

## Empowering Sadness: Grief, Gender and Action in Statius' *Thebaid* and Virgil's *Aeneid*

The *Aeneid* can be read as a poem that arises from grief, and puts the story of a trauma survivor at its centre. Processes of grief such as numbness, denial, anger, searching, restlessness, idealisation all play their part in the characterisation of Aeneas and the Trojans. Ultimately grief in the *Aeneid* is both productive and destructive, and women are particularly destructive. This paper explores the ways that the *Thebaid* responds to the representation of grief and gender in the *Aeneid* and takes it in a new direction. Polynices can function to a certain extent as an Aeneas figure, except that his grieving is always destructive rather than constructive: responding to exile by setting the war in motion, responding to the death of Tydeus by trying to kill himself, his ultimate decision to kill Eteocles. In contrast, the women of the *Thebaid* often use grief as a stimulus to action and reconciliation (Hypsipyle, Argia and Antigone, the Argive women), whereas the women of the *Aeneid* are for the most part destructive (the burning of the ships, Euryalus' mother). The paper will examine a number of representations of grief in both poems, and explore the various ways in which grief gives rise to action.