

BOOK REVIEW

Statius, Thebaid 2. Edited with an Introduction, Translation, and Commentary by KYLE GERVAIS. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp. xi + 374. Hardback, \$155.00. ISBN 978-0-19-874470-2.

Book 2 of the *Thebaid* offers readers a bounty of elements characteristic of Statius' epic style. Suffused with vivid ekphrases, evocative similes, sonic wordplay, and layered intertexts, the book begins with Laius' blood-dripping epiphany to his grandson Eteocles and ends with the hero Tydeus' spectacular monomachy against a Theban ambush. These episodes of horror and violence bookend intimate scenes from an ill-omened wedding at Argos and frame the stirrings of the fraternal civil war to come. Furthermore, like Harmonia's cursed necklace, whose elaborate ekphrasis is a centerpiece of the book, *Thebaid 2* plays a pivotal role both structurally, in its central position among the poem's opening triad and its parallels with Book 8, and as a synecdoche of the poem's larger themes and concerns. Kyle Gervais' superb new commentary on *Thebaid 2* is comprehensive, learned and accessible, marking a welcome update to its predecessor from 1954 by H.M. Mulder.¹ Here Gervais gives us a treatment of *Thebaid 2* that bars nothing in its unapologetic appreciation for and nuanced explication of Statius' brilliance. This is a commentary for the 21st-century Statian scholarly vanguard.

In establishing his text for *Thebaid 2*, Gervais engages closely with the recent editions of D. R. Shackleton Bailey (2003) and J. B. Hall et al. (2007) and gives detailed explanations for his divergences. At points of discrepancy, he generously lays out the reasons for his disagreement, often adducing evidence from elsewhere in Statius' work or invoking intertextual references to support his interpretation. I cite here just a few examples of his clearheaded and confident approach to interpreting individual words and phrases: *Pharaeos* (163), *inimicent* (419), *Getica... Phlegra* (595) and *umbo... spoliis* (671-2). Gervais' translation of Statius' challenging Latin is lucid and lithe. Especially strong in the speeches of Eteo-

¹ Mulder, H. M. (comm., 1954), *Publii Papinii Statii Thebaidos liber secundus* (Groningen).

cles and Tydeus, it contains moments of real frisson, for example, the rendering of Tydeus' final words to Maeon before dispatching him back to Thebes at the end of the monomachy (2.703, *tales in bella venimus*): "This is what we're like. We're coming to war."

Gervais sets forth the central concerns of his commentary in his streamlined Introduction. In the Introduction's largest section, "Intertexts," Gervais documents the passages and motifs in texts ranging from Homer to Silius Italicus that provide the most important sources for *Thebaid* 2. Gervais is specifically interested in showing how allusions underscore the irony of Statius' poem, exposing a "counter-narrative in tension with the main narrative" (xxxv), particularly at the level of individual phrases. Putting into practice his stated approach to identifying an intertext, that is, an impulse to "make it mean" (xxxvi n 114, following Fowler [1997]),² Gervais evinces a profound sensitivity to intertextuality in the *Thebaid*, setting a new standard for establishing the range and versatility of Statius' engagement with his predecessors.

Vergil's *Aeneid* is the main source of allusion for Statius' poem, and Gervais is, overall, careful to demonstrate in his notes what acknowledgment of this relationship can teach us about both Statius' stance as a poet toward his predecessor and how Statius uses Vergil's work to create specific effects in his own narrative. Particularly rich in this regard is, for example, Gervais' discussion of the potentially antithetical sources for Laius' visit to Eteocles (see notes to lines 89-119). By entwining references to Anchises' visit to Aeneas in *Aen.* 5 and Allecto's visit to Turnus in *Aen.* 7, Statius thus intermingles Vergil's conflicting forces of familial piety and wrathful vengeance to create a tension that undermines the former and vaunts the latter in his own poem.

There are several instances in which Gervais' identification of an intertext helps to justify a particular reading or clarify ambiguous meaning. For example, in his discussion of a scene in which Tydeus, perched on a ledge, hurls a boulder upon his attackers (line 566), Gervais advocates for the reading *simul arma virum, simul ora manusque* (supported by Hall, while most editors print *ora... arma*). Among his defenses of this reading are that this arrangement allows for the juxtaposition of the words *arma* and *virum*, which would of course recall the opening line of the *Aeneid*, thus suggesting that at the very moment that Tydeus is crush-

² Fowler, D. (1997), "On the Shoulders of Giants: Intertextuality and Classical Studies," *MD* 39: 20.

ing the weapons of his opponents, he is also “crushing” the Vergilian battles evoked earlier in the passage through Statius’ deft act of meta-poetry.

Book 2 in many ways belongs to Tydeus, and Gervais’ analysis of intertexts is particularly strong in describing Tydeus’ evolution over the course of the book. His reading of Tydeus through characters in Lucan’s *Bellum Civile* (see notes on 460, 486f. for Tydeus as Pompey in his conflict with Eteocles, and on lines 580-94 and 644-60 for Tydeus as a less-monstrous Scaeva in his fight against the Theban attackers), for example, allows us to see the fundamental confusion in Tydeus’ character from a new perspective. This mode of inquiry maps onto Gervais’ broader discussion throughout the commentary of the friction between Tydeus the hero and Tydeus the monster, which reaches its apex in Book 8.

Gervais’ treatment of *Thebaid 2* is a wonderful addition to the growing collection of English language commentaries on Statius’ poem. This work is an especially fitting companion to A. Augoustakis’ 2016 Oxford commentary on *Thebaid 8*; using these commentaries in tandem, one can fully explore and appreciate the many instances of doubling across the two books themselves. In his unflagging commitment to showcasing the poetic richness of Book 2, Gervais offers a model for the critical appreciation of Statius’ poetics that reveals substantial new insights for those familiar with the *Thebaid* and promises to convert a new generation of readers.

EMMA SCIOLI

University of Kansas, scioli@ku.edu