

### *Tydea Consumpsi*: Dark Humor in the *Thebaid*

Puns involving cannibalism are generally in poor taste, but Statius nevertheless serves one up in the middle of Polynices' sorrowful speech (*Theb.* 9.49-72) mourning the death of his dearest comrade, immediately following the condemnation of Tydeus for his shocking act of cannibalism (8.751-766). This paper investigates the intrusion of this abrupt humor – *Tydea consumpsi* (9.60) – into a deeply pathetic moment. First, it will examine the pun, its context, and the most common readings of the line (Dewar 1991; Melville 1995; Shackleton Bailey 2003; Ross 2004; Joyce 2008); secondly, it will prove that it is in fact a pun appreciable by Romans, and then that it can legitimately be called humorous, albeit gruesomely so, through surveying and applying what Cicero (*De Oratore* especially) and Quintilian (6.3 in particular) have to say about humor. Once a functioning if brief Roman humor theory is drawn up, the effects of the particular pun are then examined through the lenses of this Roman theory, as well as modern incongruity and psychoanalytic theories. Much like the language which achieves the startling pun, its effects are multivalent: aside from further undermining Polynices as an effective speaker and leader, the eruption of the bathetic into high epic exemplifies and encapsulates the *nefas* of the civil war so frequently bemoaned in the *Thebaid*, a *nefas* involving the distortion of aesthetic as well as political codes. Simultaneously, the joke offers a kind of bait-and-switch with terrible consequences: the immediate consequence of the pun is a humor which allows readers to escape the macabre setting so oppressive throughout the beginning of *Thebaid* 9, but it also implicates readers in the guilt and shame of the Tydeus' actions when they realize the dual meaning of *consumpsi*. This participation activates a new and horrifying understanding of the language and consequently of the greater *nefas* of the epic.

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