

## TWO COMBATS IN THE *THEBAID*

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Despite a high evaluation by Dante and Chaucer, in modern times Statius' *Thebaid* has been so out of fashion that it has received little critical attention and less critical praise. Most scholarly work of a strictly literary nature has centered on what Statius may have learned, or failed to learn, from Vergil or Lucan. In recent years there has been an attempt, most notably in Germany, to evaluate the *Thebaid* on its own terms as a work of artistic merit. In English, David Vessey's *Statius and the Thebaid*, written in the same spirit, has filled a large gap.<sup>1</sup> Focusing as they very often do on structure, these writers have brought to notice the fact that Statius' epic is a complex and highly finished work which repays study of the internal relations among its parts.

Two scenes whose close relationship has gone unnoticed are the first and last combats of Polynices in the epic. The first is a brawl with Tydeus for a dry place to sleep on the doorsill of the palace of Argos. The clash has no apparent antecedents and no direct consequences, does not involve deadly weapons, and is interrupted before it comes to a resolution. Polynices' last battle is the climactic struggle for the crown of Thebes in which he and his brother Eteocles kill each other. Despite the extreme incongruity of the two scenes, they have parallels in structure, in incident, in imagery, and in the characters involved, which allow us to use the trivial, earlier combat as a commentary on the later, essential one.

In Book 1 Oedipus curses his sons and arouses the Fury Tisiphone from Hades to bring violence between them (46–124). Subsequently the young princes are unable to work together, and they agree to rule Thebes in turn; while Eteocles takes the royal power for the first year, Polynices goes off into exile. He makes his way to Argos in a driving rainstorm and takes refuge on the threshold of the royal palace. On the same night arrives Tydeus, also exiled, and the two wanderers become

<sup>1</sup> D. W. T. C. Vessey, *Statius and the Thebaid* (Cambridge 1973). The most influential of the German works has been Willy Schetter's *Untersuchungen zur epischen Kunst des Statius* (Wiesbaden 1960).

involved in a violent struggle over the Theban's wretched bed. The fight is ludicrously low, carried on with elbows, knees, and gouging fingers (it is to be compared to that between Irus and Odysseus in *Odyssey* 18.1–117), but it is terrifically violent; the combatants become locked together, gasping in a deadly embrace. The atmosphere is dark and silent, and there are no spectators, but the two princes fight as if at Olympia before their cheering friends and relations:

Hic vero ambobus rabiem fortuna cruentam  
adtulit: haud passi sociis defendere noctem  
culminibus, paulum alternis in verba minasque  
cunctantur; mox ut iactis sermonibus irae  
intumescere satis, tum vero erectus uterque  
exertare umeros nudamque lacessere pugnam.  
celsior ille gradu procera in membra simulque  
integer annorum, sed non et viribus infra  
Tydea fert animus, totosque infusa per artus  
maior in exiguo regnabat corpore virtus.  
iam crebros ictus ora et cava tempora circum  
obnixi ingeminant, telorum aut grandinis instar  
Riphaeae, flexoque genu vacua ilia tundunt.  
non aliter quam Pisaeo sua lustra Tonanti  
cum redeunt crudisque virum sudoribus ardet  
pulvis; at hinc teneros caveae dissensus ephebos  
concitat, exclusaeque expectant praemia matres:  
sic alacres odio nullaue cupidine laudis  
accensi incurrunt, scrutatur et intima vultus  
unca manus penitusque oculis cedentibus intrat. (408–27)

Adrastus, the Argive king, hears the noise of fighting on his doorstep and intervenes in time to avoid weapons being drawn. The king demands and gets an explanation, insists that hostilities stop, and calms the two fighters as the sea is calmed after a raging storm. Ultimately he prevails upon both princes to enter the palace, his two daughters appear, and a banquet completes the happy scene rather in the manner of comic drama. We are given to understand that the general reconciliation will be capped by a double marriage, each exile taking a sister; for the animal skins which the princes wear identify them as Adrastus' sons-in-law ordained in an oracle of Apollo.<sup>2</sup> In addition, a firm friendship will grow up between the two men (1.428–556, 668–720).

The importance of this scene for the introduction of its characters is easily appreciated. There seems to be no comment, however, on the way in which this fight foreshadows and nearly replaces the final com-

<sup>2</sup> Adrastus' peaceful reign and the fateful oracle have been introduced (390–400) between the arrivals of Polynices and Tydeus, so that the outcome is foreshadowed. Statius' source for both fight and oracle may well be Euripides: cf. especially *Phoenissae* 420ff. and *Suppliants* 134ff. For the sources and the comparison with the *Odyssey*, see F. Caviglia, *La Thebaïde libro I* (Rome 1973) 20ff. and ad loc.

bat of the two brothers Eteocles and Polynices which is the focus of Book 11. The narrative makes the connection explicitly: if Adrastus had not stopped them from drawing swords (429–30), “you would lie dead for your brother to mourn, young Theban, more suitably killed by an enemy’s weapons.”<sup>3</sup>

As Statius has noted (1.142), the alternating rule at Thebes is “only a delay of the fight.” From the time of the Fury’s onset the two brothers are consumed with a *furor* (126) which is eventually to end in their mutual destruction. Even in the storm, and just before reaching Argos, Polynices’ thoughts remain fixed on Eteocles: “haurit iter; pulsat metus undique et undique frater” (369, and cf. 312–89 generally). The combat with Tydeus offers to replace that with Eteocles because Polynices applies to it the fresh anger against his brother with which he is seething when he reaches Adrastus’ palace. His violent refusal to share his shelter, which shocks even Tydeus, an embodiment of fury (447–65), is a venting of fratricidal rage on the substitute who, like his brother, threatens to usurp his place.

The chance that the prince might thus deflect his craving for suicidal and fratricidal conflict is lost when the healing efforts of Adrastus stop the fight. Acceptance into the king’s family initiates a calm which lasts until his rage can be expressed directly against Eteocles. In the intervening period Polynices never again shows the intensity of emotion (described as *furor*, *ardor*, *ira*, *rabies*, and *odium*) which he has displayed against Tydeus. He is hardly mentioned in the battle-books at all, being said (7.689) to show restraint in fighting against his own people. When he determines to fight Eteocles in Book 11, Polynices becomes again the violent character of the first book, and the battle is clearly reminiscent of that first scene.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Forsan et accinctos lateri—sic ira ferebat—  
nudassent enses, meliusque hostilibus armis  
lugendus fratri, iuvenis Thebane, iaceres,  
ni rex . . . movisset gressus. . . (428–33)

There is a similar comment by the narrator when Polynices falls from his chariot in the race in Book 6 (513–17). On this point, and on the fight as foreshadowing the character of Tydeus, see the remarks of Vessey (above, note 1) 216–24.

<sup>4</sup> A study of the concordance (Roy J. Deferrari and Sister M. Clement Eagan, *A Concordance of Statius* [Brookland, N.Y. 1943; reprint Hildesheim 1966]) shows that similar emotional terms are applied to Polynices in his fight with Tydeus and in his relationship and fight with Eteocles. In Book 1 *furor* (438), *rabies* (408), *ira* (411, 445), *ardor* (440), and *odium* (425, 441) are all used in describing the mutual feelings of Polynices and Tydeus. Polynices’ attitude towards Eteocles (or their reciprocal relations) is similarly described: *furor* (11.382, etc., *furere* 11.440, etc., 2 cases of *furiae*); *ira* (1.155, 11.386, and often), *ardor* (12.443, *ardere* 11.152), and *odium* (11.526, etc.). Otherwise these terms are hardly used for Polynices at all, although they are quite common in battle situations (notably applied to Tydeus) and are applied to Eteocles, for example, in other relations.

Even in broad outline, the structure of Book 11 is at first very much like that of Book 1. The Fury Megaera is raised from Hades to stimulate anger in the brothers (57–118), as Oedipus' original curse brought forth Tisiphone. The effect of the Fury's efforts on Polynices is a rage which causes a loss of mental balance (*inops animi*, 152), like that which afflicted him and his brother originally. Under this stimulus the prince is moved to renounce his new family ties to Argos, returning us in emotional terms to the situation of Book 1. He tells Adrastus of his decision in a speech which emphasizes his guilt:

"Ille ego sum, qui te pacem et pia iura regentem—  
infelix utinamque aliis datus urbibus hospes!—  
extorrem patria regnoque—sed exige tandem  
supplicium: fratrem suprema in bella—quid horres?  
decretum est fixumque—voco; desiste morari,  
nec poteris." (165–70)

He lists the lost heroes of the Seven, for whose deaths he feels responsible, and continues:<sup>5</sup>

"Sed digna rependam.  
convenient ubi quaeque nurus matresque Pelasgae  
longaevique patres, quorum tot gaudia carpsi  
orbavique domos: fratri concurro, quid ultra est?  
spectent et votis victorem Eteoclea poscant.  
iamque vale, coniunx, dulcesque valet Mycenae!  
at tu, care socer—nec enim omnis culpa malorum  
me penes, et superi mecum Parcaeque nocentes—  
sis lenis cineri, meque haec post proelia raptum  
alitibus fratrique tegas urnamque reportes—  
hoc tantum—et natae melius conubia iungas." (182–92)

After a number of attempts at preventing it have failed, the brothers finally come face to face for armed combat. At this moment, just as in Book 1, Adrastus hears of the fight and rushes to intervene. The king attempts to assert himself as Polynices' surrogate father,

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The only and not very striking examples are two passages in which (6.915) Adrastus advises him to save his *furor* for battle and (10.487) he and his father-in-law *ardent* in stirring the troops. In regretting the deaths of the Seven, Polynices bemoans (11.181) the fact that he could not (J. H. Mozley, in the Loeb edition, translates "had not the spirit to") share the *furor* of Capaneus.

<sup>5</sup> The mention of Adrastus' peaceful kingdom (165) reminds us of its introduction in Book 1 (390ff.). The list of the heroes, with its special notice of Tydeus, parallels the initial catalogue in 1.41–45. For these and a number of other specific parallels, and in general for the notion of a broader structural relation between the whole of Books 1 and 11, I am indebted to Professor Elaine Fantham, who acted in the first instance as one of the anonymous readers for *TAPA*. Indeed, the extensive comments furnished by both readers have improved this paper in more places than I can possibly cite.

enforce the claims of family feeling even on Eteocles, and remove the causes of conflict. As in Book 1 he wishes to calm Polynices and bring him into his own palace, now even as ruler if that will stop the fight.<sup>6</sup>

"Te precor, hostis—  
quamquam, haec ira sinat, nec tu mihi sanguine longe—  
te, gener, et iubeo; sceptri si tanta cupido est,  
exuo regales habitus, i, Lernan et Argos  
solus habe!" (431–35)

At this point the structural parallel with Book 1 breaks down, or rather it reverses itself into a mirror-image structure which originates in Polynices' dissolution of the Argive family connection. Adrastus' attempted intervention fails, this time, and he is forced to retreat in confusion (436–46). The actual fight which takes place follows Adrastus' effort instead of preceding it. Ultimately the Furies are unnecessary to goad the brothers, and they withdraw (537–38). Finally, when the princes are dead, Oedipus reappears to complete the circle to the structure of the first book (580–633).<sup>7</sup>

While the structures of the two books show both direct parallelism and mirror-reversal, their scopes are quite different. The fight of the first book, although it is the central moment in it, fills only a brief space.<sup>8</sup> As befits the climax of the epic itself, the brothers' battle, with its preliminaries and consequences, takes up the whole of Book 11. This difference in the scope of treatment is proportional to the real importance of the two fights, one over a dry place to sleep and the other for the crown. But the difference cannot obscure the basic similarity of the two situations, the first prefiguring the other in miniature. The two princes, like Polynices and Tydeus in Book 1, are struggling for possession of a place which one holds, which both wish to occupy, and which they are unable to share. The contrast in value between the two places is part of a general difference in level between the two equally grim scenes: the first very nearly absurd in its baseness, the second invested with pageantry. Contributing to this effect is the difference in the combatants' appearance. The rain-soaked animal skins in Book 1

<sup>6</sup> The two acts of intervention by Adrastus are parallel in a number of small points. Note the use of *exter* (1.439, 11.429), the emphasis on Adrastus' hearing the fight (1.431–32, 11.426), and the notice of the king's age (1.434, 11.422).

<sup>7</sup> In mourning the brothers Oedipus specifically recalls the parallel scene of his curse in Book 1. The two speeches (1.56–87, 11.605–26), which should be compared throughout, offer some verbal repetitions. More importantly they provide an obvious frame for the struggle of Eteocles and Polynices.

<sup>8</sup> The passage in Book 1 lasts about 300 lines, very broadly interpreted: 245 (312–556) for the whole scene prior to the Coroebus story, including Polynices' wandering in the storm, plus the 53-line tailpiece (668–720).

offer the greatest possible contrast to the royal and gaudy battle gear of 11.<sup>9</sup>

The failure of Adrastus' efforts in Book 11 is illustrated by similes drawn from the sea, just as his success has been in Book 1. After their fight, Tydeus and Polynices subside under the king's soothing influence as waves and winds subside naturally at the end of a storm, leaving ships safely becalmed:

Mulcentem dictis corda aspera regem  
iam faciles, ventis ut decertata residunt  
aequora, laxatisque diu tamen aura superstes  
inmoritur velis, passi subiere penates. (478–81)

In 11, Adrastus is no more able to stop the fight than the Pontus is able to hinder the repeated clashing of the Symplegades:

Non verba magis suadentia frangunt  
accensos, sumptisque semel conatibus opstant,  
quam Scythia curvatis erectus fluctibus umquam  
Pontus Cyaneos vetuit concurrere montes. (435–38)

That is, the first combat is a simple, natural process which comes to an end under the right influences; the second, like the smashing together of the Symplegades, is both unnatural and inevitable. No natural force can stop it. The same point is made on the abstract and psychological level by the failure of the immediately succeeding intervention of Pietas (457–96). The effect of this inevitability of their fight on the brothers themselves, as well as their failure to perceive and control the emotions which move them, is illustrated by another related simile offered in mid-combat:

Ut nocte rates, quas nubilus auster  
implicuit, frangunt tonsas mutantque rudentes,  
luctataeque diu tenebris hiemique sibique,  
sicut erant, imo pariter sedere profundo:  
haec pugnae facies. (520–24)

They fight as two ships, thrown into confusion by a storm at night, run afoul of each other and together sink to the bottom. The contrast with

<sup>9</sup> Both Polynices and Tydeus are badly used by the storm of Book 1. Polynices lays on the palace doorstep (387) "artus imbri ventoque rigentes." Tydeus arrives "... infusam tergo glaciem et liquentia nimbis / ora comasque gerens..." For the animal skins see 482–90. In Book 11 Polynices is irritated at Eteocles' royal dress, despite his own finery:

uritur alto  
corde, quod innumeri comites, quod regia cassis  
instratusque ostro sonipes, quod fulva metallo  
parma micet, quamquam haud armis inhonorus et ipse  
nec palla volgare nitens: opus ipsa novarat  
Maeoniis Argia modis ac pollice docto  
stamina purpureae sociaverat aurea telae. (396–402)

the safely becalmed ship of Book 1 is complete and forecasts the brothers' mutual destruction.

The comparison to a wild storm at sea is appropriate to the emotional tone of both combats, which are characterized by desperation and close-gripping violence, devoid of any fighter's art.<sup>10</sup> The blows of Book 1 fall as thick as spears as the opponents grapple, gouging at each other's eyes and jamming their knees into each other's groins (418–20). In the later fight Polynices and Eteocles are so peculiarly close as to hear each other's breath like trumpeting through their helmets (527–28). One death wound is given in the groin (593), and the whole is carried on "without style, without skill":<sup>11</sup>

Coeunt sine more, sine arte,  
tantum animis iraque, atque ignescentia cernunt  
per galeas odia et voltus rimantur acerbo  
lumine: nil adeo mediae telluris, et enses  
impliciti innexaeque manus, alternaque saevi  
murmura ceu lituos rapiunt aut signa tubarum. (524–29)

The atmosphere of the two combats is also alike in an instructive way. The first fight is natural, mundane, without psychological overtones (except as Polynices carries them over from his hatred of Eteocles). The second imitates the first in an eerie way which is suitable to the unnatural fratricidal combat. Though thousands are present, announcement of the brothers' fight produces an awed hush (409–10). The parallel silence of Book 1 is the natural quiet of peaceful Argos at night. The simple darkness of that Argive night has been replaced in Book 11 by the artificial darkness, now a symbol of moral wrong, which Jupiter casts over the battlefield (130–35). While Tydeus' fight with Polynices has no spectators, we have noted that the two struggle as if at Olympia under the eyes of crowds of their partisans (1.421–27); the sense of family and community which the simile conveys is ironic both for Polynices and for Tydeus, himself exiled for fratricide (1.402–3). In Book 11 the two combatants, in contrast, fight before their entire families and peoples, who weep and lament. The cheering crowds of the

<sup>10</sup> Bernhard Kytzler, "Gleichnisgruppen in der Thebais des Statius," *WS* 75 (1962) 155–57 explains the prevalence of sea similes in the epic as ultimately based on the notion that war is comparable to a rough sea-journey. The idea here presented, that such a storm is a symbol of emotional turmoil, will recommend itself readily to readers of Vergil; note that the two Furies are said to stir up the final fight as winds do a storm (11.114–18). Also relevant to the present argument is a simile at 1.370–79, in which Polynices, making his way to Argos, is compared to the captain of a ship in a storm at sea. For the language of emotional violence in the two fights, see above, note 4.

<sup>11</sup> The description of the fight emphasizes the many errors, slips, and misunderstandings. Vessey (above, note 1) 279 has pointed out that this lack of art is quite contrary to Euripides' treatment of the final combat in *Phoenissae* (see especially lines 1353–54).

simile in Book 1 are recalled by the shades of Theban ancestors, specially released from Hades for the purpose, who form a “depressing claue” on the surrounding hills to applaud the evil actions of their descendants:

Prominet excelsis volgus miserabile tectis,  
cuncta madent lacrimis et ab omni plangitur arce.  
hinc questi vixisse senes, hinc pectore nudo  
stant matres parvosque vetant adtendere natos.  
ipse quoque Ogygios monstra ad gentilia manes  
Tartareus rector porta iubet ire reclusa.  
montibus insidunt patriis tristisque corona  
infecere diem et vinci sua crimina gaudent. (416–23)

Animal imagery also relates the two combats to each other. In Book 1, the oracle is described in which Apollo has predicted Polynices and Tydeus as Adrastus’ sons-in-law:

Cui Phoebus generos—monstrum exitiabile dictu!  
mox adaptata fides—fato ducente canebat  
saetigerumque suem et fulvum adventare leonem. (395–97)

The princes fulfill this prophecy by wearing the skins of the requisite animals: Polynices the lion, Tydeus the boar. The difference between the two men, the fact that they are not related by geography or family history, is emphasized by this difference in animals, which Statius has presumably taken over from the brief notice in Euripides’ *Suppliants* 134ff. Both animals return in significant fashion in Book 11.

Throughout the epic, boars (usually *sus*, sometimes *aper* or some circumlocution) continue to be identified with Tydeus and the skin of the Calydonian boar which he wears. It is striking then, when in the final battle of Book 11 Eteocles and Polynices are described, following a quite different simile in Euripides’ *Phoenissae* (1380–81), as *sues* who crash together violently under the influence of *ira*:

Fulmineos veluti praeceps cum cominus egit  
ira *sues* strictisque erexit tergora saetis:  
igne fremunt oculi, lunataque dentibus uncis  
ora sonant. (530–33)

By this image we are reminded of the earlier fight and of the violence of Tydeus, but we are also shown that the Thebans really are brothers, two of a kind who struggle for domination.

The lion, which represents bloodthirsty destructiveness in the epic according to Bernhard Kytzler, is often applied in similes to warriors in battle.<sup>12</sup> The lionskin which Polynices wears against Tydeus and again

<sup>12</sup> Kytzler (above, note 9) 150–53. Lion similes are common for members of the Seven, especially Tydeus and Capaneus.



(4.86) in marching against Eteocles suggests the violence which the prince shows in those two relations only; certainly he is never described as a lion in the battle books. The application of the lion to Polynices in Books 1 and 4 may also hint at his aspiration to the kingship of Thebes, a connection made explicit by another simile near the end of Book 11. Oedipus, who appears from the darkness when the battle is done, is described as an old lion who regrets the dominance of young lions in the field:

Qualis leo rupe sub alta,  
quem viridem quondam silvae montesque tremebant,  
iam piger et longo iacet exarmatus ab aevo,  
magna tamen facies et non adeunda senectus;  
et si demissas veniat mugitus ad aures,  
erigitur meminitque sui, viresque solutas  
ingemit et campis alios regnare leones. (741–47)

Although we may refer “other lions” to the new king Creon in the first instance, the evocation of the newly dead brothers, as well as Oedipus’ jealousy of them, seems clear.

After their inescapable, violent, artless duel the brothers lie together on the field, grappling in death as in battle (573, 624 *nexus*), sharing a resting place as they could not share their kingdom. The contrast with the scene in Book 1 is complete: Tydeus and Polynices, who could not lie down together, are separated from combat and then joined in the house of Adrastus. Eteocles and Polynices, who cannot join in their father’s house, cannot be separated in battle, and in the end they lie down together in death.<sup>13</sup> The tragic atmosphere of the eleventh book is capped by the double death and the subsequent rout of the Argives, as the comedy of Book 1 was ended in banqueting and marriage in the Argive palace.

The difference in outcomes between the two parallel fights is not due to the differing values of the stakes involved. Not only does Polynices fight with similar violence in both cases, but we are given abundant evidence that the material advantages of rule mean little to him in comparison with victory itself. In effect, the combat over a dry door-sill in Book 1 makes by *reductio ad absurdum* the point which Statius has offered earlier in analyzing the motives of Eteocles and Polynices. Thebes is very poor, so that what drives the brothers is not the value of the prize but the sheer urge for domination.<sup>14</sup> Polynices makes it clear

<sup>13</sup> The aftermath of Book 12 offers a final image of joining and separation for the Theban brothers. Antigone and Argia inadvertently burn Polynices on Eteocles’ pyre, and the two bodies, joined together, arouse two warring flames (420–46).

<sup>14</sup> 1.144–64. Note especially 150–51: “sed nuda potestas / armavit fratres, pugna est de paupere regno.”

in his prayer, offered on the point of wounding his brother in Book 11, that success in this final sibling struggle is his real goal, and that he is willing, almost eager, to die in it:

Di, quos effosso non inritus ore rogavit  
 Oedipodes flammare nefas, non improba posco  
 vota: piabo manus et eodem pectora ferro  
 rescindam, dum me moriens hic sceptrā tenentem  
 linquat et hunc secum portet minor umbra dolorem. (504–8)

The real difference between the two scenes, that which affects the outcome, is the replacement of Tydeus with Eteocles as Polynices' opponent. Polynices' anger in Book 1, as I have argued, is transferred from Eteocles. Moreover, the Calydonian prince has been portrayed in Book 1 as similar to Polynices himself: each a young exile (Tydeus already a fratricide) of noble bearing and high courage. We find it easy to believe in their reconciliation; indeed Tydeus, under the benign influence of Adrastus, becomes in emotional terms the real brother of Polynices. Their closeness is predicted immediately after the fight in Book 1 (473–77, where they are compared to Orestes and Pylades) and often cited thereafter. We may note especially the wild sorrow and guilt of the Theban at his friend's death: he lies upon the corpse (9.47–48), as he will lie down upon Eteocles, calls Tydeus his brother (52–53), wants to face Eteocles immediately (57), recalls the fight and reconciliation of Book 1 (61–64), and is prevented from suicide only by Adrastus (76–81).<sup>15</sup>

The relationship of Polynices and Tydeus is reinforced more formally by the marriage of the two princes to Adrastus' daughters. From that point on the Theban prince has a new father and brother with whom he enjoys the close ties which are thought natural for families and which are conspicuously absent from his relations with Eteocles and Oedipus. Polynices' relationships with his real and adopted brothers are at the center of the two parallel combats, and like the fights themselves they provide a mirrored reversal. The prince first fights with a stranger in deadly fury, but he is capable of coming to real brotherly feeling for that same enemy under the proper influence. When he brings himself to fight Eteocles, to treat his real brother as an enemy, he has rejected his new artificial family in favor of his blood ties. Those blood ties call him to doom; for the equivalent of *pietas* in this family, as Tisiphone points out, is the bloody obligation to internecine destruction (11.484ff.).

The comparison between the two combats particularly illuminates Polynices, the constant element in them. Given the opportunity, as he is by Adrastus, of escape from the curse of his family, he makes a

<sup>15</sup> See Vessey (above, note 1) 95–97 for the brotherhood of Tydeus and Polynices. He also makes the identification of Adrastus as a sort of anti-Oedipus.

suitable hero: hot-tempered but respectful of real authority, capable of brotherly feeling and the acceptance of an equal, susceptible to reason.<sup>16</sup> In the parallel and climactic scene the one significant change—the introduction of the real Eteocles—causes Polynices to carry out the disastrous fight to the death. Faced with the unnatural craving for related blood which is his inheritance, the prince's rationality disappears. His behavior is to be blamed directly on the horrific history of his family, on Oedipus' curse, on the inherited Fury. If Eteocles is a stage villain, his brother is a simple and noble figure who behaves monstrously because he is the expression of a monstrous family.

<sup>16</sup> Adrastus specifically offers the hope of escape from the inherited horrors of Polynices' family (1.677–92), but he is wrong even in the evidence from Argive history which he offers. Argos, too, is about to pay for old wrongs in the war with Thebes which Jupiter has decreed. Polynices has long been discerned as the more attractive of the brothers. See the comments in L. Legras, *Étude sur la Thébàide de Stace* (Paris 1905) 212–13, and H. Glæsener, "Les Caractères dans la Thébàide de Stace," *Musée Belge* 3 (1899) 100–102.