerial body mimics the internal passions:

“quindi ridiam noi;
quindi facciam le lagrime e ’ sospiri
che per lo monte aver sentiti puoi.” (XXV: 103-105, also 97-108)

Finally, Stazio’s wry self-deprecation in XXI: “‘quand’ io dismento nostra vanitate, / trattando l’ombre come cosa salda’” (XXV: 135-36) coupled with this explanation to Virgil that

“veramente più volte appaion cose
che danno a dubitar falsa matera

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are an excellent preface to *Purgatorio* XXV, in which Stazio explains the true workings of the shade bodies.

These parallels might seem fairly insignificant if Dante were not deploying them to some greater purpose. But there remain several additional thematic parallels that help reveal why Dante has so loaded Stazio’s cantos with connections between each other. These examples concern matters of poetics in *Purgatorio* XXI and XXII, so that their correspondences with *Purgatorio* XXV help bring out the fact that *Purgatorio* XXV is, among other things, also a canto on Dante’s poetics. The way Stazio opens his lecture—“lume ti fiero al come che tu die’” (XXV: 36) recalls the metaphor both he and Virgil used to describe Stazio’s process of conversion, the lights that guided him to God (XXII: 61-69).

The use of light imagery to convey intellectual illumination is of course a commonplace in Dante and in literature generally, but since Stazio is the speaker in *Purgatorio* XXV, the audience should call to mind the high import of the context in which he had first used this imagery. Moreover, his admonition to Dante—“Se le parole mie, / figlio, la mente tua guarda e riceve”—recalls Stazio’s own process of careful reception and interpretation in his two conversions. He explains that he turned away from prodigality because “‘io intesi là dove tu chiame....Allor m’accorsi....e pente’mi” (XXV: 34-35, XXII: 38, 43, 44). His Christian conversion required even more contemplation and consideration:

“la parola tua sopra toccata
si consonava a’ nuovi predicanti;”

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402 “‘qual sole o quai candele / ti stenebraron si’” (XXII: 61-62); “‘prima appresso Dio m’alluminasti. / Facesto come quei che va di notte, / che porta il lume dietro’” (XXII: 66-68).
By pairing the image of an illuminating guide and the instruction to ruminate on a teaching, as given by Stazio, Dante evokes the themes of interpretation and poetics, suggesting that these themes are an important subtext to this discourse.

Both speeches also draw on the themes of fecundity and pregnancy, and employ the commonplace of these themes representing the fruitfulness of literary discourse. In *Purgatorio* XXV, such themes occur as the actual substance of the discourse on the development of the human embryo. However, this subject also recalls Stazio’s metaphorical usage of these concepts in describing the process of his conversion:

> “Già era ’l mondo tutto quanto pregno
de la vera credenza, seminata
per li messaggi de l’eterno regno.” (XXII: 76-78)

In his imagery, the Christian message is the seed that bears fruit in those who hear it, imagery that recalls Christ’s parable of the sower. Just as in the biblical texts, the gospel message is the seed that can grow to bear fruit. Earlier, Stazio had used the same image to discuss Virgil’s positive influence:

> “Al mio ardor fuor seme le faville,
che mi scaldar, de la divina fiamma
onde sono allumati più di mille.” (XXI: 94-96)

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403 Martinez has also examined some of the themes of fertility and gestation in these cantos, in “Canto XXV: Statius’s Marvelous Connection of Things,” 285.

404 This parable is found in the three synoptic gospels: Matthew 13:3-8, 18-23, Mark 4:3-20, and Luke 8:5-15. In that Stazio is a thoughtful and receptive reader, he would seem to represent the seed that falls on good soil; yet, the fact that he failed to produce visible fruit of his Christianity, by keeping silent out of fear of persecution would seem to classify him among those who become choked by the cares of the world.
While many English translations render this “seme” in a way that decouples it from the biological significance of the word, Dante-poet tends to use this term and its derivatives in situations where he wants to evoke biological fertility and resulting progeny. Through Stazio, Dante-poet indicates that the gospel is not the only text that can be the seed of positive change, which is an important step for his self-justification of the value of his own work. What is more, Stazio’s use of this commonplace provides for the embryology discourse a subtext concerning texts themselves, and their readership. This theme will be explored in more detail below, as it is central to Dante’s decision to use Stazio to relate this lesson.

Moreover, Stazio’s earlier speeches are relevant to the second half of the *Purgatorio* XXV speech as well. As noted above, the dominant metaphors Stazio uses to describe the process of inspiration and creation in *Purgatorio* XXI and XXII are images of light and heat. So too, Stazio’s three metaphors that attempt to convey the process of embryo development and the nature of the shade bodies in *Purgatorio* XXV appeal to the mysteries of heat, light, and fire. He compares “‘lo motor primo’” breathing the “‘spirito novo’” into the embryo to “‘il calor del sol’” transforming grape juice into wine (XXV: 70-78). He likens the appearance of shade bodies to rainbows formed by the rain-filled air reflecting light (XXV: 91-96). He pairs this image with a second one, that of the visible flame that “‘segue il foco là ’vunque si muta’” (XXV: 98). By the selection of metaphors in the same family as those often associated with the creative process, ones which Dante’s chosen speaker has himself

405 Stazio also notably refers to Virgil as his poetic “mamma” and “nutrice,” further images of the natural fecundity of literary enterprise (XXI: 97, 98).
used recently, Dante signals that this discussion is a veiled presentation of the process of poetic inspiration.\textsuperscript{406} The use of this imagery not only helps build a rationale for why Stazio should deliver this speech, but also illumines how Dante has been preparing his readers to receive this message.

While many of these themes recur throughout Dante’s work, there is another cluster of particular similarities found in the middle of \textit{Paradiso}, cantos XXIII and XXV, that build upon the themes of the Statian cantos in \textit{Purgatorio}.\textsuperscript{407} \textit{Paradiso} XXIII: 55-60 refers to the inspiration of the Muses and the milk of Parnassus in a way that recalls the discussions of Virgil and Stazio in \textit{Purgatorio} XXII: 58, 64-66, and 100-105. Moreover, lines 67-69 use the imagery of a daring sea voyage as a metaphor for the enterprise of writing or reading, an image that recalls Statius’ ending to the \textit{Thebaid}, the nautical imagery used by Virgil when asking about Stazio’s conversion in \textit{Purgatorio} XXII, as well as Dante’s previous usage of this image in the opening to \textit{Paradiso} II. Later, in \textit{Paradiso} XXV, Dante discusses his earthly hopes for the future of his poetry in a way that corresponds to elements of the autobiography he constructed for Stazio. Dante’s lines:

\begin{quote}
Ritornerò poeta, e in sul fonte
del mio battesmo prenderò 'l cappello;
però che ne la fede (\textit{Par. XXV}: 8-10)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{406} At the same time, it is worth noting that while these metaphors share common substances, the relationship between these substances differs significantly.

\textsuperscript{407} Warren Ginsburg has also looked at the connections between the Statian cantos and the \textit{Paradiso} examination cantos. Warren Ginsburg, “Dante, Ovid, and the Transformation of Metamorphosis” \textit{Traditio} 46 (1991): 205-233. While this treatment focuses on \textit{Paradiso} XXIII and XXV, Ginsburg has noted that the opening simile of \textit{Paradiso} XXIV also uses imagery that brings to mind Stazio’s description of the digestive process and the mystical body (218).
call to mind Stazio’s references to his own poetic identity and coronation (*Purg. XXI: 85-90*), and to his baptism, which he also connects to his poetic output (*XXII: 88-89*).

Moreover, Stazio’s *Purgatorio XXV* explanation of the development of the soul, as combined with Dante’s self-description as poet in *Purgatorio XXIV*, provides a subtext for the event that occurs in *Paradiso XXIII*. In *Paradiso*, Dante describes how his very being is transformed:

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Come foco di nube si diserra
per dilatarsi si che non vi cape,
e fuor di sua natura in giù s’atterra,
la mente mia così, tra quelle dape
fatta più grande, di sé stessa uscio,
e che si fesse rimembrar non sape. (*Par. XXIII*: 40-45)
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Such a significant transformation may call to mind Stazio’s description of the point of development at which God breathes a human soul into the embryo:

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"lo motor primo a lui si volge lieto
sovra tant’ arte di natura, e spira
spirito novo, di vertù repleto,
che ciò che trova attivo quivi,
in sua sustanza, e fassi un’alma sola,
che vive e sente e sé in sé rigira. " (*Purg. XXV*: 70-75)
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408 It is even possible that Beatrice’s smile, which is both the pretext and proof of Dante’s transformation, is meant to recall Dante’s fateful smile in *Purgatorio XXI*, which caused Virgil’s identity to be uncovered. Moreover, as Lindheim points out, in *Paradiso XXV* Dante looks forward with hope to the resurrection of the body, whereas *Purgatorio XXV* is concerned with the state of the aerial body in the liminal time between death and the Last Judgment. Lindheim, 27.

409 Although the specific imagery is different, it seems possible that Dante drew inspiration for this simile from *Thebaid X*: 674-77, which also uses the image of lightning to denote a change in mind and being not dissimilar to an apotheosis. Statius’ passage describes what happens to Menoeceus when he realizes that he is the personal sacrifice that can ensure Thebes’ success; what is more, this passage occurs not long before the one concerning the anguish of Menoeceus’s mother (*X*: 804), in which Statius plays on the dual meaning of “*sacra*.” As the second chapter argued, it seems distinctly possible that the episode of Menoeceus, and specifically the “*sacra*” passage, inspired some of Dante’s choices for his portrayal of Stazio.
By this divine action, the creature becomes human, or, more specifically, “‘divegna fante,’” becomes one who can speak (XXV: 61). Similarly, the transformation in Paradiso XXIII builds upon the one Dante has already undergone, the experience of “transumanar” in Paradiso I. Dante is now endowed with the faculties appropriate to this experience: those necessary for him to recount much of what he encounters and learns in Paradiso. While these experiences are necessarily distinct, it does seem that Dante means Paradiso XXIII to recall Purgatorio XXV. The poet uses this connection to provide part of the divine justification for his work, and to explain the specific power that enabled him to create the Commedia. The passages following the description of his empowerment make it clear that this enterprise is something Dante is uniquely and divinely qualified to do. Previously, Dante described his activity as a poet by saying:

“I’ mi son un che, quando
Amor mi spira, noto, e a quel modo
ch’e’ ditta dentro vo significando.” (Purg. XXIV: 52-54)

Now, through what may be called God’s “spirando” in Paradiso XXIII, Dante’s capacities to both “notare” and “significare” are sufficiently enlarged so that he is capable of writing the Commedia. By laying the necessary theological and poetic framework in Purgatorio, and using textual similarities to remind his audience of the pertinent cantos, Dante helps his audience comprehend what sort of step he is taking in Paradiso.

However, the element connecting these sets of cantos that should be particularly emphasized is that, in them, Dante uses the adjective “sacro” in the context of discourse concerning poetry. In Purgatorio XXII, Stazio uses this word in
his evocation of the Virgilian passage that saved his life: “Per che non reggi tu, o sacra fame / de l’oro, l’appetito de’ mortali?” (XXII: 40-41); in Paradiso XXIII and XXV, alongside the passages we have been examining, Dante uses a form of this adjective to describe his own poem: “convien saltar lo sacrato poema” (XXIII: 62) and “Il poema sacro / al quale ha posto mano e cielo e terra” (XXV: 1-2). Many readers have commented on Stazio’s “mistranslation” of Virgil’s Aeneid in Purgatorio XXII, with some even assuming that Dante himself had made a mistake, rather than a conscious choice. Since the passage Stazio draws on for the attribution of his moral conversion, the beginning of Aeneid III, is one to which Dante frequently returns, it seems very unlikely that he grossly misread this passage.  

Moreover, as other scholars have established, it does seem that Dante chose this passage intentionally for the purpose of being misread by Stazio, since Virgil composed other passages that more directly critique prodigality. These scholars have done excellent work on the import of Stazio’s misreading for Dante’s poetics, but a vital part of Stazio’s misreading has generally been overlooked: the ambiguity

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410 Dante had named Polydorus, who was the subject of these lines of Virgil’s (upon being killed on account of other men’s “cursed hunger” for gold) only two cantos back (Purg. XX: 115). Moreover, Polydorus’ fate—inhabiting a tree, and communicating through painful exsanguination when Aeneas plucks his leaves—inspires the contrapasso of Inferno XIII, which, along with Purgatorio XXV, is one of the major cantos in which Dante discusses the body in the afterlife. Lindheim discusses the relationship between Inferno XIII and Purgatorio XXV in “Body, Soul, and Immortality: Some readings in Dante’s Commedia,” 11-15.

411 For instance, L. A. Mackay has pointed out: “There are plenty of passages in Virgil, as Dante surely knew, that express direct opposition to prodigality; not only in the Georgics, but in, for example, the seventh and eighth books of the Aeneid.” L. A. Mackay, “Statius in Purgatory,” Classica et Medievalia 67 (1965): 303. Mackay concludes that this choice occurs so as to ensure sufficient hermeneutic ingenuity, which is certainly part of Dante’s motive. But this chapter will contend that the presence of “sacer” in the chosen quotation is equally necessary.
of the Latin "sacer." In Virgil's text, it is fairly clear that the poet means the "sacra fames" to signify an unholy hunger; yet, Dante has Stazio interpret this phrase as denoting a holy desire, because the Latin "sacer" is an auto-antonym, or contranym, a word that can signify both one meaning and that meaning's opposite. Chapter 2 noted that Dante's choice of "sacer" in Stazio's autobiography may be a sign of his close reading of Statius' work, because Statius plays on the ambiguity of the term in a significant locus in the Thebaid. However, even if the similarity with Statius' passage is coincidental, it seems possible that that Dante intentionally selected for Purgatorio XXII a passage that used "sacer" in order to transform that word, and subsequently the passage, to signify the opposite of what Virgil had intended by those lines. Moreover, the substance of this transformation is a significant sign of Dante's approach to his poetics, and another significant reason why it is necessary for Stazio to deliver the speeches in Purgatorio XXI, XXII, and XXV.

5.2 “Sacro” in the Commedia

5.2.1 Dante’s Use of “Sacro”

While Dante can turn the ambiguity of the Latin “sacer” to his benefit in Stazio’s “misreading” of Virgil, it is intriguing that Dante chooses to use Italian derivatives of “sacer” elsewhere in the poem when one considers the historical ambiguity of the Latin term, and the availability of a non-controversial word: “santo” in its various forms. There may be some signs that Dante’s own commentators were surprised by his choice. For instance, Francesco da Buti incorrectly includes “santa” in his account of how Stazio translates Virgil’s Latin: “e tutto viene ad una intenzione e così si possano esponere li ditti di Virgilio, secondo l’una esposizione come secondo l’altra, pilliando sacra per santa, e cogis per reggi, e quid, perché.” While Francesco correctly cites Dante’s lines elsewhere in this gloss, this mistake suggests that he (or at least, a later transcriber) at some level would have expected Dante to use “santo” rather than “sacro.” Dante does use a form of “santo” about a hundred times over the course of the Commedia, and it is used with particular frequency in Paradiso, where Dante describes both the holy atmosphere of Paradise and the saints that populate it. By contrast, he uses an Italian form of “sacer” only fifteen times.

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413 Francesco da Buti, Commento di Francesco da Buti sopra La Divina Commedia di Dante Allighieri, ed. Crescentino Giannini, 3 vols (Pisa: Fratelli Nistri, 1858-62). Ed. Lexis Progetti Editoriali, 2001, Note on Purgatorio XXII: 25-54. Moreover, both Francesco and Jacopo della Lana (note to Purgatorio XXII: 37-42) gloss this instance of “sacra” as meaning “santa.” While these instances are simple explanatory glosses, it is also worth noting that neither figure needs to provide any gloss for Dante’s various uses of “santo.” Thus, their practice implies at least that “sacro” was not an adjective as commonly used as “santo,” and perhaps also that while “sacro” could be defined as “santo,” the identity did not hold for the reverse.
Dante’s less frequent use of “sacer” corresponds with what can be determined about general usage of forms of “santo” and “sacro” in Dante’s time. A search of the Opera del Vocabolario Italiano finds 3,834 instances of a form of “santo” in texts dated before 1321; a search for forms of “sacro” or “sacrato” for the same time period results in only 52 instances. Moreover, a search of the nouns Dante qualifies with “sacro,” searching for when they are paired with any form of “santo” or any form of “sacro,” produces the result that in contemporary Italian, these nouns were, at best, as likely to have been paired with “santo” as with “sacro.”

With several words, the pairing of the noun with “santo” was far more likely than one with “sacro.” These results indicate that Dante’s use of “sacro” in the Commedia was very deliberate, though some of the choices may have been made for poetic reasons, such as rhyme scheme, rather than strictly semantic ones.

What is more, many of the instances in which Dante uses “sacro” over “santo” appear in contexts that may suggest that Dante wanted to maintain the double meaning of the Latin “sacer” in his usage. The sole instance of “sacri” in Inferno

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414 For each of Dante's 14 “sacro” nouns (“poema” is repeated) a search for pairings was performed in six ways. Using “porta” as an example, the searches took the form: "port.* sacr.*", "sacr.* port.*", "port.* sanct.*", "sant.* port.*", "port.* sanct.*", and "sanct.* port.*". The form ".*" enables the search to find all possible word ending combinations, and any false results were discarded. The word order of the pairings was varied in order to capture all possibilities. This dissertation will simplify how it refers to words on this list by naming only one ordering for each noun-adjective pair, and omit the “sanct.” spelling variation. However, results do account for all possible forms and combinations. While the sample sizes are small, the results indicate that in each case, it would have been grammatically sound to select “santo” instead of “sacro.” Moreover, in the majority of cases, the results for “noun + sacro” are nearly all instances from commentaries on Dante, or, at least, texts dating to after the Commedia.

415 In addition to noting where Dante does use “sacro” in the poem, it is worth pointing out where he does not. Although Dante uses the phrase “Sacra Scriptura” in Monarchia III.iv.1 and “sacratissima scriptura” in De vulgari eloquentia Liv.2, in the Commedia he only uses the adjectives “divina” (Par. XXIX: 90) and “santa” (Par. XXII: 68) when describing the Scriptures. However, it does seem that the pairing of “scrittura” (or “scriptura”) with “santa” (or “sancta”) was the more popular
appears in canto XXVII, when Guido da Montefeltro describes the collusion in public affairs conducted between two ostensibly religious men. Guido explains that “Lo principe d’i novi Farisei” who seeks his advice disregards the “ordini sacri” by which both he and Guido are bound. Even if “sacro” were the adjective commonly used to refer to the holy orders in the Middle Ages, the fact that Dante does not always use “sacro” in that context in the Commedia may suggest that Dante means to signify ambiguity or uncertainty about the “holiness” of the vows of both individuals.416 Moreover, a similar usage is found in Paradiso III, where Piccarda Donati describes the past of Costanza, who also broke her holy vows, though not entirely through her own will: “sorella fu, e così le fu tolta / di capo l’ombra de le sacre bende” (Par. III: 113-14).417 Though her vow was also broken for her by another, the rest of this canto and the next explains how the wills of these women were sufficiently complicit as to merit their placement in the sphere of the Moon. While Dante does not doubt the holiness of the vows themselves, he may, through his choice of language, be indicating the ambiguous character of these situations by choosing “sacra” over “santa.”

While not all of the instances in which Dante chooses to use “sacro” can be accounted for here, it is worth pointing out that he also describes many of the

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416 Guido’s “ordini sacri” is one of the cases where it seems that Dante could have chosen either “santo” or “sacro” as his adjective. Before the Commedia, there are 2 instances of “sant*” and 3 of “sacr*” with this noun; through 1400, there are about 26 instances of “sant*” and 25 of “sacr*.”

417 There are no instances of “sant* bend*” in the OVI, and no instances of “sacr* bend*” before the Commedia.
liminal spaces of Purgatory with the adjective “sacro” rather than “santo.” Dante twice refers to the great door into Purgatory proper as being a “sacrata” or “sacra” door, perhaps so as to signify the soul’s process of moving from unholiness to holiness, through entering the stage of purgation. Though he tends to use “santo” to describe the mountain itself, its stairs, and its inhabitants, Dante-poet returns to the adjective “sacro” when he describes the stream running through Earthly Paradise (XXXI: 1-3), itself a transitional space where the inhabitants have been purged of their sins and left the purgation stage of the mountain but have yet to ascend to the blessedness of Paradise. Moreover, the stream represents not only a geographical boundary, but a psychological and spiritual one as well: Lethe prevents Dante from crossing to Beatrice before he has confessed to her, and after this confession, the river purges his memories of all his sins. Perhaps Dante uses the adjective “sacro,” as he did elsewhere describing broken holy vows, so as to convey a sense of the duality of these spaces. They are “holy,” certainly, but perhaps not in the same way that other people and places in the Commedia can be termed “santi.” It also might be worth noting that these objects not only represent transitional experiences, they have a temporary, rather than eternal, existence.  

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The sole use of “sacro monte” is found in Purgatorio XIX: 37-39.

The idea of “sacro” being the appropriate way to characterize the holiness of a transitional state may also explain why Cacciaguida characterizes that which drives his interactions with Dante as a “sacro amore”: “ma perché ‘l sacro amore in che io veglio / con perpetua vista e che m’aseta / di dolce disiar, s’adempia meglio” (Par. XV: 64-66). In the same lines, he establishes this desire as something he is striving to fulfill. Moreover, he will successfully express this love and fulfill this desire through this very conversation. However, Dante may also use this language, along with the overt reference to Aeneid VI several lines above, in order to remind the reader of the Aeneas-Anchises pairing, as well as Dante’s own Virgil-Stazio interaction that echoes Virgil’s text. Unlike his poetic predecessors, Dante achieves true communion with his ancestor, which is conveyed by not
Dante also uses the adjective “sacro” when discussing historical transitions and turning points in relation to Christianity. When Justinian is describing the work of the Holy Spirit in Europe in the centuries between the conversion of Constantine and the rule of Justinian, he explains that it ruled the world “sotto l’ombra de le sacre penne” (Par. VI: 7). Moreover, the final instance of “sacre” in the Commedia is found in Paradiso XXXII, where John explains the arrangement of the divine rose to the pilgrim. Once more, Dante chooses the word “sacre” for use in a context of liminality and the divide between Christianity and pre-Christianity, though notably, here is a point where these inequalities are made equal:

“perché, secondo lo sguardo che fée
la fede in Cristo, queste sono il muro
a che si parton le sacre scalee.” (Par. XXXII: 19-21)

Together, these two passages may indicate that the term “sacro” is especially appropriate for the context of the transition between the classical/pre-Christian world and the Christian world.

While this analysis has possibly stretched the meaning of Dante’s “sacro,” it can be maintained that there is a common element throughout these usages, even if the application takes different forms. “Sacro” being a fitting adjective for navigating the transition between classical and Christian culture also helps explain

getting caught up in matters concerning the lower order of the body (i.e., their ability to embrace physically).
From a historical and philological perspective, “sacro amore” is the most curious of Dante’s usages of “sacro.” By 1367, there are already almost 60 instances of “amore” with “santo,” including at least 10 predating the Commedia. But the only two instances of “sacro amore” in the OVI come from Dante’s verse and a commentary upon it.

420 What is more, although he does not reference the concept of “sacro,” Martinez has noted that Purgatorio XXV also shares this liminal quality: “The horizon of rising matter and descending spirit is, in fact, the guiding principle of Stazio’s entire discourse in Canto XXV, which describes a series of informative acts in which the relation of active to passive reiterates, in several contexts, the figure of the boundary, or horizon,” “Canto XXV,” 281.
Dante’s use of “sacra” in Stazio’s translation of the *Aeneid*. Moreover, in that the *Commedia* itself is meant to mediate between the classical and Christian traditions, and in that Dante envisions his work as liminal—both a peak and a turning point in literary history—his description of his “poema sacro” seems very fitting. However, there seems to be yet more behind Dante’s use of the adjective to describe his poem, and this significance is connected to the Stazio cantos. Dante’s use of the adjective to refer to a literary situation in *Purgatorio* XXII, *Paradiso* XXIII, and *Paradiso* XXV, along with the many thematic and verbal connections between these cantos, suggests that Stazio’s cantos are relevant to the problem of what Dante means by “poema sacro.” The examination on this point will begin by looking more closely at the context of Stazio’s use of “sacra.”

### 5.2.2 “Sacro” in *Purgatorio* XXII and *Paradiso* XXIII and XXV

In that Stazio is merely making an easy (and invisible) translation from the Latin “sacra” to the Italian “sacra,” it might not seem that his choice of adjective is significant. However, it is important to remember that the theme of appearances versus reality recurs in all of Stazio’s speeches, and that these warnings are the context in which Dante’s Stazio offers his creative misreadings of Virgil’s texts. Moreover, Stazio’s very existence and status as a secret Christian seems itself to be a comment on the difficulty of disentangling appearances from realities.⁴²¹ This theme

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⁴²¹ Dante’s apparent stance on the *Achilleid* as unfinished, an assertion apparently in opposition to what most medieval readers believed, may be another variation on the theme of appearances versus reality.
informs Dante’s presentation of Stazio from the Latin poet’s first appearance. In the biblical allusion to Luke concerning the men on the way to Emmaus, which Dante uses to introduce Stazio, the disciples fail to realize that their interlocutor is Christ until he disappears (Purg. XXI: 7-10). Stazio too assumes wrongly that the two whom he meets must be other saved souls purging their sins (his “frati” to whom “Dio” “dea pace”), until Virgil corrects him about his own status, and points to Dante’s remaining P’s to explain his identity (XXI: 13-33). Stazio phrases his answer about the nature of the mountainquake as if to clear up a misconception that the quake resulted from a physical event, rather than a spiritual one (XXII: 40-48). As noted above, Virgil and Stazio verbalize this theme in the aftermath of Stazio’s attempted embrace: “trattando l’ombre come cosa salda” (XXI: 136). Dante-poet belabors the point by carrying it over to the following canto, where Virgil persistently makes a number of wrong assumptions about Stazio: that he was avaricious, rather than prodigal (XXII: 19-24), and that he was not a Christian when he wrote the Thebaid (XXII: 55-60). Stazio’s patient and gentle correction again stresses the point of not mistaking appearances and reality:

“Veramente più volte appaion cose
che danno a dubitar falsa matera
per le vere ragion che son nascose.” (XXII: 28-30)

422 As noted in Chapter 2, Virgil’s disbelief may be rooted in the medieval conception of auctores/poetae as morally perfect beings, a belief that Dante-poet needs to overturn in order to present himself as an auctor who is simultaneously a repentant sinner. But, as Stazio points out, he was not avaricious, but prodigal, because just as Virgil and the pilgrim saw in Inferno, the two sides of the sinful attitudes with respect to material possessions are punished together. Thus, Virgil is twice taken in by false appearances—he believes that a poet could not be morally imperfect, and he fails to recognize that Stazio could have been prodigal, rather than avaricious.
For Dante so to stress this point establishes the context in which his audience should interrogate Stazio’s (mis)interpretations of Virgil in this canto, and is especially relevant to the double meaning of “sacer.” This context is also very relevant to the interpretation of Stazio’s later speech, in *Purgatorio* XXV, which concerns much more than the surface-level discussion of the shade bodies and embryonic development. In both instances, which are so important for Dante’s communication of his poetics, Dante urges his readership to look beyond what is obvious in the text. Stazio’s reading of *Eclogue* IV as a Messianic prophecy is the less remarkable of his interpretations, as it follows medieval reading practices, and reflects the way some readers did indeed interpret that text. Stazio adds a Christian dimension to the text, newly obvious to him after hearing the early Christian preachers, but the poet does not otherwise alter Virgil’s words. However, Stazio’s reading of *Aeneid* III is noteworthy. While it is possible to construe each word individually in the way Stazio does, such a reading can only be done by removing each word from its context, since the burden of Stazio’s new interpretation falls on construing “sacra” as having a positive meaning rather than the negative meaning that Virgil’s context suggests. For “sacra” to pivot to the opposite signification changes the meaning of all the other words in the phrase. It is hard to say whether this move signals a great respect for the wide range of meanings precise words can convey, or a basic disregard for verbal significance. It seems strange that Dante-

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423 Simone Marchesi argues that Dante uses this scene to contrast between Virgil’s literal reading and Stazio’s new salvific, non-literal hermeneutics. Marchesi, 120-27.
poet, who in all his works shows such concern for the proper interpretation of his writings, could actually condone such loose interpretative practices. Yet, Stazio’s misreadings lead to his moral and religious conversions, which seems to indicate that Dante-poet does approve of such reading practices, at least, in particular circumstances. This idea will be considered and interrogated further.

Thus, the very word “sacra” is the perfect encapsulation for the ambiguity of Stazio’s act. It seems like a transgression, yet it is unmistakably one that led to holiness in Stazio’s own case. It seems possible that that one of the major reasons behind Dante’s selection of this particular Virgilian passage for Stazio to “misread,” is his desire to provide a context for his later use of the adjective “sacro” to describe his poem. Through Stazio’s translation, Dante associates “sacro” with practices of reading, writing, translation, the classical heritage, and above all, poetry; moreover, Stazio’s story brings out the inherent duality in this adjective, which should not be ignored as one examines Dante’s choice of “sacro,” rather than “santo,” as the adjective appropriate for discussing the Commedia. In his first usage of this descriptor for his work, Dante signals a turning point for the poem: “e cosi, figurando il paradiso, / convien saltar lo sacrato poema” (Par. XXIII: 61-62). The second use appears shortly thereafter, in between Dante’s examination on faith and that on hope: “ ‘l poema sacro / al quale ha posto mano e cielo e terra” (Par. XXV: 1-2). Both of these passages occur in contexts that recall significant elements from the Statian cantos of Purgatorio, and the Paradiso XXIII quotation is actually sandwiched between two references that should cause the reader to remember Purgatorio
XXII. Thus, it seems that Dante means his readers to hearken back to *Purgatorio* XXII in order to consider what this adjective signifies about Dante’s poem.425

Through combining the different connotations associated with Dante’s use of “sacra”—the dual meanings, the quality of ambiguous holiness, and the importance of reading and interpretation—it can be suggested that Dante’s poem is “sacra” in that it has the potential to be sacred or sacrilegious. Moreover, further engagement with the Statian cantos, including *Purgatorio* XXV, suggests that the *Commedia* is “sacro” in two ways: the poem is “sacro” because of the lofty claims Dante is making for his poem; and it is “sacro” because no matter the author’s intentions, it is necessary that readers interpret for themselves, and thus, they may at times misinterpret. While the first meaning is rather obvious, without the illumination of Stazio’s example, readers might miss the latter part that, just as “sacra” is a word that can be interpreted variously, it is in the interpretation of the *Commedia* that the real danger lies.

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424 “Se mo sonasser tutte quelle lingue / che Polimnia con le suore fero / del latte lor dolcissimo più pingue,/ per aiutarmi, al millesimo del vero / non si verria, cantando il santo riso / e quant o il santo aspetto facea mero; / e così, figurando il paradiso, / convien saltar lo sacrato poema, / come chi trova suo cammin riciso. / Ma chi pensasses il ponderoso tema / e l’omero mortal che se ne carca, / non biasmerrebbe se sott’esso trema; / non è pareggio da picciola barca / quell che fendendo va l’ardita prora, / né da nocchier ch’a sé medesmo parca” (*Par.* XXIII: 55-68, emphasis added). As noted above, the first lines call to mind the conversations between Stazio and Virgil on their sources of poetic inspiration. As will be examined further below, these lines evoke Stazio, who failed this challenge.

425 This chapter is not proposing that *Purgatorio* XXII is the only, or even the most important, text for understanding Dante’s description of his poem, but only that these connections are suggestive enough to be worth pursuing.
5.3 Dante’s Poem as Sacred or Sacrilegious

With regard to the sacredness of the *Commedia*, Dante never hides that he desires his work to be read not only as great art, but also as a source of truth as trustworthy as the Scriptures themselves. As Padoan writes:

Il fatto fondamentale, che non si deve perdere di vista, è che l’Alighieri nella *Divina Commedia* offre sempre non un parere più o meno accettabile e convincente e dimostrativo da porre al fianco di altre soluzioni offerte dalla speculazione scolastica: ma la soluzione che pretende di essere l’unica e la vera, per la quale non sempre la razionalità umana può essere sufficiente, e che è pertanto presentata al lettore come frutto di rivelazione da parte di autorità la cui parola non può essere messa in dubbio.\(^{426}\)

This is a lofty, and potentially blasphemous, claim. While, throughout the *Commedia*, Dante asserts the divine inspiration of his work and the divine ordination of his journey, the cantos this chapter has been examining are particularly focused on the justification for these grand claims. In *Purgatorio* XXIV, the pilgrim discusses the role of divine inspiration in human art, and defines his actions as a poet as giving linguistic form to what he is inspired to write. In *Purgatorio* XXV, as Barański has shown, the poet demonstrates that the inspiration of the *Commedia* shares a lineage of divine artistry with God’s creation of Adam and his infusion of the human soul; moreover, the uniquely human qualities of that divinely-given soul enable man to actively imitate the divine model of creativity. Just as the soul in the afterlife has the power to will into being an apparent body, which itself is a sign of human and divine

\(^{426}\) Padoan, 596-97. Emphasis in original.
cooperative action, Dante, through divine gift and inspiration, can write the poem that exalts both human and divine artistry.\footnote{Barański, 393-95. Barański shows how these activities share the commonality of working their artistry upon an inferior element. Martinez, in Ronald L. Martinez, "The Pilgrim’s Answer to Bonagiunta and the Poetics of the Spirit." Stanford Italian Review III No. 1 (Spring 1983): 37-63, has also discussed these issues in light of Purgatorio XXIV.}

The Paradiso builds upon this foundation in showing the various transformations Dante must undergo, in being and vision, in order to understand sufficiently to write the Commedia. Paradiso XXIII contains one of the most notable of these transformations, and at that point, Dante is given the chance to prove his understanding by means of the theological examination carried out by the saints in Paradiso XXIV-XXVI.\footnote{As V. Stanley Benfall has pointed out, a secondary motive of this examination is to emphasize the physical, textual nature of the Holy Scriptures in such a way that Dante’s own text can be a similarly authoritative source of truth. V. Stanley Benfell, "Biblical Truth in the Examination Cantos of Dante's Paradiso," Dante Studies CXV (1997): 89-109. The move to locate truth in a text is a very necessary one for Dante to make, since throughout his poem he is asserting that his version of the truth is at times superior to events as they actually transpired in history. Dante asserts that a divinely inspired text is a more authoritative source than divinely ordered historical events, if the two ever come into question. This argument is also a part of his ongoing veiled polemic with Augustine.} Since Dante wants his readers to believe in his authority, he builds a case for this authority as resting on divine inspiration. The very magnitude of these claims requires that they are either deeply holy, if accurately made, or deeply profane, if false. Thus, Dante institutes as one of his fundamental principles for the Commedia that God has ordained this text, and that Dante is personally endowed with both the opportunity and powers to write it. These facts determine the meaning of “sacro poema”: though the poem, and all Dante’s grand claims about it, could be blasphemous, they are in fact quite the opposite. But Dante acknowledges and wants to call attention to the tension in his grandiose claims,
which may be why he first uses a participle to refer to his poem: before he can name it as a sacred poem *simpliciter* (*Par. XXV*), he identifies it as a poem that has been made sacred: “sacro poema” (*Par. XXIII*). It is God who sacralizes the poem, for God is the ultimate source of Dante’s authority, as *Purgatorio* XXIV and XXV, these *Paradiso* cantos, and numerous other loci make clear.

Dante also uses these cantos to set himself apart from, and to show himself superior to all the figures of the classical tradition. His poem is one “al quale ha posto mano e cielo e terra” (*Par. XXV: 2*), just as God and Nature work together to create the human embryo in *Purgatorio* XXV. Moreover, Beatrice describes the light that transforms the pilgrim and enables him to see her smile as one that bridges heaven and earth:

\[
\text{la sapienza e la possanza} \\
\text{ch’apri le strade tra ’l cielo e la terra,} \\
\text{onde fu gia si lunga disianza. (Par. XXIII: 37-39)}
\]

The fact that it is a light that triggers Dante’s transformation calls to mind the “lamps” and “sun” Stazio and Virgil discussed in the story of Stazio’s conversion; however, Dante’s lights are of a magnitude that eclipses these earlier referents. Not only is the light Stazio found faint in comparison to the one Dante experiences, Dante’s light actively transforms his mind to be capable of writing his poem. Dante’s sun is the lamp of lamps, the source of all the other lights of inspiration. Just as this light bridges Heaven and Earth, so too Dante will bring together Heaven and Earth, spirit and matter, with his poetry. Dante’s whole conception of himself as poet, and the source of his greatness as a poet, is the fact that both heaven (God) and earth (himself) put forth creative effort into his poetry. Combined with the fact of Dante’s
considerable artistry, Dante proves himself to be a greater poet than anyone the classical tradition can offer.

While Dante’s use of Stazio as a positive example of reading, and as the mouthpiece for Purgatorio XXV will be examined shortly, Dante’s words in Paradiso XXIII and XXV are also calculated to demonstrate that Dante far outstrips Stazio as a poet. Dante gives warning to readers with small ambitions, who travel in small boats, like Statius’ “ratis” (Theb. XII: 809). While Stazio’s Christianity is enough to save his soul from hell, it makes little difference from an artistic standpoint, because he never let these truths infuse his work in a noticeable way.\footnote{429 It is possible that Dante did see certain signs of Christianity in Statius’ work; however, between Virgil’s assessment of the poetry, and Statius’ reception over the centuries, it can be agreed that there is nothing obviously Christian about his works.} As Stazio’s own testimony proves, Stazio witnessed a light that led him to Christianity, thus transforming his identity, including his identity as a reader; but, also by his own admission, this experience did not alter his poetic identity. Moreover, the way Dante completes his tercet may be another dig at Stazio, and those like him: “né da nocchier ch’a sé medesmo parca” (Par. XXIII: 69). As a Christian poet, Dante’s Stazio is a sailor who “spared himself,” earning multiple centuries on the terrace of acedia perhaps in part for his failure to write Christian poetry.\footnote{430 Dante spends little time defining the vice of acedia, but he does characterize it as “’per tepidezza in ben far messo’” (Purg. XVIII: 108). Thomas Aquinas describes acedia as a disposition opposed to hope, in that it provokes despair about the possibility of attaining the attainable, but arduous goods that are the object of hope (Summa Theologica II.II. Q. 20 A. 4). In this definition, Thomas is speaking about the theological virtue of hope. However, it is worth noting that both the theological virtue and the passion of hope (in other words, earthly hope) are defined as having the object of a future good that is difficult, but possible, to attain (ST II.II. Q. 17 A. 1 Respondeo; ST II.I. Q. 40 A. 1 Respondeo). Thus, it is possible that Dante also means to characterize Stazio’s acedia as a failure of earthly hope as well as of spiritual hope, and thus, one concerning his failure to write Christian poetry.} It is unlikely to be
accidental that Dante uses sailing imagery to describe the sin of acedia in Purgatorio XVII: 85-87:

L’amor del bene, scemo
del suo dover, quiritta si ristora;
qui si ribatte il mal tardato remo.”

Paradiso XXV also calls Stazio failure to mind, because Dante calls his poem “sacro” in the context of describing his earthly hopes for his poetry and his status as poet, but Stazio did not aim so high for his own poetry. In Purgatorio XVIII, Dante explicitly links acedia with the failure to seek glorious aims:

“E quella che l’affano non sofferse
fino a la fine col figlio d’Anchise
sé stessa a vita sanza gloria offerse.” (Purg. XVIII: 136-38)

One of Dante’s purposes in undermining the figure of Stazio in this way is to expose the insufficiency of the classical tradition. If even the Christian Stazio is Dante’s inferior, those poets lacking the knowledge of Christian truth could never hope to compare to Dante, no matter the level of their genius. Dante openly argues that no poetry lacking God’s inspiration could ever compare with his own, divinely ordained poetry:

Se mo sonasser tutte quelle lingue
che Polimnia con le suore sero
del latte lor dolcissimo più pingue,
per aiutarmi, al millesimo del vero
non si verria, cantando il santo riso
e quanto il santo aspetto facea mero. (Par. XXIII: 55-60)

As the rest of Paradiso XXV demonstrates, Dante’s earthly hopes for his poetry are appropriate because his poetry is meant to strengthen his readers in spiritual hope: “veduto il ver di questa corte, / la spene, che là giù bene innamora, / in te e in altrui di ciò conforte” (XXV: 43-45).
These lines are the evidence Dante points to in order to conclude, “thus (cosi), my “sacratum poema” must leap” (XXIII: 61-62). Dante differentiates himself from the poets of the classical tradition, and especially Virgil\textsuperscript{432} and Stazio, who, as noted above, reference the figures of the Muses and Mount Parnassus in discussing their own and each other’s poetry, with the implication that these sources are their sole and sufficient inspiration. In Paradiso XXIII, Dante uses the language of the classical tradition even as he demonstrates how he transcends this tradition.

Although Purgatorio XXIV-XXV is an early stage in Dante establishing himself as a Christian poet, it is a very important and calculated one. The fact that Dante seems to refer back to the process described in Stazio’s speech when he tells of his poetic transformation in Paradiso XXIII underlines how Stazio’s speech constitutes part of his process of self-authorization. Though Dante argues for his especial divine inspiration elsewhere, Stazio’s teaching provides a figure that stands for Dante’s own inspiration. In Paradiso, Dante continues to build on the ideas he lays out in Purgatorio XXV, even as he reinforces the inadequacy of those who had laid a foundation for him.

\textsuperscript{432} Dante’s interactions with Virgil throughout the course of the poem show that even Virgil, greatest of the classical poems, was lacking the light of ultimate truth. As Stazio’s explanation suggests, Virgil had only as much illumination as could reach him from the light held behind his back. The Commedia implicitly argues that Virgil accomplished great things with this limited illumination. However, as Dante’s Virgil himself admits many times, his powers ultimately failed. He never himself experienced the light that can bridge heaven and earth, and his poetry, however great, is ultimately inferior to Dante’s efforts, which benefit from a full experience of human and divine truth.
5.3.1 “Sacro”—as Subject to Interpretation

There is yet more to explore as to why Dante selected a Virgilian passage containing “sacro” to effect Stazio’s repentance, and why Dante calls attention to the shared use of “sacro” by providing reminiscences of the Statian Purgatorio cantos in Paradiso XXIII and XXV. Dante additionally recognizes that his work is ambiguously “sacro,” because even if he is writing thanks to the approval and authority of God, there can remain a divide between what an author intends and writes, and what a reader interprets. The problem of interpretation has been in Dante’s mind at least since Inferno V, in which he presented Paolo and Francesca as two naive readers. Not only do they misunderstand and misrepresent details of what they are reading, they use these misreadings in order to justify their sinful behavior.\(^{433}\) Even while she undergoes infernal punishment, Francesca remains obdurate in her misreading and her self-justification. It is necessary for Dante to offer a counterexample to bad reading in the process of his self-justification as poet and as he builds up support for his claims for the Commedia.\(^{434}\) In addition to Dante’s many direct addresses to his readers, Stazio’s conversion account make up a significant portion of his strategy to

\(^{433}\) Susan Noakes has written extensively on how Francesca is not only twisting the interpretation of the text to suit her ends, but also misrepresenting the details of the Arthurian text, such as which character initiates the kiss. Susan Noakes, *Timely Reading: Between Exegesis and Interpretation* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1988).

\(^{434}\) That Francesca and Stazio are shaped to mirror or invert each other is evident from their respective first words. Francesca greets Dante by saying: “O animal grazioso e benigno /.../ se fosse amico il re de l’universo, / noi pregheremmo lui de la tua pace, / poi c’hai pietà del nostro mal perverso” (Inf. V: 88, 91-93). When Stazio appears, he modifies these self-centered conditional statements into other-centric action. Since he is a friend of God, he does wish them: “Dio vi dea pace” (Purg. XI: 13). Moreover, rather than a generic captatio benevolentiae, he greets them with the familial “O frati miei.” Finally, he does not offer this wish because he perceives that the pilgrims view him favorably; rather, he does so because his soul is ordered and it is the fitting greeting for Purgatorio.
this end. If a pagan can read a pagan work and find Christianity within it, then there are certainly readers who can read Dante’s work correctly, and find the correct truths therein. Nevertheless, Dante recognizes the power readers hold over the perceived meaning of a text; Stazio’s own story is simultaneously a testament to the potential of the Christian intellect, and the acknowledgment that readers, even good and careful ones, may read into a text the opposite of what an author intended. Thus “sacro” is an apt adjective for Dante’s poema. In itself, according to its divine inspiration and seal, it is a holy poema. But Dante also aims so high—both in terms of difficulty and sublimity—that some readers may fail to understand his message, and others may willfully misinterpret it, as Francesca did. In the wrong hands, this text could certainly be read as an unholy poema.

The importance of the interpretation of Dante’s work becomes more evident when one considers the thesis of scholars like Barański that one of the most significant themes of Purgatorio XXV is the establishment of poetry as the best medium for the expression of complex truths. The very quality that makes poetry the best language for these matters, its capacity for multivalency, and the potential to express ideas that cannot easily be conveyed in direct or literal language, also ensures that poetry is more difficult to interpret than other forms of discourse. While writers must always face the possibility that their work could be misinterpreted or misapplied, the risk is even greater for poets. And the stakes

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435 This is a problem in human communication generally, which Dante brings out by defining man as “fante” in Purgatorio XXV. Being able to speak hardly matters if no one else can understand you. This problem motivates Dante’s discussion with Adam in Paradiso XXVI on the matter of the impermanence of particular human language but the continuation of human communication.
are so high for Dante, because the matters he must discuss stretch the human
capacity for understanding. Thus, Dante uses both Purgatorio XXII and XXV in order
to express—but also solve—the potential problem of Dante’s poem being “sacro” in
terms of how readers attempt to engage with the poem.

As part of the strategy for countering this problem, Dante does not merely
show that his text can be read properly, but additionally, is constantly preoccupied
with equipping his readers with this interpretative ability. He informs his readers of
his ambitions for the Commedia at several significant points in the text, which is
another sign that he is highly cognizant of the potentially dangerous nature of his
work. In fact, if one looks again at Paradiso XXIII, he sees that Dante calls his poem
“sacrato” as part of his argument as to why his readers must proceed with caution:

convien saltar lo sacrato poema,

... 
Ma chi pensasse il ponderoso tema
e l’omero mortal che se ne carca,
nol biasmerebbe se sott’ esso trema:
non è pareggio da picciola barca
quel che fendendo va l’ardita prora,
né da nocchier ch’a sé medesmo parca. (XXIII: 62, 64-69)

He is literally telling readers that if they were not prepared to read carefully, it
would be better if they closed the book. Fortunately, as on the terraces of Mount
Purgatory, Dante provides a positive example of the virtue he seeks, in addition to
prohibitions and negative examples. Although Stazio’s readings of Virgil’s texts
feature some questionable aspects, they also model good reading practices.

Stazio’s description of the process by which he comes to his conclusions is
necessary to establish the context in which such creative readings are appropriate.
He makes a distinction between merely reading a text and understanding the
message or truth of that text. Stazio places emphasis on the moment when he understood the true meaning of Virgil’s lines: “quand’io intesi là dove tu chiame, / crucciato quasi a l’umana natura” (Purg. XXII: 38-39). After that, “Allor m’accorsi che troppo aprir l’ali / potean le mani a spendere” (XXII: 43-44), and this knowledge caused him to repent and change his behavior. The distance between reading and understanding that seems to be at work here is yet another example of the theme of the importance of not mistaking appearances for reality that suffuses Stazio’s cantos. Though it would appear that Virgil’s text is criticizing avarice, Stazio uses the text to interpret his own soul and his own behavior, in order to realize that avarice’s opposite is a moral failing as well, and one he is committing.

Stazio also models good reading practices in his interpretation of the Fourth Eclogue, showing how context can aid understanding. Since Stazio was living in the context of the early Church spreading the Gospel, he was primed to understand Virgil’s lines as referring to Christ (Purg. XXII: 76-81). The metaphor he uses, of the world being pregnant with the gospel, implies that there was the potential for every individual to be “born again” as a convert, were he or she only able to understand the gospel message. Stazio’s attention to both Virgil and the preachers enabled him to see how the two sets of authorities affirmed each other, and shone the way to the truth of Christianity. That this conversion follows upon the similar story of his moral conversion shows how Stazio read his texts and his circumstances dynamically, against one another. Through Stazio, Dante models for his readers how to read an authority to one’s benefit. Though it appears that Stazio “misreads” Virgil, by reading against authorial intention, the context of his descriptions show that Dante
affirms this sort of reading when it is a reading that leads toward Christian virtue or salvation.

As several critics have noted, Stazio’s model of reading seems to have some features in common with Augustine’s *Regula Caritatis*, as discussed in *De Doctrina Christiana*, although with the important caveat that Augustine would not have countenanced reading non-biblical texts in this way. As Simone Marchesi writes, “Dante instead appropriates Augustine’s tools only to apply them first to the writings of a pagan author—an unacceptable, radically mistaken object—and then, as we shall see, to his own text—a surprising and dangerous move.” Augustine might think the better principle to apply to Dante’s work is that of “spoiling the Egyptian gold,” or, taking what is valuable from secular texts, since Augustine

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437 Dante’s relationship to Augustinian texts is a complex one, in part because he usually takes pains to disguise Augustine’s influence. The stance of this work is that Dante recognizes how much his work is indebted to Augustine, and that knowledge is the very reason why he so rarely openly acknowledges the debt. Simone Marchesi’s recent work on Dante and Augustine is particularly excellent, and so thorough that it is unnecessary to spend much time on this relationship here. Marchesi particularly contends that the hermeneutics Dante has Stazio employ is a way for the poet to correct his prior hermeneutical principles, as on display in the *Vita nova* and the *Convivio*. He also includes a whole section on the *Regula Caritatis Dante and Augustine*, 133-144. As other critics have noted, there is also a significant Augustinian influence on *Purgatorio* XXV. Giuseppe Mazzotta has grounded his argument about the metapoetic dimension of Stazio’s discourse in the Trinitarian and incarnational theology that pervades the “poetics” cantos of the latter part of *Purgatorio*, and argues that part of Stazio’s speech directly quotes from Augustine’s *De Trinitate*. “Literary History,” 213. Moreover, Barański has recognized the influence of Augustine’s *De Genesi ad litteram* on Dante’s conception of the aerial bodies, 404.

438 *Dante and Augustine*, 140.
perceived secular texts as possessing very limited value.\textsuperscript{439} It is noteworthy that “gold” features prominently in Augustine’s example, as well as in Stazio’s reading; however, Augustine is primarily discussing philosophical texts, “maxime Platonici,” rather than literary ones. While it is likely that the hermeneutic Dante gives to Stazio has something of an Augustinian genealogy, and also reflects medieval reading practices, it seems that Dante is ultimately treating literary texts in a new way, and that the places where he distances himself from Augustine are vital to understanding Dante’s novel contribution to literary poetics.\textsuperscript{440}

\textsuperscript{439} Augustine writes: “Sicut enim Aegyptii non tantum idola habebant et onera gravia, quae populus Israel detestaretur et fugeret, sed etiam vasa atque ornamenta de auro et de argento et vestem, quae ille populus exiens de Aegypto sibi potius tamquam ad usum meliorem clanculo vindicavit, non auctoritate propria, sed praeepto Dei, ipsis Aegyptii non solum simulata et superstitione figmenta gravesque sarcinas supervacanei laboris habent, quae unusquisque nostrum, duce Christo, de societate Gentilium exiens, debet abominari et quaedam morum praecepta utilissima continent, de quibus ipso uno Deo colendo nonnulla vera inveniuntur apud eos. Quod eorum tamquam aurum et argentum quod non ipsi instituerunt, sed de quibusdam quasi metallis divinae providentiae, quae ubique infusa est, eruerunt.” DDC, Book II, XL.60. For more on the relationship between Dante’s Stazio and the Egyptian gold, see Marchesi, and also Grlic, “Dante, Statius and Augustine,” 79-80. In addition, Grlic argues that Dante has shaped Stazio’s conversion narrative so as to resemble Augustine’s conversion account (76). However, Grlic does not fully explore how Dante’s hermeneutics diverged from Augustine’s.

\textsuperscript{440} While it would be difficult to prove the following parallel to be anything other than coincidence, two of the rare instances when Augustine uses a form of “sacer” may be relevant to Dante’s decision to use that adjective in a distinctive way. At least, these two passages are curiously appropriate to the particular issues of Dante’s poetics in which he is distancing himself from Augustine. In a passage in \textit{De Doctrina Christiana}, Augustine contrasts the eloquence of the “litteris sacris” with that of pagan literature, whether in prose or poetry (DDC 4.6.10). This passage seems somewhat relevant to Dante’s endeavor to mediate between classical poetry and Scripture, and create a third type of literature that is also both eloquent and God-given. However, it is a passage from \textit{Confessions} XII that has an almost uncanny relevance for Dante’s project, and especially for what he seems to be doing with the figure of Stazio, and Stazio’s model of interpretation. “Ita cum alius dixerit, ‘hoc sensit, quod ego,’ et alius, ‘immo illud, quod ego,’ religiosius me arbitrur dicere, ‘cur non utrumque potius, si utrumque verum est, et si quid tertium et si quid quartum et si quid omnino alius verum quispiam in his verbis videt, cur non illa omnia videsse credatur, per quem deus unus sacras litteras vera et diversa visuris multorum sensibus temperavit?’ ego certe, quod intrepidus de meo corde pronuntio, si ad culmen auctoritatis aliquid scriberem, sic mallem scribere, ut, quod veri quisque de his rebus capere posset, mea verba resonarent, quam ut unam veram sententiam ad hoc apertius ponerem, ut excluderem ceteras, quarum falsitas me non posset offendere. nolo itaque, deus meus, tam praeceps esse, ut hoc illum virum de te meruisse non credam. sensit ille omnino in his
Dante goes far beyond Augustine, and argues that even secular literary texts can be read for salvation. In addition, Stazio's reading also serves to confirm that there will be readers who can read Dante's work correctly.

However, just as Dante uses both *Purgatorio* XXII and XXV to establish the problem of readership, Stazio's role in the *Commedia* does not end with *Purgatorio* XXII. Dante calls on him again in *Purgatorio* XXV, which offers additional important supplementation and reassurance on the matter of Dante's work as "sacred."

Moreover, Stazio's *Purgatorio* XXV speech is another act of reading and interpretation, this time of synthesizing sources and ideas. The fact that there is still no scholarly consensus on which authority is most important for Dante in *Purgatorio* XXV shows what a subtle and complex presentation it is. In the mouth of Stazio, Dante combines secular, Christian, and pre-Christian biblical sources, as well as sources both philosophical and poetic. This synthesis in itself is a significant part of Dante's aim for this canto. After the philosophical sources, the most prominent intertext is Anchises' cosmological discourse in *Aeneid* VI, and many scholars have noted how Stazio's account works as another Christian correction of Virgil. When

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verbis atque cogitavit, cum ea scriberet, quidquid hic veri potuimus invenire, et quidquid nos non potuimus aut nondum potuimus, et tamen in eis inveniri potest." Augustine, *Confessiones*, ed. James Joseph O'Donnell, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), XII.31. In this text, Augustine not only engages with the question of the interpretation of Scripture, and how God made such interpretation possible, but also specifically explains that he believes the Scriptures to have been written so as to express whatever truths readers can find in them as long as they do not transgress the tenets of the faith. This text is an expression of the principle that Dante seems to be depicting through the example of Stazio as reader, but with the exception that, whereas Augustine is only discussing the interpretative fecundity of Scripture, Dante is arguing that this idea holds true for literary texts as well.

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441 This work does not claim that Stazio's speech is unique in this way; all of the doctrinal speeches Dante has his characters present would fit this classification to some degree. But the fact that it is a common characteristic does not mean that this characteristic is not worth noting here.
readers note this lineage, they can recognize that Dante is again using Stazio to rewrite Virgil according to Christian principles. However, unlike canto XXII, the act of interpretation is not the focal point of canto XXV; rather, one is to learn from the substance of the speech, the use Dante makes of his authorities, the subtextual implications for his own poetics, and finally, how these themes cannot be separated. As Barański has shown, the use and alteration of the Aeneid is not merely motivated by Dante's and Stazio’s shared veneration for Virgil, but is a central part of the poetic argument Dante is making:

Il rinvio di Dante al sesto dell'Eneide non solo fa grandissimo onore a Virgilio, il quale, bencé pagano, tenta di solvere un problema che avrebbe lasciato turbate le migliori menti cristiane, ma serve anche a sottolineare la capacità della poesia in generale di trattare temi di considerevole difficoltà intellettuale. Virgilio, quale auctor supremo della cultura letteraria medievale, rappresenta, in armonia con una delle sue tipiche immagini dell'epoca, le enormi potenzialità gnoseologiche della poesia ed è proprio a questa dimensione della poesia—come si è visto—che Dante fa ricorso in Purg. XXV per legittimare il carattere sacro della Commedia.443

Dante acknowledges a previous poetic text as an equal authority to that of the theologians, even as he overwrites this text with his own poetic account.

442 On the theme of the Christianization of Virgil in this canto, see Ronald L. Martinez, “Canto XXV,” 277–87. He writes: “But Statius’ words, though transcending Virgil, are also conspicuously mediatory, an exemplar of how the Christian experience incorporates and renews pagan culture by rewriting it. If Virgil's role emphasizes his disjunction from the verbal order of prayer and grace, Dante compensates by making Virgil's text the model of the genealogical account Stazio gives. As commentators note, the conclusion of Stazio’s speech, alluding to the cosmological discourse of Anchises in Aeneid VI, corrects the Stoic-Platonic notion of the body—as the cause of the passions—with the Christian view that desire and fear are motions of the soul. At the same time, Stazio’s account of how human beings reproduce and die to immortality, following a hermeneutic tradition, is both a correction and transformation of the great cycle of human reincarnation that is the subject of Anchises’ full discourse. Fulfilling his role as mediator, as horizon of pagan and Christian worlds, Stazio rewrites Virgil’s pagan lore in Christian terms and founds the continuity of ancient Rome and Christendom that is itself one of the bases of Dante’s historical vision and his poetics” (286).

In addition, as was briefly discussed above, many critics have noted how Stazio’s speech provides a figure of literary creation. In order to answer Dante’s question about the emaciated shade bodies, Stazio sees the need to begin with a much earlier stage, the development of the embryo and the addition of the soul, because this foundation is necessary in order to explain how the shade bodies have the capacity to manipulate air particles into the appearance of bodies. Once the soul is breathed into the embryo, the being possesses the peculiarly human capacities. In addition to possessing the lower faculties of living and sensing, this being, as a “fante,” now can “sé in sé rigira” (Purg. XXV: 61,75). Even after death the soul retains the faculties of “memoria, intelligenza, e volontade” which enable the soul to continue to express its thoughts and feelings (XXV: 83,103). These capacities for speech, reflection, memory, intellect, and will, are also those used in poetic creation. Just as the wills of the shades enable them to manipulate their airy bodies into meaningful form, so too, Dante as poeta manipulates his personaggi in order to form the substance of the Commedia. Moreover, just like the aerial bodies, a text is the intersection of spirit and matter, which is why it is important to acknowledge both parts of this partnership in Purgatorio XXV.

In addition to the figure of the aerial bodies serving as a figure for poetic creation, it seems that Stazio’s presence helps signal that this figure also serves as an illustration of the work of the reader. Stazio’s speech is not solely a demonstration of why Dante is capable of writing the Commedia, for it should not be missed that much of the speech concerns what all men have the capacity to do through their Creator’s gifts. Dante acknowledges through Stazio’s conversion
account that the author is not the only soul exerting a will upon the text to
determine its meaning: every interpreter necessarily does so as well. The shades’
aerial bodies convey a reality ultimately more truthful than physical reality, which is
only empty air. This process enables them to convey the spiritual reality of their
condition, as perceived from the “veduta eterna,” as Stazio phrases it (XXV: 31).
After all, all these shades are in a temporary state, awaiting the return of their
bodies at the Last Judgment. The shade bodies are a means for them to reveal
themselves as they are, although this being is yet in potentia. While texts contain
truths, they may be veiled in ambiguous speech, or otherwise difficult to discern.
The reader marshals together the words of the text (like motes of the air) and
through his will and his human faculties, imposes an interpretation (form) upon the
text. As Stazio’s interpretation of “sacra” shows, the literal substance of the words
may be secondary to the deeper, eternal truth that words can embrace. As a good
Christian reader, Stazio was able to discern the truth within Virgil’s texts, and apply
those truths to his life.

Stazio’s speech is also a reassurance to writers about how their work can be
read, because it overtly links the purity of the soul’s faculties with the ability to read
correctly. This point is even more apparent if one applies Stazio’s explanation of the
aerial bodies to the various readers one meets in the Commedia. Stazio, who read
Virgil for his salvation, is also the model for the soul who has perfect control over his
will and his faculties. Although he spent many centuries disciplining his will in
Purgatory, it is significant that readers meet him only once he has completed this
process. The figure of Stazio, who not only has perfect command of his aerial body,
but also possesses an intellectual understanding of these principles sufficient for explaining them coherently, contrasts even more obviously with the figures of Paolo and Francesca. These failures as readers are shown not even to have control over their aerial bodies, but rather, are blown about by the winds of the second circle: “que’ due che .../...paion sì al vento esser leggeri”  

(Inf. V: 74-75). This state reflects their inner being, for they subjected their higher faculties to their lower ones: “che la ragion sommettono al talento” (V: 39). They can only barely summon the power to control their direction in order to gratify their self-interest and pride, when Dante asks to speak to them. Through these shades, and the doctrines that account for them, Dante shows that those who are in command of their souls will be good readers, and interpret him well (even if, at times, “well” may not translate into “exactly as Dante intended”).444 Moreover, in his work, Dante is not only striving to teach his readers to read, but also to instill in them the qualities of character and understanding, so that their souls will be capable of effective interpretation. He knows, and passes on this knowledge through Stazio, that the capacity for understanding goes hand in hand with an orderly soul.

444 This principle explains why Stazio read Virgil’s pagan works so effectively. As Marchesi writes, “In Dante’s poem, the power to lead to salvation that belongs to pagan texts depends only on the active reading of their interpreters, who are able—as Statius was—to see their conformity to a higher intention. In the Christian Scripture, the ultimate meaning of a text can be located beyond the authority of the inspired author because there is an ultimate author, God, dictating its meaning. Conversely—and this is a huge step, but a necessary one nonetheless—the truth of uninspired authors can be located only in their texts and in the inspired reading of their interpreters” (140-41). Ultimately, the text itself may only be a shade, and Stazio has warned against the danger of mistaking shades for solid things.
As other critics have noted, the XXVs of each canticle offer a consideration of what it means to be a Christian poet. In *Inferno* XXV, Dante compares his abilities favorably to those of classical poets, while also meditating on the possibility of poetic trespass. In *Paradiso* XXV, Dante demonstrates his personal and sanctified mission as a poet. And in *Purgatorio* XXV, Dante meditates on the general human capacities and abilities that are divinely given and that enable the writing and reading of literature. Perhaps the *Purgatorio* canto’s themes are more general and impersonal, because it is here that Dante wants to consider the interplay between writer and reader, which is fitting because *Purgatorio* is the canticle most concerned with how to live the *in via* life. However, when *Purgatorio* XXV is read within the context of the discussion of poetics occurring in the sequence of cantos from XXI through XXVII, it is evident that this canto is also a necessary part of Dante’s process of self-justification.

In conclusion, we see that a number of different concerns motivated Dante’s selection of Stazio as the appropriate character to give the speech in *Purgatorio* XXV. The continuity of speaker should make the reader look closely for thematic continuities between *Purgatorio* XXI-XXII and *Purgatorio* XXV. In particular, readers should be motivated to examine what *Purgatorio* XXV, in metaliterary terms, offers beyond the general subject of poetics, specifically on the matter of what Dante hopes for from his readership. Although Dante draws on early Christian and medieval ideas about literary interpretation, he is creating a new hermeneutics suitable for his innovative concept of poet and poetry, so that Stazio, as a Christian classical poet, is the appropriate voice to communicate his new ideas.
CONCLUSION

This research has shed light on how Dante works both within and against the medieval tradition on Statius for his portrait of Stazio. While medieval readers considered Statius to be a major auctor, and his works were an important part of the medieval school curriculum in many parts of Europe, sources indicate that few copies of Statius’ works seem to have existed in Italy during Dante’s life. It is likely that Dante himself only read Statius after his exile. Moreover, there existed fewer biographical resources on Statius as compared to other poetic auctores, even in places where Statius was widely known and read. In the Commedia, Dante is able to take advantage of Statius’ status as an auctor, but one about whom little was known in the Middle Ages, as he constructs his own unique vita for Stazio. The fact that a number of those writing vitae and accessus for Statius in the later Middle Ages and the Renaissance are compelled to incorporate or respond to Dante’s new claims about Stazio is sign of both how few resources on Statius existed as well how Dante’s text ably emulates the conventions of medieval texts on Statius.

The specific ways Dante alters Stazio’s biography both illuminate and underscore the different purposes Dante intends Stazio to serve in the Commedia. Dante’s most famous change to the historical Statius, Stazio’s Christianity, enables
the pilgrim to engage with two different classical poets in *Purgatorio*, one Christian and the other pagan, as Dante explores his conceptions of poetic *auctoritas* and Christian *auctoritas*. Stazio’s own conversion also dramatizes the very Christianization of classical culture that Dante contemplates and strives to effectuate in the *Commedia*. In addition, Stazio’s presence helps Dante to define his own complex position with respect to Virgil. The love and appreciation Stazio expresses toward Virgil mirrors Dante’s own admiration, while Stazio’s heartfelt testimony of his conversion provides a persuasive argument for the excellence and moral value of Virgil’s poetry. At the same time, the pairing of Stazio and Virgil, who share so many similarities, also highlights what distinguishes them from one other: Virgil’s poetic mastery and Stazio’s Christianity. Stazio’s presence—and his Christian understanding—help bring to the fore why Virgil cannot continue to serve as Dante’s guide. However, the range of Stazio’s guidance and influence is also limited, for it is Dante’s ultimate end to prove how he successfully brings together Virgil’s poetic mastery with the Christian authority of Stazio in his own poetic persona.

The other major change to Stazio’s biography that Dante introduces—Stazio’s prodigality—may ultimately be as important for Dante’s purposes in the *Commedia* as Stazio’s conversion. While Dante may have found inspiration for this sin in Juvenal’s few lines about Statius in the *Satires* that were commonly quoted in medieval texts on Statius, there does not appear to be any overt reference to Statius’ prodigality in the medieval *accessus* tradition that Dante knew. Stazio’s prodigality exists in discordance with the sinless lives led by the other classical poets, who—as
Dante emphasizes by clustering them together—are all consigned to Limbo.

However, Dante-pilgrim’s sins and repentance are not only the ostensible reason for the pilgrim’s journey through the afterlife but also an integral part of the theological themes Dante desires to delve into in the *Commedia*. Thus, it is necessary for Dante to show a prior example of a poetic *auctor* who was formerly immoral and now repentant, in the process of establishing his own *auctoritas*. The choice to give Stazio the specific primary sin of prodigality may have been influenced by the biblical narrative of the prodigal son. Because there was a biblical precedent for prodigality representing sin in general, Dante is able to establish Stazio as an Everyman sinner who becomes an Everyman Christian through his conversion. In the *Commedia*, Stazio also represents all Christians who are sanctified through the process of purgation, and Dante draws attention to this holy status through the biblical allusions implicit in the events that follow the completion of Stazio's purgation. In addition, Dante can use Stazio to demonstrate the effect of the purgatorial journey, by contrasting the behavior of Stazio with characters like Sordello, both in their interactions with Virgil and Dante, and in their attitudes toward the purgatorial journey.

Although the dates of Statius’ life—living both after Virgil and after the beginning of the Christian religion—make Stazio a chronologically convenient poet to serve Dante’s purposes in the *Commedia*, the way Dante works with and adapts Statius’ poetry in *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* suggests that Dante genuinely appreciated Statius as a poet. The *Thebaid* is a particularly fruitful source for Dante’s depiction of Hell, as well as for as the many characters that populate *Inferno*, especially in the
lowest three circles of violence, fraud, and treachery. Dante’s vivid portraits of Capaneus, the soothsayers, and even Ulysses seem to have been at least partially inspired by Statius’ works, and Statius’ inspiration is definitely seen in Ugolino’s bestial sin. When all of Dante’s incorporations of Statius are considered in aggregate, it seems that the lower three realms of the inferno are suffused with a Statian atmosphere, which Dante also makes explicit by linking the inferno with the city of Thebes.

Dante’s use of Statius’ works in the Purgatorio is more surprising, and perhaps more complex. While Dante could lift both characters and description from Statius without much alteration when writing Inferno, in Purgatorio some of his adaptations of Statian works require a keener eye to recognize, and Dante must make greater alterations to his source material. Dante’s references to Statius’ female characters are particularly noteworthy, and may indicate Dante’s particular admiration for these figures. There is even sufficient evidence to suppose that scenes from later books of the Thebaid, either the story of Menoeceus’ sacrifice or the prayers to Clementia, or both, may have influenced Dante’s decision to portray Stazio as a Christian. However, when one examines these potentially Christological events in Statius’ work, as well as the Statian scenes Dante adapts for Purgatorio, one sees how many of these episodes and characters illuminate the spiritual limitations of Statius’ tragic works, especially in contrast to Dante’s Christian comedy.

Finally, Dante uses Stazio in order to express a complex position on the interpretation of poetry, and show how that position relates to Dante’s own
ambitious poem. Stazio’s retelling of his conversion provides an enthusiastic argument for the great moral and artistic value of poetry and poetic narratives as vehicles for truth. The speech Stazio gives on embryology and the aerial bodies also supplies an important theological foundation for the nature of divine poetic inspiration, both as applied to mankind in general and to Dante in particular. However, Stazio’s narrative also points to an unsettling fact inherent in language, and especially poetic discourse—authors cannot control their audiences’ responses to their texts. While Stazio’s salvific reading of Virgil is an encouraging counterpoint to Paolo and Francesca’s reading of Arthurian literature in *Inferno* V, the fact that Stazio interprets Virgil’s text to mean the opposite of Virgil’s intentions should not be ignored. Moreover, the problem of the reader’s response is especially pertinent to Dante’s own high ambitions for the *Commedia*. Not only does Dante mean to suggest that poetry can be the better medium for expressing truths, he writes his own work at a high level of difficulty, and is constantly reminding the reader of this fact. Dante uses Stazio to express how his own work is a “poema sacro”—either sacred or sacrilegious, according to how it is interpreted. The fact that the reader has such power may be troubling, but Dante also uses Stazio to show the possibility of a misreading that is nonetheless performed *in bono*, and to demonstrate that a Christian hermeneutic can ensure that even a gross misreading of a text can lead to good.
The research for this project has also revealed a number of places where further work on the medieval Statius, or Dante's reception of Statius' work, would be very fruitful. A subject that certainly deserves further research is the medieval reception of Statius' portrayal of the figure of Menoeceus. While many modern scholars agree in perceiving Menoeceus as a potential Christ-figure, evidence that medieval readers ever interpreted Menoeceus in this way has yet to be unearthed. In fact, there is very little known material on Menoeceus dating to the Middle Ages or before. If more medieval sources treating Menoeceus were uncovered, it would be possible to investigate the hypothesis suggested in this dissertation that Dante may have been at least partially inspired to Christianize Stazio because of Statius' portrayal of Menoeceus in the *Thebaid*.

A more in-depth examination of Dante's adaptations of Statius' texts in the *Commedia* is also very important work for the future. This dissertation could only touch on and assess a fraction of the suggestions that Dante’s commentators have made concerning Statian sources. While additional potential Statian adaptations in the *Inferno* should be investigated, the argument presented here suggests that studying the *Purgatorio* for additional signs of Statius could be especially enlightening and fruitful. The Statian references in *Purgatorio* examined above show Dante adapting his borrowings in such a way that the context of the original Statian passages supplies an additional meaningful valence to Dante’s lines. Dante’s commentators have suggested many other Statian references in *Purgatorio* in addition to the ones examined above, but there exist very few in-depth analyses of these passages. Following up on these suggestions, as well as using medieval texts
on Statius in order to discover additional references to Statius, could greatly improve our appreciation of Dante’s engagement with Statius’ works. Moreover, once scholars have a more thorough understanding of Dante’s use of Statius in *Purgatorio*, this knowledge should be applied more directly to Dante’s use of Stazio in the canticle. A comprehensive examination of Dante’s engagement with Statius’ works as entwined with his engagement with the *personaggio* Stazio could be a fascinating and important study.

In addition, although reservations were expressed above concerning existing work on Dante’s use of Statian works in *Paradiso*, it is important that these suggestions be investigated more thoroughly. The few apparent signs of Statius in *Paradiso* seem to be particularly intertwined with Dante’s treatment of the figure of Stazio. It is certainly possible that there are more *Paradiso* references that could shine further light on Dante’s *personaggio*, or, there could be additional references to Statius whose significance is not related to Stazio. Moreover, as knowledge of the medieval reading of Statius increases, it is possible that readers will be able to discern uses of Statius in *Paradiso* that have not been recognized in the past.

Finally, one of the principles this dissertation has demonstrated is the necessity of bringing together the study of Dante’s Stazio and that of Dante’s Statius. Much of the existing research on Dante and Stazio has focused on one facet of Stazio’s portrayal, such as *Purgatorio* XXI-XXII, without giving much consideration to the other significant uses of Stazio, such as *Purgatorio* XXV, or to Dante’s use of Statius’ works. However, the process of trying to connect these apparently disparate threads leads to new insights about Dante’s relationship to Statius and his poetry, as...
well as new ideas about Dante’s conception of poetics, and his relationship to the classical world. Dante intended readers to consider his Stazio as the poet Statius, and any attempt to separate the figures too rigidly distorts Dante’s text.
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