ETEOCLES' AESCHYLEAN DREAM IN STATIUS' *THEBAID* THROUGH THE READER'S EYES*

ABSTRACT

This article explores the intertextual connection between Eteocles' dream in Statius' Thebaid *Book 2 and the brief reference to his ambiguous dream at Aesch.* Sept. *710−11. In Aeschylus' play, Eteocles understands the true meaning of the dream belatedly, as he is about to enter into a duel with his brother Polynices. The article argues that the ambiguous character of the Aeschylean dream forms the basis of the dream in Statius, and that the poet develops the scene further through elements of epic dream sequences that align his narrative with the epic tradition. However, Statius emphasizes even more the ambiguity of Eteocles' dream to highlight the tragic nature of his character. Following ancient dream theorists, the discussion shows next that the obscurity of the dream in the* Thebaid *can be understood as the product of the fusion of different dream classes, which are evoked in the description of the dream in Statius. The proposed interpretation suggests that, on the basis of their personal experience of dreams and their familiarity with popular dream theories, Statius' readers would have been able to perceive the irony between Laius' message and Jupiter's true intentions, all of which enhance Eteocles' tragic character.*

Keywords: intertextuality; reader response; dream theory; Statius' *Thebaid*; Aeschylus; Theban legend

At the beginning of the second book of Statius' *Thebaid*, Mercury leads the ghost of Laius to Thebes, where the latter disguises as the seer Tiresias and appears in a dream which upsets King Eteocles (2.89−133). This is the first dream scene in the poem and the most important for the development of the narrative not only because it links the current struggle of the two brothers with the past woes of the house of Laius but also because it puts in motion Jupiter's plan to destroy the royal household.[1]

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* For the text of the *Thebaid* I follow D.E. Hill, *P. Papinii Statii Thebaidos libri XII* (Leiden, 1983), for Artemidorus R.A. Pack, *Artemidori Daldiani Onirocriticon libri V* (Leipzig, 1963), and for Macrobius' *In Somnium Scipionis* F. Eyssenhardt, *Macrobius* (Leipzig, 1868).

[1] Jupiter, who has grown weary of human transgressions (1.214−23), decides to make an example out of Argos and Thebes for their inclination to crime and evil (1.227−47) by destroying their royal houses (1.224−6). As he decrees in 1.241−3, *noua sontibus arma | iniciam regnis, totumque a stirpe reuellam | exitiale genus.* D.E. Hill, 'Jupiter in *Thebaid* 1 again', in J.J.L. Smolenaars, H.J. van Dam, R.R. Nauta (edd.), *The Poetry of Statius* (Leiden and Boston, 2008), 129−42, at 140 and C. Criado, 'The contradictions of Valerius' and Statius' Jupiter: power and weakness of the supreme god in the epic and tragic tradition', in G. Manuwald and A. Voigt (edd.), *Flavian Epic Interactions* (Berlin and Boston, 2013), 195−214, at 197 argue that Jupiter's intention is to punish only Eteocles and Polynices for mistreating Oedipus, and not to exact retribution for the crimes of the whole *gens*. For Jupiter's depiction as an unjust and authoritative monarch, and for the outline of his cruel plan, see W. Dominik, *The Mythic Voice of Statius: Power and Politics in the* Thebaid (Leiden and New York, 1994), 7−15. F.M. Ahl, 'Lucan and Statius', in T.J. Luce (ed.), *Ancient Writers: Greece and Rome* (New York, 1982), 2.917−41, at 2.930, F.M. Ahl, 'Statius' *Thebaid*: a reconsideration', *ANRW* 2.32.5 (1986), 2803−912, at 2845 and D. Feeney, *The Gods in Epic: Poets and Critics of the Classical Tradition* (Oxford and New York, 1991), 355 have vigorously questioned the chief god's moral role in the poem. For a more favourable approach to Jupiter's

The scene, however, is also essential to discussions of Statius' treatment of the Theban tradition as well as of his allusive techniques.[2]

   Tracing the intertextual connections between the *Thebaid* and earlier literature informs our understanding of Statius' complex poetic technique which, in turn, illuminates the poet's purposes.[3] Allusions guide the reader's response most notably through the effect of irony they create, revealing, as Gervais succinctly points out, 'the hypocrisy, blindness, ill omen, and perversion of Statius' epic universe'.[4] Intertextual links with tragedy, in particular, including but not limited to the use of diction, imagery, themes and motifs, are also essential in shaping the tragic aspect of the narrative, and subsequently open a window for the reader to contemplate vexing issues, also fundamental in tragedy, such as divine and human causation, the role of fate, inherited guilt and their ramifications for mortals.[5] Though dreams are a trademark of epic composition, scholars have recognized the distinctive tragic tone of the dream in *Thebaid* Book 2 on account of its intertextual links with Senecan drama and the strong presence of metatheatrical elements.[6] However, the connection with the dream of Eteocles in Aesch. *Sept.* 710−11, the only possible source for Statius' scene which survives today, has not drawn much attention.[7]

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sketching, see A.J. Gossage, 'Statius', in D.R. Dudley (ed.), *Neronians and Flavians: Silver Latin I* (London and Boston, 1972), 184–235, at 195, D. Vessey, *Statius & the Thebaid* (Cambridge, 1973), 90 and S. Franchet d'Espèrey, 'Le destin dans les épopées de Lucain et de Stace', in J. François (ed.), *Visages du destin dans les mythologies: Mélanges Jacqueline Duchemin* (Paris, 1983), 95−104, at 102.
   [2] The Theban Cycle served as a thematic source for numerous works, most notably epic, tragic and lyric poems. For the authorship, plot and various comments on the surviving fragments of the epic poems *Oedipodeia*, *Thebais*, *Epigoni* and *Alcmaeonis*, see M. Davies, *The Theban Epics* (Washington, 2015). Theban-related plays were very popular in Athenian drama (see H.C. Baldry, 'The dramatization of the Theban legend', *G&R* 3 [1956], 24−37): (1) Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*, the unpreserved *Laius* and *Oedipus* and the lost satyr play *Sphinx*; (2) Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, *Antigone* and *Oedipus at Colonus*; (3) Euripides' *Phoenician Women*, the *Suppliants*, the lost *Alcmaeon in Psofis* and *Antigone*; (4) many unpreserved plays by minor poets (see *TGF* vol. 1, *passim*). The Theban legend or parts of it are treated in the lyric poems of Pindar (*Ol.* 2.35−45) and in Stesichorus' *Eriphyle* (see M. Noussia-Fantuzzi, 'The Epic Cycle, Stesichorus and Ibycus', in M. Fantuzzi and C. Tsagalis [edd.], *The Cambridge Companion to the Cyclic Epic* [Cambridge and New York, 2015], 365−82) and *Thebais* (see J.M. Bremer, A.M. van Erp Taalman Kip, S.R. Slings [edd.], *Some Recently Found Greek Poems: Text and Commentary* [Leiden and New York, 1987], 128−72). The woes of the house of Laius are a theme also in Seneca's *Oedipus* and *Phoenissae*.
   [3] K. Gervais, *Statius, Thebaid 2* (Oxford, 2017), xxxiii–xlvi discusses Statius' debt to earlier poets, offering a summary of the rich intertexts for the opening scene of the second book, ranging from Homer and Virgil to Ovid, Lucan and Seneca.
   [4] Gervais (n. 3), xxxv. For the role of irony in the *Thebaid*, see L. Micozzi, 'Statius' epic poetry: a challenge to the literary past', in W.J. Dominik, C.F. Newlands and K. Gervais (edd.), *Brill's Companion to Statius* (Leiden and Boston, 2015), 325−42, at 329.
   [5] For an informed discussion on these issues, see P.J. Davis, 'The fabric of history in Statius' *Thebaid*', in C. Deroux (ed.), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History* 7 (Brussels, 1994), 464–83; S. Franchet d'Espèrey, 'La causalité dans le chant I de la *Thébaïde* de Stace. Ou commence la *Thébaïde*?', *REL* 79 (2001), 188–200, focussing particularly on Oedipus; Franchet d'Esperey (n. 1); N.W. Bernstein, *In the Image of the Ancestors: Narratives of Kinship in Flavian Epic* (Toronto and Buffalo, 2008), 64−104.
   [6] R. Parkes, 'Finding the tragic in the epics of Statius', in S. Papaioannou and A. Marinis (edd.), *Elements of Tragedy in Flavian Epic* (Berlin, 2021), 107−28, at 121.
   [7] L. Legras, *Étude sur la Thébaïde de Stace* (Paris, 1905), 39 mentions Aesch. *Sept.* 710−11 as an intertext, but traces both the Aeschylean and the Statian dreams back to the cyclic epic *Thebais*. For the *Thebaid*'s intertextual relationship with Greek tragedy, see J.M. Hulls, 'Greek author, Greek past:

This article explores the dream's allusion to Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*, and shows how the intertextual connection underlines even more the tragic character of the scene. More specifically, I argue that the cryptic character of the Aeschylean dream and Eteocles' initial failure to understand its real message form the basis of the episode in *Thebaid* Book 2. Like his tragic counterpart, Statius' Eteocles also fails to interpret the dream correctly. It is the reader of the epic, however, who, on the basis of their awareness of Jupiter's plan as well as their personal experience of dreams and their knowledge of popular dream theories, is able to perceive these Aeschylean features, which Statius adopted to further enhance Eteocles' tragic dimension.

ETEOCLES' DREAM IN AESCHYLUS

In Aesch. *Sept.* 710−11, Eteocles comes to a grim realization as soon as he learns that he is going to face Polynices in battle; this leads him to exclaim: ἄγαν δ' ἀληθεῖς ἐνυπνίων φαντασμάτων | ὄψεις, πατρῴων χρημάτων δατήριοι ('too true were the apparitions in my dream visions, dividing our father's wealth!'). The dream is not attested in any of the surviving fragments of Aeschylus' Theban trilogy, and scholarly views have diverged. Some have argued that the dream was not included in any of the plays and that this was the first and only time it is mentioned; others have suggested that the dream was included in one of the lost tragedies—namely, the *Oedipus*.[8]

Even though the content of the dream remains elusive, Eteocles' exclamation might be indicative of its message. As Anne Burnett argued, the anticipated duel between the two brothers satisfies both the curse of Oedipus and the dream in a way that Eteocles could hardly have expected. The realization that his vision is coming true indicates that its message was such that led him to hope, at least initially, for a peaceful reconciliation with Polynices, but now the vision takes a 'new and sinister meaning'.[9] The ancient scholia offer further information on the dream and its message: according

Statius, Athens, and the tragic self', in A. Augoustakis (ed.), *Flavian Poetry and its Greek Past* (Leiden and Boston, 2014), 193−213, A. Marinis, 'Statius' *Thebaid* and Greek tragedy: the legacy of Thebes', in W.J. Dominik, C.F. Newlands and K. Gervais (edd.), *Brill's Companion to Statius* (Leiden and Boston, 2015), 343–61 and P.J. Heslin, 'Statius and the Greek tragedians on Athens, Thebes and Rome', in J.J.L. Smolenaars, H.J. van Dam, R.R. Nauta (edd.), *The Poetry of Statius* (Leiden and Boston, 2008), 111−28. Numerous studies on the influence of specific Greek poets on individual scenes and characters of the *Thebaid* have also been published: for Euripides' influence on the Hypsipyle episode, see G. Aricò, 'Stazio e l' Ipsipile euripidea: note sull' imitazione staziana', *Dioniso* 35 (1961), 56−67 and R.M. Iglesias and M.C. Álvarez, 'El treno de Hipsípila en la *Tebaida* de Estacio', in J.F. González Castro, A. Alvar Ezquerra, A. Bernabé et al. (edd.), *Actas del XI congreso español de estudios clásicos* (Madrid, 2005), 2.895−902; for the description of Adrastus' and Hippomedon's shields in Eur. *Phoen.* 1113−18 as a model for Capaneus' shield in *Theb.* 4.165−72, see M. Fernandelli, 'Statius' *Thebaid* 4.165−72 and Euripides' *Phoenissae* 1113−18', *SO* 75 (2000), 89−98. For the different versions of the story of Jocasta's suicide in Greek and Roman drama, and in the *Thebaid*, see J.J.L. Smolenaars, 'Statius *Thebaid* 1.72: is Jocasta dead or alive? The tradition of Jocasta's suicide in Greek and Roman drama and in Statius' *Thebaid*', in J.J.L. Smolenaars, H.J. van Dam, R.R. Nauta (edd.), *The Poetry of Statius* (Leiden and Boston, 2008), 215−38.
    [8] For the dream of Eteocles in Aeschylus, and its probable content, see G.O. Hutchinson, *Aeschylus, Septem contra Thebas* (Oxford, 1985), xxvii; A. Burnett, 'Curse and dream in Aeschylus' *Septem*', *GRBS* 14 (1973), 343−68, at 351−61; I. Torrance, *Aeschylus: Seven against Thebes* (London, 2007), 12−13 and 62.
    [9] Burnett (n. 8), 357.

to Σ Aesch. *Sept*. 720−1a, it was the Erinys who appeared in Eteocles' sleep, and whose prophecy is confirmed in the king's statement (Σ Aesch. *Sept*. 722a), while the Σ Aesch. *Sept*. 710−11c states that the dream foretold, like Oedipus' curse, the division of the paternal property by sword. However, it is possible that the scholiasts drew their conclusions from the text itself without necessarily consulting other, now lost, sources.[10] Manton, who claimed that the chorus interprets both the curse and the dream in the first antistrophe of the second stasimon, also suggested that these two sequences were somehow connected. Most probably, he argued, they had something to do with the division of Oedipus' property through the mediation of a Scythian stranger, who, at the moment of Eteocles' realization, proves to be 'cruelhearted Iron' (727−33).[11]

The evidence leads to certain conclusions about the dream in the Aeschylean version of the myth: it was most probably experienced by Eteocles, and it cryptically prophesied the division of Oedipus' wealth between the two brothers;[12] but the Theban king proved to be a fallible reader, unable to interpret the dream correctly before learning that Polynices was stationed outside the gate he was going to defend. Statius adopted the cryptic character of the dream and Eteocles' subsequent failure to determine its true message as the basis for the episode in *Thebaid* Book 2, which he further enriched with elements of epic dream sequences to fit the poem's generic context. Statius' reader, I argue, is able to perceive these Aeschylean features through their own experience and knowledge of the popular beliefs on dreams.

THE DREAM'S EPIC PEDIGREE

Epic poetry's considerable influence on Statius' modelling of the scene places Eteocles' dream in the longstanding tradition of epic dream narratives which was established by Homer and shaped further by his successors, most notably Virgil.[13] As part of the epic apparatus dream scenes serve multiple functions such as better sketching of characters, advancing the plot and halting the narrative as well as foreshadowing upcoming events.[14] Besides their literary functions, dreams were also included in epic poems since they were considered an indispensable precedent, which poets felt the need to follow.

The scene in *Thebaid* Book 2 resembles closely the genre's foundational texts, especially the dream of Agamemnon in *Iliad* Book 2, which exemplifies many of the characteristics of epic dreams.[15] Eteocles' dream, like that of the Mycenean king, is divine in nature and has been sent by Jupiter as part of a bigger plan which governs the whole plot. In both cases, the apparition appears as a person familiar to the dreamer:

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[10] G.R. Manton, 'The second stasimon of the *Seven Against Thebes*', *BICS* 8 (1961), 77−84, at 79 makes this important observation.

[11] Manton (n. 10), 79; Torrance (n. 8), 62 also adopts Manton's view on the dream's content.

[12] Manton (n. 10), 79 has suggested that the dream might have been experienced by Jocasta. Although this is possible, I am more inclined to accept that Eteocles was the one who dreamt of the division of the paternal wealth, in the absence of any evidence supporting Manton's suggestion.

[13] The Homeric epics establish many of the patterns found in subsequent poets. For an exhaustive catalogue of the motifs from Homer to Lucan, see C. Walde, *Die Traumdarstellungen in der griechisch-römischen Dichtung* (Munich, 2001), 439−56.

[14] For the function of epic dreams within the narrative, see Walde (n. 13).

[15] Gervais (n. 3), 97−8 lists a number of epic intertexts, including Agamemnon's dream in the *Iliad* and Allecto's epiphany to Turnus in the *Aeneid*.

in the *Iliad* ὄνειρος takes the form of Nestor (*Il*. 2.20), while in the *Thebaid* Laius assumes the countenance of Tiresias (*Theb*. 2.95−7). From this aspect, the scene can be lumped together with Achilles' dream of Patroclus in *Iliad* Book 23. These three scenes share further similarities: they centre upon the instructions that the apparition communicates to the dreamer: Laius stirs Eteocles to hold the throne for himself and keep Polynices out of Thebes (*Theb*. 2.116−17), ὄνειρος urges Agamemnon to attack the Trojans immediately (*Il*. 2.28−9), while the shade of Patroclus asks Achilles for proper burial (*Il*. 23.71); the apparitions begin their speech by reprimanding the dreamer for inactivity and procrastination. The latter is more of a rhetorical device rather than a motif which, however, is common in dream narratives, including the dream of Turnus in *Aeneid* Book 7, in which Allecto, who has disguised herself as Calybe, Juno's priestess, rebukes the Rutulian hero for not taking action against the Trojans and Latinus (*Aen*. 7.429−34). With the exception of Achilles' dream, these dream narratives are meant to deceive the dreamer by raising false hopes of success: Agamemnon is led to believe that if he attacks at that point he will conquer Troy, Eteocles is led to believe that he will be able to keep the throne for himself, and Turnus is led to believe that he will be victorious over his enemies. To convince them of the truthfulness of their message, the apparitions also reveal that they have been sent by a god: Nestor claims that he was sent by Zeus (*Il*. 2.26), Calybe by Juno (*Aen*. 7.428), and Tiresias by Jupiter (*Theb*. 2.115−16). A peculiar element of Statius' dream scene is that towards the end the apparition removes its disguise, thus revealing its true self (*Theb*. 2.120 −3), a move which parallels only that of Allecto in the *Aeneid* (7.447−8).[16] And like the Fury who instils fear and battle rage in Turnus, Laius enhances further the madness and rage already stirred by Tisiphone on Eteocles.[17] Finally, the narratological environment of Eteocles' dream is also identical to that of Aeneas' dream of Hector in *Aeneid* Book 2, which took place after the Trojans succumbed to sleep and wine (*Aen*. 2.265). These similarities adequately underline Statius' adherence to the epic precedent and, consequently, his intention to place the dream narrative in the tradition of dream narratives in Homer and Virgil.[18]

However, this is not a simple, passive imitation but one infused with innovative elements, which differentiate him from his predecessors. As Gervais specifically points out, Statius substitutes both Allecto's 'metaphysical assault' on Turnus and the Rutulian's 'physical reaction' of soaking in sweat with Laius' blood dripping on Eteocles. Gervais further observes that the shade's disguise as Tiresias is a reversal of the scene in Ov. *Met*. 11.650−6, in which Morpheus assumes the form of the deceased Ceyx, and blood replaces the seawater drops and tears dripping, respectively, from Ceyx's hair and face.[19] Thus Eteocles' dream scene, which is filled with violence and gore, illustrates the same 'contrasting tendencies' with earlier epic poems as the rest of the narrative in the *Thebaid* does.[20]

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[16] Ahl (n. 1 [1986]), 2843.

[17] D. Hershkowitz, *The Madness of Epic. Reading Insanity from Homer to Statius* (Oxford, 1998), 60.

[18] My discussion on the similarities between the dream in *Thebaid* Book 2 and earlier epic poems is greatly indebted to A. Khoo, 'Dream scenes in ancient epic', in C. Reitz and S. Finkmann (edd.), *Structures of Epic Poetry. Vol. II.2: Configuration* (Boston, 2019), 563−95.

[19] Gervais (n. 3), 108.

[20] Khoo (n. 18), 584, and 585−6 for a brief analysis of the elements differentiating Eteocles' dream from the earlier epic tradition.

THE DREAM FROM THE READER'S PERSPECTIVE

Despite the dream's intertextual connections with earlier epic poems, the allusion to Aesch. *Sept.* 710−11 establishes the scene's tragic character. For the reader, however, this is confirmed through the irony created by the incongruity between Jupiter's plan and the dream's execution as part of it, which further enhances Eteocles' tragic nature.[21]

The reader's reception of Laius' appearance as a cryptic dream and their realization of Eteocles' probable failure to grasp the dream's true message depend on two factors. The first is their knowledge of earlier narrative events which shape the dream's context, specifically Jupiter's declaration during the *concilium deorum* (*Theb.* 1.214−47). In Book 1, the chief god, responding to Oedipus' pleas to punish his sons (1.81), summons the gods and lays out his plan: he resolves to stir up war in Thebes and to destroy its royal house (1.241−3). He then proceeds to implicate Argos, owing to Tantalus' abhorrent crime, through Argia's marriage to Polynices (1.243−7). Immediately after rejecting Juno's objections, he puts the plan in motion by sending Mercury to the Underworld to raise Laius from the dead (1.293−6). He further clarifies what the ghost will communicate to Eteocles—namely, that Polynices has prospered in exile and that Jupiter commands him to disregard the familial bonds and to bar his brother from returning to Thebes and from assuming his position as king (1.298 −301). The exposition of the plan and the details of the mission of Laius give the reader some, albeit general, hints on the dream's purpose. As Jupiter himself states clearly at 1.302, Laius' appearance is intended to stir rage between the brothers (*hinc causae irarum*). At the end of the dream scene the shade has achieved its goal, since Eteocles wakes up with an unprecedented rage against his brother (*sic excitus ira | ductor in absentem consumit proelia fratrem*, 2.132−3).[22] But during the course of the scene the reader also sees clearly that Laius communicates Jupiter's orders in such a way that would lead Eteocles, who is unaware of the god's machinations, to hope for a favourable outcome in the conflict with his brother. More specifically, the shade falsely claims that Jupiter sent him out of pity for the king (*ipse deum genitor tibi me miseratus ab alto | mittit*, 2.115−16), mildly suggesting that the god is on his side. Of course the reader knows that this statement holds no truth whatsoever.

The other, and most important, factor is the description of the dream *per se*, which compels the reader to draw parallels between Eteocles' dream and their own experiences as well as between Eteocles' dream and popular dream theories.[23] As Vessey has

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[21] 'Inconsistency' as an element in Statius' epic has been noted in C. Reitz, '*Vocem fata sequuntur*: Entscheidungsfindung und epische Konvention in der flavischen Epik', in T. Baier (ed.), *Götter und menschliche Willensfreiheit. Von Lucan bis Silius Italicus* (Munich, 2012), 29−42, at 37−8 and in C. Criado, 'La inevitable inconsistencia del Zeus/Júpiter épico', *CFC(L)* 35 (2015), 263−77, at 265−8. For Eteocles' tragic nature in the epic, see A. Marinis, 'Eteocles and Polynices in Statius' *Thebaid*: revisiting the issue of tragic causality', in S. Papaioannou and A. Marinis (edd.), *Elements of Tragedy in Flavian Epic* (Berlin, 2021), 149−69.

[22] As soon as Eteocles awakens, he is not *iners* any more. For the importance of the word in the vocabulary of sleep and for dreaming in the *Thebaid*, see A. Sacerdoti, Tremefacta quies. *Spazi di transito nella* Tebaide *di Stazio e nei* Punica *di Silio Italico* (Naples, 2019), 36−7.

[23] Most of the evidence on dream divination in the Graeco-Roman world comes from Artemidorus' second-century C.E. treatise, the *Oneirocritica*. Although written much later than Statius' *Thebaid*, we can assume that dream theories were widely circulating in Imperial times. As the author claims at the beginning of the book, his writings are based mostly on his personal experience (διὰ πείρας), but he also paid heed to the various diviners of his time, and studied meticulously earlier oneiromantic works (1.1 τοῖς τῶν παλαιῶν βιβλίοις … δι' ἀρχαιότητα σπάνια ὄντα καὶ διεφθαρμένα). Furthermore, if

suggested, Laius' appearance could be interpreted either as an *insomnium* (a dream with no predictive value) or as a prophetic *oraculum*.[24] If we look closely, however, at the classification of dreams and their definitions as provided in Artemidorus' *Oneirocritica* and in Macrobius' *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, it becomes evident that Eteocles' vision is a fusion of more dream types than Vessey had proposed.[25] On the basis of their own experience and their knowledge of popular beliefs on dream divination, the reader has the ability to perceive this blending of elements from different dream classes, each signifying different things, and this blending eventually causes Eteocles' failure to understand the dream's message just like his Aeschylean counterpart had failed to do.

Whether Statius intended his readers to view the scene from the perspective of the dream theory is a question that cannot be answered conclusively. However, this assumption is not without merit since the poet makes a crucial statement at the beginning of the scene: to explain Laius' disguise, he states that the shade assumes the form of Tiresias to avoid being considered a false dream (*neu falsa uideri noctis imago queat*, 2.95). The phrase *noctis imago* is synonymous with *somnium* (see *TLL* 7.1.409.10−11), which, in the context of a non-specialized text, is to be understood as any vision that occurs during sleep. Therefore, a *falsa … noctis imago* is an untruthful dream, in other words an ἐνύπνιον.[26] Even though the comment functions as an intranarrative explanation for Laius' disguise, it is possible that Statius implicitly invites his readers to view the dream scene from this aspect.

ETEOCLES' DREAM AND DREAM THEORY

At the beginning of *Thebaid* Book 2, Mercury, obeying Jupiter's command, travels from Taenarus to Thebes accompanied by the ghost of Laius. It happens that on the same

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we consider Gervais's ([n. 3], 84) assumption that Statius was suffering from frequent bouts of insomnia (at least during the composition of *Thebaid* Book 2), perhaps we have another reason to believe that the poet would be particularly interested in dreams and sleep.

[24] Vessey (n. 1), 235 followed by Gervais (n. 3), 98.

[25] In Artemidorus' five-volume treatise, the basic distinction is made between ὄνειροι and ἐνύπνια, that is, prophetic and non-prophetic dreams respectively (1.1 [3.13−15 Pack]). ὄνειροι are further divided into two subcategories based on whether their content appears in literal or in symbolic form: in θεωρηματικοὶ ὄνειροι the message is directly communicated to the dreamer (1.2 [4.23 Pack]), while in ἀλληγορικοὶ ὄνειροι the message is encrypted (1.2 [5.9−11 Pack]); therefore, the dream needs decoding. The taxonomy of ὄνειροι branches further as the θεωρηματικοί are subdivided into ὁράματα and χρηματισμοί (1.2 [6.16−17 Pack]). In the case of the ἐνύπνια, Artemidorus adds another class, the φαντάσματα, on which he does not elaborate further (1.2 [6.13−14 Pack]). He thus reaches a fivefold taxonomy consisting of the non-prophetic φάντασμα and ἐνύπνιον, and the prophetic ὅραμα, χρηματισμός and ὄνειρος. In his *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, Macrobius also distinguishes between five classes, and provides us with their Greek equivalents (*In Somn.* 1.3.2). The Greek terms are identical with those employed by Artemidorus: ὄνειρος = *somnium*, ὅραμα = *uisio*, χρηματισμός = *oraculum*, ἐνύπνιον = *insomnium*, φάντασμα = *uisum*. In the class of *uisum*/φάντασμα, Macrobius includes the ἐπιάλτης, an apparition which attacks people in their sleep, causing a feeling of pressure and burden (*In Somn.* 1.3.7). For a critical analysis of Artemidorus' dream classes, see D.E. Harris-McCoy, *Artemidorus*' Oneirocritica (Oxford, 2012), 414−24 and A.H.M. Kessels, 'Ancient systems of dream-classification', *Mnemosyne* 4 (1969), 389 −424, at 391−6.

[26] Ahl (n. 1 [1986]), 2843: 'To avoid appearing "a false vision of the night" − *falsa … noctis imago* (94−95), Laius assumes a false appearance, and thus becomes a false vision.'

night the whole city assembled to celebrate a Bacchic festival.[27] Statius' brief though
vivid description of the festivities sheds light on the physical condition of the
participants, especially Eteocles, before he experiences the ominous dream (2.73–8):

> … Tyriis ea causa colonis
> insomnem ludo certatim educere noctem
> suaserat; effusi passim per tecta, per agros,   75
> serta inter uacuosque mero crateras anhelum
> proflabant sub luce deum; tunc plurima buxus
> aeraque taurinos sonitu uincentia pulsus;

The Thebans stayed awake for the whole night, spending their time in playful rivalry
(2.74) and rejoicing in ecstatic music (2.77–8). Mercury and Laius arrive at dawn
(2.77), only when everyone is asleep (2.77) after excessively indulging in drinking
(2.76).[28] As king of Thebes, Eteocles would certainly have participated in the festival
to honour the protector deity of his city and naturally he would have enjoyed the
pleasures of wine and food. Statius' description of Eteocles' bodily state in the
subsequent lines supports this argument:

> … ubi ingens   90
> fuerat Assyriis extructa tapetibus alto
> membra toro. pro gnara nihil mortalia fati
> corda sui! capit ille dapes, habet ille soporem.
> tunc senior quae iussus agit; neu falsa uideri
> noctis imago queat …   95

The king lay with his arms and legs spread out as a person consumed by wine would
have done. Although *Theb.* 2.91–2 is the only instance of the active *fundo* used in
this sense, there is no need for emendation.[29] Coffee argues that the verb belongs to
the 'vocabulary of wasteful expenditure' that is used for the description of Eteocles,
and Gervais claims that the active form allows for such a reading.[30] Incapacitated by
the all-night celebrations, by drinking and by eating (*capit ille dapes*), Eteocles assumes
an unseemly posture and falls asleep. Both passages underline the immoderate
consumption of food or drink, which is exactly the cause of an ἐνύπνιον, according
to Artemidorus (1.1). And even though one might suggest that the reader would have
considered the dream trustworthy, since it had occurred at dawn when dreams were
usually accounted true, the general view was that food and wine could potentially disturb
the predictive power of dreams, which consequently influenced the time when such
dreams were experienced.[31] This idea holds true also for Artemidorus who claims that

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[27] Gervais (n. 3), 89 identifies this festival as the τριετηρίς, during which women dressed as mae-
nads would engage in 'ὀρειβασία (mountain dancing; still practiced in St.'s day [Plut. *De prim. frig.*
953d]; cf. 79f.) and σπαραγμός and ὠμοφαγία (dismembering and eating raw animal flesh; the prac-
tice found more in myth than actual ritual [*OCD* s.v. *Dionysus*]; cf. 83f.)'.

[28] Gervais (n. 3), 91 argues that Laius' appearance happens at dawn, not during the day, since
such an interpretation does not disturb the chronological sequence and is further supported by lines
76–7 (the verb *proflabant* recalls Nisus and Euryalus' episode, which takes place at night [Verg.
Aen. 9.325–6]).

[29] Gervais (n. 3), 96.

[30] N. Coffee, 'Eteocles, Polynices, and the economics of violence in Statius' *Thebaid*', *AJPh* 127
(2006), 415–52, at 436; Gervais (n. 3), 97.

[31] Gervais (n. 3), 91 cites Ov. *Her.* 19.195–6 and claims that, since Eteocles' dream is prophetic,
dawn is the appropriate time for it. For the immoderate consumption of food and drink as a factor

the time of experiencing the dream (even at dawn) is irrelevant to its prognosis, and that the only factor affecting the dream's outcome is the consumption of food (1.7).[32] Therefore, by elaborating on Eteocles' physical condition, Statius sketches him as an ideal candidate for experiencing a non-prophetic vision, thus suggesting that Laius' appearance could have been perceived by the reader as an ἐνύπνιον. This is further affirmed by the comment which comes immediately afterwards, in lines 94−5. Under the circumstances, Eteocles would probably have discredited the dream's predictive value and considered it a *falsa ... noctis imago*.

To avoid Eteocles' rejection of the dream as untruthful and non-prophetic, Laius disguises himself (2.95–100):

> … longaeui uatis opacos   95
> Tiresiae uultus uocemque et uellera nota
> induitur. mansere comae propexaque mento
> canities pallorque suus, sed falsa cucurrit
> infula per crines, glaucaeque innexus oliuae
> uittarum prouenit honos;   100

The passage suggests the conflation of two other dream classes according to Macrobius' definitions. Before appearing to his grandson, Laius assumes the countenance, voice and characteristic sacred fillets of Tiresias. The latter is a revered prophet and a priest (he is called *sacerdos* at 4.455 and 4.503), and with his appearance the dream automatically becomes a χρηματισμός (*oraculum*; see Macrob. *In Somn.* 1.3.8).[33] However, lines 97−8 clearly indicate that the ghost has retained some of its original characteristics, such as the hair and white beard of Laius as well as the paleness of the dead. Therefore, the figure that Eteocles sees in his dream presents some discrepancies with the actual figure of Tiresias. In this case, the dream could also have been perceived as a φάντασμα (*uisum*, Macrob. *In Somn.* 1.3.7).

The end of the dream would have confused Eteocles even more. Having delivered Jupiter's orders, Laius tears the twigs and fillets from his head, and reveals his true identity (2.120–4):

> dixit, et abscedens (etenim iam pallida turbant   120
> sidera lucis equi) ramos ac uellera fronti
> deripuit, confessus auum, dirique nepotis
> incubuit stratis; iugulum mox caede patentem
> nudat et undanti perfundit uulnere somnum.

As Lesueur first pointed out, the removal of the disguise is odd.[34] If Laius' intention was to convince Eteocles that the dream is trustworthy, why not continue impersonating Tiresias till the end?[35] Instead, he divests himself of the olive branches and the fillets (and probably of any other personal characteristic of the prophet, since he now appears in his real form: *confessus auum*), leans over the king, and sprinkles him with his own

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affecting the predictive power of dreams, see Harris-McCoy (n. 25), 430, who also includes in his discussion a list of primary sources.

[32] The belief that reliable dreams are the result of eating in moderation before sleep was probably very old, dating back to Plato and the Pythagoreans (see Cic. *Diu.* 2.119).

[33] Gervais (n. 3), 98.

[34] R. Lesueur, *Thébaïde* (Paris, 1990), 1.128 n. 11: '… il révèle, sans raison particulière, sa veritable identité'.

[35] Gervais (n. 3), 107 wonders exactly the same.

blood.[36] In the reader's eyes, however, the abandonment of the disguise significantly changes the character of the dream, since they realize that it causes further confusion to the king who in the aftermath of the dream would have wondered what exactly he had seen. Was it Laius or Tiresias? This question has further implications, because the appearance of a different figure in a dream signifies different things. According to Artem. 3.20, if someone dreams of resorting to a prophet about some issue, they are seriously concerned about it. Of course, Eteocles does not imagine resorting to Tiresias on his own, but he is clearly worried about something, and that is the return of his brother.[37] Unwilling to relinquish power to Polynices as we can infer from Jupiter's statement at 1.299−301, Eteocles experiences a dream advising him to keep the throne for himself (2.115). But as soon as the ghost reveals his true identity, the dream obtains a different meaning. According to Artem. 3.27, an ancestor's (that is, a relative born before someone's parents) appearance in a dream suggests anxieties stemming from the past. And the outcome will be positive if the figure says something pleasant, but if not, the opposite. At the end of the narrative, Eteocles has experienced a twofold dream and is unable to interpret it correctly, contrary to the reader who is able to fully perceive the events based on their knowledge of Jupiter's plan. From their perspective, the ambiguity created by the disguise and its eventual abandonment renders Laius' epiphany a *somnium*, which for Eteocles would have necessitated oneiromantic interpretation (Macrob. *In Somn.* 1.3.10).

Laius' leaning over Eteocles might be indicative of another dream type, the ἐπιάλτης/ἐφιάλτης. This class had been studied as a medical condition as early as the first century B.C.E., when Themison described the symptoms it causes on those who sleep intoxicated or suffer from indigestion (Paul. Aeg. 3.15.1.1−8). Apart from Eteocles' intoxication which is suggestive of this dream class, the connection becomes stronger in the reader's mind through the etymological link between the verb used to describe Laius' movement (*incubuit*) and the Latin noun for the ἐπιάλτης (*incubo*). Scribonius Largus, the physician of the first century C.E. who presents a prescription to alleviate the symptoms of this psychologically induced nightmare, identifies it as a deceptive dream which causes the patient to lose their ability to breathe and speak (100.3).

CONCLUSION

The analysis of these passages shows the fusion of different dream types in the narrative which the reader of the *Thebaid* would be able to recognize through their own experience and knowledge of popular dream theories. What is more important, though, is that they would have grasped the dream's overall cryptic character and Eteocles' foreseeable failure to understand it, both features alluding to the Aeschylean verses. In this process, which results in the enhancement of the king's tragic presentation, their awareness of Jupiter's plan is crucial since they realize immediately that Laius/Tiresias is lying when he claims that the god sent him to Eteocles out of pity. The chief god had no intention of warning or advising him on the proper course of action.

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[36] According to Gervais (n. 3), 98, this is the first instance of a person's ghost appearing in disguise.

[37] This is further confirmed by Eteocles' subsequent fantasies, specifically the fight with his absent brother. See A. Lagière, *La* Thébaïde *de Stace et le sublime* (Brussels, 2017), 126−8.

His purpose, instead, is to stir further the rage of the king which will put the divine plan in motion, leading Argos and Thebes to war, and the two brothers eventually to a mutual fratricide. With his final words, Laius urges Eteocles to keep the throne for himself and to send Polynices to exile (2.116−17 *habe Thebas, caecumque cupidine regni,* | *ausurumque eadem, germanum expelle*). Technically speaking, he instructs him how to divide the realm (that is, the property) of his father, Oedipus. This is a bad and unfair division, but still a division of patrimonial property: one brother gets everything, the other nothing. And like his Aeschylean counterpart, Eteocles cannot even imagine that Laius has just prophesied his grandsons' doom.

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