**Lucan and Flavian Epic**

*by*

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# 1. Introduction

There has never been a moment when more scholarly attention has been devoted to Roman epic poetry of the Neronian and Flavian periods. There have certainly been high points in the reception histories of these poems in the past. In the Neronian and Flavian periods themselves, the contemporary reception of the epics that survive today was intense and largely positive, and, in the fifteenth century, excitement about the “rediscovery” of poems like Valerius Flaccus’ *Argonautica* and Silius Italicus’ *Punica* helped to bring the level of attention devoted to those poems closer to that of Lucan’s *Bellum Civile* and Statius’ *Thebaid* and *Achilleid*, but at no time in the modern world has it been easier to find people enthusiastic about the epic poems of the 60s to the 90s CE. Our aim in this book is to characterize and historicize the moment in the sun that these poems are experiencing in the early twenty-first century. What follows is a set of four review essays, each devoted to one of the four Neronian and Flavian authors whose epics substantially survive. Each will stand on its own, providing a snapshot of the current state of the field and some predictions of future directions in scholarship on the particular author and poem(s) it addresses. Taken together, the four essays form an overview of the history, present, and a possible future of studies in the epic of the period.

Although the five poems treated in this book have much in common, as do the histories of their reception, it is perhaps surprising that the particular grouping of Neronian and Flavian epic is not more common in scholarship. Rather, scholarship has more often treated all of Roman epic together[[1]](#footnote-1) or, especially more recently, the Flavians as a unique subgroup.[[2]](#footnote-2) A kind of compromise between the two positions can isolate post-Virgilian epic, as in Philip Hardie’s *The Epic Successors of Virgil* or David Quint’s *Epic and Empire*.[[3]](#footnote-3) Nevertheless, there are good reasons both to include Lucan with the Flavian epic poets and to treat the five extant, classical, post-Augustan epic poems as a distinct group. First, Lucan’s poem is closer in the time of its composition to the Flavian epics than to any others. There is a gap of almost fifty years between Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and Lucan’s *Bellum Civile*, and three centuries between the end of the Flavian period and the time of Claudian, but the poems of Lucan, Valerius Flaccus, Statius, and Silius Italicus all appeared within a period of about thirty-five years. They were also produced in a changed literary milieu. Alain Gowing has argued that the Augustan and Tiberian periods were characterized by attempts to emphasize continuity with the *res publica*, and that it was in the Neronian period that Roman literature ceased to pretend that the Republic had been or could be restored, but instead emphasized the historical rupture of the Augustan revolution that created an imperial period.[[4]](#footnote-4) Roland Mayer has similarly argued that it was in the Neronian period that Roman authors first treated Augustan poems as “classics.”[[5]](#footnote-5) Moreover, recent scholarship has emphasized the ways in which Lucan radically challenged the ethics and poetics of these Augustan classics, especially Virgil, and how the Flavian epicists each responded to Lucan’s provocations. We would not be wrong, in fact, to treat the Flavians as the epic successors of Lucan. Finally, the reception histories of the Neronian and Flavian epics are characterized by a common narrative of a long period of unfair neglect or denigration followed by a redemption in the late twentieth century, a narrative which has profoundly shaped the modern scholarship that has effected that redemption.

The similarities between the poems and between the histories of their receptions, combined with the fact that there is significant overlap among the scholars who have written the most influential recent works on the poems, means that there are a few themes that recur in our treatments of the separate authors. Some themes, like an emphasis on intertextuality and a recent increase in interest in the reception histories of the poems, are part of broader trends in Latin literary scholarship and Classical scholarship more generally. Others, like a strong emphasis on textual criticism and a certain defensiveness about the quality of the poems, are more unique to the genre and period. The most persistent theme is the recurrent narrative of development that has characterized the late twentieth and early twenty-first century surge in scholarship on Neronian and Flavian epic. According to the usual story, “silver” epic was subject to incorrectly negative judgments of its quality in comparison with that of the epics of Homer and Virgil, but scholars now correctly see that imperial Latin epic is of excellent quality and is a worthy subject of scholarship. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, even Virgil suffered,[[6]](#footnote-6) but once the rehabilitation of Latin epic took hold, it marched chronologically through Virgil, Ovid, Lucan, and then to the Flavians, where simultaneous composition makes the chronological advance more complicated. Claudian is sometimes included as a late antique coda to the story.

There can be no doubt that imperial Latin epic suffered through a period of neglect but is now enjoying a renaissance. Scholars of Latin poetry, however, have learned to be skeptical of neat narratives in literary history,[[7]](#footnote-7) and we should be just as skeptical of tempting narratives in the history of scholarship. Our aim in this book is decidedly not to argue that twenty-first-century scholars and critics are wrong and that “silver” epic really is bad and unworthy as a subject of study. Rather, our goal is to apply some of the insights of reception studies to recent receptions of Neronian and Flavian epic in a way that historicizes the remarkable shift in scholarly appreciation for these poems in the late twentieth century. Just as it was never the case that the inherently bad quality of post-Augustan epic was the cause of the poor reception of the poems, it is equally not the case that the inherently good quality of the poems is the cause of their scholarly redemption.

A confluence of four developments has produced circumstances favourable to a surge of interest in Neronian and Flavian epic. First, the rise of postmodern thought in the latter half of the twentieth century provided theoretical approaches amenable to the poems; second, the digital revolution has provided tools especially suited to poems characterized by intricate allusion; third, the increase in scholarship on Latin epic in general an Virgil’s *Aeneid* in particular has provided an initial methodological framework for addressing the poems; and finally, the working conditions of professional Classicists in the twenty-first century have encouraged scholarship on lesser-covered authors. The most beneficial postmodern tendency for imperial epic has been the distrust of canons and the elevation of marginal works of literature beginning in the second half of the twentieth century, which has helped to shorten the distance between the richly received *Aeneid* and its lesser-known successors. Moreover, the relegation of Latin epic to universities (Homer is still read in secondary schools and remains a famous name, but Virgil much less so) has also helped to flatten distinctions between the worthiness of different Latin epics. A separate but related development is the increasing utility of digital tools for analyzing Latin poetry, including especially for intertextual approaches. The searchable Latin texts of the Packard Humanities Institute (PHI) and *Musisque Deoque* (MQDQ), along with algorithms like the Tesserae Project, have given new impetus to the study of Latin intertextuality.[[8]](#footnote-8) The highly allusive poetry of the Neronian and Flavian periods is particularly amenable to this kind of study, as Don Fowler demonstrates by using the PHI database in his important early defense of intertextuality, “On the shoulders of giants.”[[9]](#footnote-9) Not only are the Neronian and Flavian epics especially intertextual, but their length, which might deter scholars conditioned to read closely, is amenable to computational methods that manage large amounts of text easily.[[10]](#footnote-10) Additionally, the successful development of a critical mass of scholarship on the successors of Virgil has provided scholars eager to work on these poets with a methodological starting place, and although the imperial epics have come into their own right, the borrowing of techniques developed for the study of Augustan Latin epics has proven valuable in scholarship on the later poems as well. One especially clear example of this phenomenon is the adaptation of the Virgilian “optimist/pessimist” debate to each of the epics discussed in this volume.

Beyond the rise of postmodern tastes, the digital revolution, and the increase of interest in other Latin epics, there is also a more practical reason for the Neronian and Flavian scholarly renaissance (or perhaps simply naissance) of the twenty-first century, and that is the sheer number of scholars and publications in the field of Classical Studies. We have become so accustomed to lamenting, and rightly so, the shrinking of our discipline and the dearth of positions, especially secure positions, for aspiring Classics professors that we lose sight of how much the field has grown since the Second World War.[[11]](#footnote-11) Growth in the number of degrees granted combined with the incredibly competitive conditions of the job market and the aspirations of an increasing number of institutions to produce significant research means that the number of Classical publications has seen a marked increase. It should be no surprise then, that a growing number of scholars are interested in imperial Latin epic, and that there should be a proportionally greater number of publications in the field, including publications of very high quality. If, already in 1965, Michael Putnam felt the need to apologize for writing yet another monograph on Virgil, it was inevitable that some of the scholarly interest in an author like Virgil would spill over into interest in Virgil’s successors.[[12]](#footnote-12) The point of this foray into the economics and labor conditions of the discipline of Classical Studies in universities is to say that it is not without reason that the twenty-first century can suddenly appreciate the merits of poets who in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries found few admirers. We have read and written about imperial epic with pleasure and benefit, but we have not done so because the poems are good. Rather, the poems have become good because, for practical reasons, we have read them with pleasure and benefit.

Each of our chapters will present a version of the narrative of redemption, and each will also challenge that story in one way or another. Although the commonality of the overall narrative that dominates the current view of the reception of the poems urges a kind of uniformity, in fact each poem has its own, unique reception history. There is, for example, an instructive contrast between the reception of Lucan’s *Bellum Civile* and that of Silius Italicus’ *Punica*. Evaluations of the quality of Lucan’s poem have varied, but even negative judgments have often produced strong reactions to the poem. Lucan has circulated continuously since antiquity, while Silius largely disappeared after antiquity until the fifteenth century. Moreover, even in the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, there are only scattered references and literary allusions to the *Punica*. Edward L. Bassett, in his 1953 defense of Silius, acknowledges that these references are merely “tacit acknowledgement of the merits of the author.”[[13]](#footnote-13) An illuminating contrast can be made with Edward Paleit’s monograph on Lucan in sixteenth century England, which shows, not tacit acknowledgement of Lucan’s merits, but deep and significant engagement with Lucan’s poem and a sense that interpretations of the *Bellum Civile* were vitally important for contemporary politics.[[14]](#footnote-14) The richer reception history of the *Bellum Civile* provides an entirely different kind of platform for modern scholarship than the relatively poor reception history of the *Punica*. A similar contrast can be made between the extensive reception of Statius’ *Thebaid* and, to a lesser extent, *Achilleid*, and the poorer reception of Valerius Flaccus’ *Argonautica*. Although all the poems share their late-twentieth-century redemption, a longer view of reception shows that the character of that reception differs between the poems.

We present the epics in their chronological order (although there was some overlap in the periods of their composition), but there are also significant thematic connections that cut across chronology. Most obvious is the connection of the two historical epics (the *Bellum Civile* and the *Punica*) and the three mythological epics (the *Argonautica*, the *Thebaid*, and the *Achilleid*). From the perspective of their reception histories, the mythological poems of Statius have more in common with the historical one of Lucan, and there is a corresponding similarity between the mythological poem of Valerius Flaccus and the historical one of Silius Italicus. Both Valerius and Silius suffered from almost complete neglect and a preponderance of denigration among what little reception was recorded for centuries, while Lucan and Statius never lacked an audience and provoked more varied reactions. Both Lucan and Statius present their readers with an abundance of difficult questions and problems that can have no solution, but those problems have almost continually found readers compelled to grapple with them. Such thematic connections mean that although we expect many readers of this book to read one chapter rather than the whole book, there is nevertheless a whole that is more than simply the sum of its parts. It is our hope that readers who come to this book for one author or one epic will find that there is much to gain by reading Neronian and Flavian epic together. There has never yet been a better time to do so.

# 2. Lucan

Scholarship on Lucan’s epic, even more than that on most classical literature, has been characterized by a need to confront fundamental questions that can have no definitive answer. A reader approaching the poem, for example, is immediately confronted with the insoluble problem of its title. For most of the history of its reception, the poem has been Lucan’s *Pharsalia*, but in the last few decades it has become increasingly common for scholars to prefer the title *Bellum Civile*. The issue is impossible to avoid—anyone talking or writing about the poem must make a choice. If there were no clearly correct title, the choice would be inconsequential. Scholars often have to improvise a common practice for giving titles to ancient texts. In the case of Lucan’s epic, however, there is tantalizing evidence that encourages scholars to make arguments and express strong opinions. Ahl summarized the evidence and arguments in 1976, and the fundamental positions have not changed in the nearly fifty years since.[[15]](#footnote-15) The manuscripts that give the poem a title name it *de Bello Civili*, but Lucan himself seems to name the poem *Pharsalia* at 9.985. Statius seems to call it *Pharsalica Bella* (*Silvae* 2.7.68) and by the Middle Ages, *Pharsalia* was in use by some authors (Dante calls it *Farsalia* at *Convivio* 4.28.13). Twenty-first-century scholars most commonly use the title given in the manuscripts, *de Bello Civili*, but also frequently modify that title to *Bellum Civile*.[[16]](#footnote-16) If Lucan were alive today, he might very well be delighted by the controversy. His poem does nothing more insistently than confront its readers with insoluble problems and unanswerable questions, and while some readers have simply given up, there has never in nearly two thousand years been a shortage of readers who feel irresistibly compelled to try anyway.

## 2.1. Lucan’s Ancient, Medieval, and Early Modern Receptions

Perhaps the most productive area of growth across Classical scholarship at the moment is Classical reception studies, and Lucan is no exception to this rule. It is fitting, then, to begin a survey of current approaches to Lucan with some receptions of his poem. Although evidence of explicit appreciation of Lucan’s insoluble problems does not appear until recently, we can detect traces of controversy about the poem almost as soon as it appeared.[[17]](#footnote-17) Suetonius’ *Vita* tells us that the *Bellum Civile* was a school text, and Statius’ poem dedicated to Lucan’s widow, Polla, for Lucan’s birthday (*Silvae* 2.7) presents the poem as surpassing even Virgil’s *Aeneid*. Even if the occasion and addressee of Statius’ poem lead readers to question the full sincerity of the sentiment, the poem shows the extent to which praise of the *Bellum Civile* was possible and plausible. Yet the *Bellum Civile* also quickly attracted criticism and mockery. Petronius seems to parody the poem (*Satyricon* 118–124), which is evidence not only of its status but also that it was possible to find in the poem recognizable tendencies to mock. Quintilian offers only reserved praise: *Lucanus ardens et concitatus et sententiis clarissimus et, ut dicam quod sentio, magis oratoribus quam poetis imitandus* (“Lucan is passionate and quick and most famous for his *sententia* and, if I may say what I think, more suitable for imitation by orators than by poets.” *Inst.* 10.1.90). Quintilian’s phrasing (*ut dicam quod sentio*) suggests that he is wading into an ongoing controversy. Martial seems to engage in the same debate, while also providing evidence of Lucan’s popularity, when he has Lucan say, *Sunt quidam, qui me dicant non esse poetam: / sed qui me vendit bibliopola putat* (“There are some who say that I am not a poet, but the bookseller who sells me thinks I am,” *Epigrams* 14.194). Fronto thought Lucan to be too repetitive (Ambr. 344). Servius (*ad Aeneid* 1.382) and Isidore (*Etym.* 8.7.10) called the *Bellum Civile* more historiography than epic. Throughout antiquity, readers had the sense that there was something wrong with Lucan’s poem, although the various attempts to pin down and express what that was never outweighed the poem’s popular and scholarly appeal.

Lucan’s controversial status continued through the Middle Ages. Despite Servius’ criticism of Lucan, his quotations of the *Bellum Civile* demonstrate that he had read the whole poem and was interested in its interpretation. Our collections of scholia, the earliest manuscript of which dates to the ninth century, show the influence of Servius continuing through the tradition of exegesis of the poem. While there is not, for Lucan, an identifiable single ancient commentator, there are two medieval collections of scholia, the *Commenta Bernensia* and the *Adnotationes super Lucanum*, along with marginal and interlinear notes present in various manuscripts.[[18]](#footnote-18) The collections and marginalia have clearly ancient roots, and they form the basis of subsequent medieval and Renaissance commentaries, which for the most part have yet to be edited. Perhaps under the influence of Servius, or perhaps more independently, the exegetical tradition maintains a hesitancy that suggests that Martial had it right: Lucan’s constant popularity was not accompanied by universal praise. In this light, the medieval literary reception of Lucan, which is extensive and most richly studied for Dante and Abelard (but much work remains to be done in this area),[[19]](#footnote-19) is more ambiguous than adulatory.

Even more than in the Middle Ages, criticism of Lucan in the Renaissance flourished. The debate over Servius’ and Isidore’s argument that the poem was more prosaic than poetic continued, but criticism of Lucan also moved beyond it. The *Bellum Civile* received an *editio princeps* in 1469, among the very first Latin poems to be printed.[[20]](#footnote-20) Lucan’s preeminence, however, was not an indicator of future fortune, as the sixteenth century came to view him as an inferior successor of Virgil in a post-Augustan age, coming to a consensus that Lucan’s Latin belonged to a “Silver Age.”[[21]](#footnote-21) At the same time as sixteenth-century educational reforms brought him to more students than ever, Lucan was relatively marginalized in scholarship and curricula.[[22]](#footnote-22) Erasmus’ *Adagia*, for example, cite Horace 393 times, Plautus 322 times, Virgil 227 times, Terence 226 times, Ovid 120 times, and Lucan and Statius just 5 times each (Silius Italicus and Valerius Flaccus do not get a citation at all).[[23]](#footnote-23) Julius Caesar Scaliger’s 1561 *Poetices Libri Septem* defended Lucan against the charge of being more a historiographer than a poet, but argued that in the wake of Virgil, the poor successors could only do things worse.[[24]](#footnote-24) He says that Lucan *latrare* (“barks” v.325) and is ignorant of geography and astronomy (v.325–327), and that *Latine aliter dicemus* (“We should speak Latin differently.” v.325).[[25]](#footnote-25) Susanna Braund is not wrong to write, “Lucan seems to have enjoyed more or less constant popularity from the fourth century to the early eighteenth century,”[[26]](#footnote-26) but if there was any time in that range when Lucan’s canonicity was threatened, it was in the sixteenth century.

Edward Paleit’s 2013 monograph, *War, Liberty, and Caesar: Responses to Lucan’s* Bellum Ciuile, *ca. 1580–1650,* provides rich examples of a surge of engagement with Lucan’s poem, particularly in England, in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Rather than comparing Lucan’s style or treatment of generic conventions with those of Virgil, Paleit’s translators, adaptors, and politicians use Lucan’s poem to engage with their own political context, sometimes clearly embracing a “Caesarist” reading and other times resisting it, but frequently approaching the poem on its own terms and in relation to their contemporary political context, rather than in relation to the *Aeneid*. Such literary and political reception was accompanied by new scholarly interest as well. Grotius’ 1614 edition combined with Farnaby’s 1618 commentary served as the standard way to read the text for more than a century, and Housman wrote in 1926, “[T]he poem has even now no better commentary.”[[27]](#footnote-27) Paleit’s reading of Farnaby emphasizes the unresolvable tension between his explicit Caesarist sympathies and his lamentation of the destruction or oppression of liberty. Paleit writes, “Lucan’s text could prompt different, sometimes incompatible responses in the same reader. It is a mistake to regularize such responses into coherent ideological positions.”[[28]](#footnote-28) This becomes a theme of seventeenth century responses to Lucan, including especially Samuel Daniel’s, Thomas May’s, and Abraham Cowley’s engagements with the problem of the end, or rather the endlessness, of the *Bellum Civile*.[[29]](#footnote-29) The seventeenth century was, if not *the* peak, at least *a* peak of this kind of engagement with Lucan, in which readers in difficult circumstances and feeling contradictions within themselves were drawn to the contradictions and un-resolvability of Lucan’s poem.

After the high point of the early seventeenth century, attention to Lucan faded somewhat, although his apparent emotional irrationality appealed to the Romantics, including Hölderlin, who translated Lucan in 1789–90, Percy Shelley, who wrote in 1815 that Lucan transcended Virgil,[[30]](#footnote-30) and Goethe, who included Erichtho in *Faust Part Two* in 1832. Jesse Weiner and Andrew McClellan have argued that Mary Shelley also engaged with Lucan’s Erichtho in *Frankenstein*.[[31]](#footnote-31) In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there were many new editions: Oudendorp (1728), Cortius (completed in 1731, but published in 1828), Burman (1740), Weber (1821), Weise (1835), Haskins (1887), Hosius (1892), Lejay (1894), and Francken (1896–7).[[32]](#footnote-32) In addition, Bentley began an edition in 1722, but never completed it, and his grandson published the notes in 1760. There has yet to be a focused study on the reception of Lucan in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and it may be that, in contrast to Lucan’s sixteenth and seventeenth century receptions, there is not enough interesting material from this period to make such an undertaking worthwhile. In a 2012 volume on *Romans and Romantics*, for example, Lucan gets just one brief mention (and Valerius Flaccus, Statius, and Silius Italicus get none), in comparison with about twenty index entries for Ovid, about thirty for Virgil, and half a dozen for Caesar.[[33]](#footnote-33) That volume was not meant to be comprehensive, but it gives an indication of the relative proportions of interest in Latin authors in the current scholarship on the period.

## 2.2. Lucan in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

There was a turning point for Lucan in 1926, when Housman’s edition appeared, bringing explicitly to the text of Lucan a sense of insoluble problems. Housman’s introduction, while noting, “[T]he text of Lucan is good,”[[34]](#footnote-34) also makes the argument that, in the case of Lucan, a stemma is not possible or helpful.[[35]](#footnote-35) Of the more than four hundred partial or complete manuscripts, Housman relies primarily on five from the ninth and tenth centuries, but he gives up on describing their relationships.[[36]](#footnote-36) He explains, “The manuscripts group themselves not in families but in factions; their dissidences and agreements are temporary and transient, like the splits and coalitions of political party; and the utmost which can be done to classify them is to note the comparative frequency of their shifting alliances.”[[37]](#footnote-37) Although occasional emendations are necessary, for Housman the best text is for the most part a selection of readings from those five manuscripts. About fourth- or fifth-century palimpsests, for example, he writes, “[They] have perhaps a better text than any one of our medieval manuscripts, but not so good a text as could be composed by choosing from the five.”[[38]](#footnote-38) Moreover, “Grammarians and other ancient authors who quote from Lucan very seldom offer any true or even noteworthy variant not to be found in ZPGUV.”[[39]](#footnote-39) The situation remains largely the same today,[[40]](#footnote-40) and Shackleton Bailey felt compelled in the preface to his 1987 Teubner (and in a 1987 *PCPS* article quoted in that preface)[[41]](#footnote-41) to defend the utility of a new edition. He argues that the primary value of his new edition is to anthologize arguments made since 1926, rather than to improve substantially on Housman’s text. Housman’s approach acknowledges the challenges of editing Lucan, that although in almost all cases the correct readings are there to be read in one or more of the major manuscripts, the comforting sense of certainty offered by the stemmatic method is unavailable for Lucan’s text, and editors are left to select eclectically from the available readings whichever seems best. Lucan, as usual, tempts us with answers but denies us any certainty.

In the anglophone tradition, the first half of the twentieth century saw Lucan as hardly worthy of interpretive attention, but already in 1924 Eduard Fraenkel’s “Lucan als Mittler des antiken Pathos” sought to redeem Lucan, at least partially. Though Fraenkel’s Lucan is not as significant, mature, or powerful as Virgil or Cicero, he is the master of pathos and surpasses all others in this one area. Ambivalent as it is in its judgment of the quality of Lucan’s poetry, this article represents a turning point for modern literary scholarship on Lucan, representing Lucan as a worthwhile subject for interpretive analysis. The success of that position is demonstrated by continued critical interest in the poem by such scholars as Marti, Bruère, Grimal, Brisset, and Gagliardi, all doing extensive work on Lucan in the middle of the twentieth century.[[42]](#footnote-42) And yet, even in 1967, Morford’s *The Poet Lucan*, while demonstrating keen dedication to the poem, still apologizes for its low literary quality.[[43]](#footnote-43) Such a rhetorical poem could not, according to Morford, be counted in the first rank of epics.

It has for some time been generally agreed that the so-called rehabilitation of Lucan began with Frederick Ahl’s 1976 book, *Lucan: An Introduction*, which presents the author’s unashamed admiration for aspects of the poem previously assumed to make it inferior, although an argument can be made that Brisset’s 1964 *Les idées politiques de Lucain* and Gagliardi’s 1976 *Lucano, poeta della libertà* anticipated Ahl’s appreciation for the poem. Charles Martindale’s 1976 “Paradox, hyperbole and literary novelty in Lucan’s *de Bello Civili*” was also a significant example of the new, unreserved appreciation for Lucan’s literary talent. Such turning points can only be recognized as such by a second wave of scholars, in this case provided by Ralph Johnson’s *Momentary Monsters* (1987), John Henderson’s “Lucan / the word at war” (1987), and Jamie Masters’ *Poetry and Civil War in Lucan’s* Bellum Civile (1992). These three landmarks of Lucan scholarship each in their own way recognized the significance of Ahl’s book, but it was not until Masters’ appeared that Ahl’s turning point became canonical. This wave in the late eighties and early nineties set the stage for a surge in Lucan scholarship, including monographs, collections, articles, and commentaries, that has continued into the age of “companion” volumes. Lucan now has his own *Brill’s Companion* (2011) and volume in the *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies* series (2010). He does not yet have a *Cambridge Companion* or one in the Wiley-Blackwell series, but he is featured in Wiley-Blackwell’s *Companion to Ancient Epic* and *Companion to the Age of Nero*. In the wake of Ahl, Johnson, Henderson, and Masters, it is no longer strange to see unreserved praise for Lucan as a poet, and it is now rare to see expressions of ambivalence or apology for working on the *Bellum Civile*.

In the absence of ambivalence about the quality of Lucan’s work, a new kind of ambivalence has come to dominate Lucan scholarship, centered on the question of just how much resolution there can be in literary analysis of the poem. While the insolubility of problems in interpreting the *Bellum Civile* has been a constant feature of its reception, the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries have made such insolubility the dominant theme in scholarship on the poem. Already in 1960, Pierre Grimal opened his article, “L’Éloge de Néron au debut de la *Pharsale*: est-il ironique?” with the observation that scholarship on Lucan is characterized by longstanding problems, but he closes the same article with what he presents as a definitive conclusion to one of those problems, namely whether Lucan was sincere in his praise of Nero in the first book. Grimal was confident that Lucan’s praise was sincere, but the large number of subsequent publications on the issue suggests his confidence was misplaced.[[44]](#footnote-44) Other problems that have resisted resolution include the title of the poem, how many books Lucan intended to write, when the first three books were composed and whether they were published separately from the rest of the poem, whether the poem can be said to have any heroes or protagonists, and how Lucan’s relationship with Nero affected the publication. More recently, scholars have acknowledged and even celebrated the impossibility of definitive solutions—a position given its most forceful formulation by Johnson and Henderson in 1987, and characterized as the most significant debate in recent Lucan scholarship in the last chapter of James O’Hara’s 2007 *Inconsistency in Roman Epic: Studies in Catullus, Lucretius, Vergil, Ovid and Lucan*. O’Hara argues that since Johnson and Henderson, scholarship has tended to take three general positions. Some, including Masters, Denis Feeney in *The Gods in Epic*, and Stephen Hinds in *Allusion and Intertext*, have fully embraced the inconsistency, uncertainty, and undecidability characteristic of Lucan’s poem. We would also place in this group Matthew Roller’s substantial 1996 article, “Ethical contradiction and the fractured community in Lucan’s *Bellum Civile*.”[[45]](#footnote-45) Others, using, in O’Hara’s words, “the enemy’s tools,” seek some kind of unifying resolution through detailed analysis of Lucan’s intractability.[[46]](#footnote-46) O’Hara places in this camp especially Leigh’s 1997 *Lucan: Spectacle and Engagement*, Bartsch’s 1997 *Ideology in Cold Blood*, and Sklenár’s 2003 *The Taste for Nothingness*, which sums up the school of thought in its introduction, “[I]t is possible to describe chaos without being chaotic, to document with clinical precision the absence of precision in language, to make a logical case for the absence of logic.”[[47]](#footnote-47) Sklenár is keen to point out that he disagrees with Bartsch as well as with Henderson, but his disagreement with Bartsch is more about where the impasses and contradictions are in the *Bellum Civile* than about how to confront them.

O’Hara gives a third position less emphasis, but it does comprise a strong and vocal minority. This position largely denies the presence of contradiction, undecidability, and unresolvable problems in the *Bellum Civile*, advocating a rejection of generally postmodern or specifically deconstructionist approaches to the poem. O’Hara places Vasily Rudich’s 1997 *Dissidence and Literature Under Nero: The Price of Rhetoricization* in this category, but Emanuele Narducci is its best known and most vocal proponent, especially in his 1999 chapter, “Deconstructing Lucan, ovvero Le nozze (coi fichi secchi) di Ermete Trismegisto e di Filologia,” but also in his 2002 monograph, *Lucano: un’epica contro l’impero*.[[48]](#footnote-48) Narducci performs detailed analysis of the multiple voices of the poem, but he insists on the ultimate unity of the narrative. On the other hand, he also suggests that the apparent lack of unity in Lucan’s poetic program is a result of the hasty composition of the poem and its unfinished state, leaving open the possibility of the kind of openness he elsewhere deplores.[[49]](#footnote-49) Ultimately, the force with which Narducci assails his opponents demonstrates the centrality of the issue to scholarship. The approximately thirty-five years since Johnson and Henderson opened the possibility of a reading that foregrounded and celebrated unresolvable tensions and insoluble problems have been dominated by debating and working out their positions.

## 2.3. Lucan’s Intertextuality

If there is a rival to the theme of unresolvability of problems for dominance in recent Lucan scholarship, it is in the exploration of Lucan’s intertextuality. While intertextuality has been an important focus of scholarship on Latin poetry for the last thirty years, the development of digital tools such as the Packard Humanities Institute database, *Musisque Deoque*, and the Tesserae Project have expanded the possibilities for research in this area.[[50]](#footnote-50) Here too, however, Lucan confronts his readers with difficult problems. Like all Latin poetry, Lucan’s epic is intensely allusive and broadly intertextual. The richness of the poem’s intertextuality has not, however, always been appreciated. To many readers, Lucan’s poem seems to embody an intense energy and emotionality. Liberal use of apostrophe, for example, gives a sense of immediacy and authenticity to the emotions of the narratorial persona.[[51]](#footnote-51) Combined with the biographical evidence of Lucan’s almost unbelievable output at a young age, the seeming raw emotion of the poem suggests that Lucan wrote quickly and without care for the more artful techniques of Roman epic, like allusivity. In Latin poetry, such appearances are almost always deceiving, and Lucan’s apparent emotional authenticity conceals painstaking artistry. Nevertheless, it is possible to read Lucan successfully without too much attention to intertextuality. Ahl explains, “In contrast [to Virgil’s complex web of allusion], Lucan’s historical and ideological focus, his compression of events and characters, produces a remarkably self-contained work.”[[52]](#footnote-52) But Ahl continues to characterize the “outer simplicity” of Lucan’s poem as a rhetorical strategy, “creating a false impression of explicitness” and concealing an inner complexity.[[53]](#footnote-53) In one special case, namely the complexity of the relationship between the *Bellum Civile* and the *Aeneid*, Lucan’s intertextuality has been the subject of intense interest and fierce debate. Lucan’s relationships with other authors, including, for example, Caesar, have attracted somewhat less attention.

The modern history of scholarship on the relationship between Lucan’ and Virgil’ begins with Narducci’s 1979 *La provvidenza crudele: Lucano e la distruzione dei miti Augusti*, which characterizes Lucan’s poem not as a degenerate successor of the *Aeneid*, but as an “anti-*Aeneid*.”[[54]](#footnote-54) There were earlier efforts to view the relationship between the poems this way,[[55]](#footnote-55) but as a monograph stating the position forcefully and in detail at the beginning of the late twentieth century resurgence of interest in Lucan, *La provvidenza crudele* remains indispensable. Narducci was well-aware that such a simple formulation could not exhaust the intertextual relationship,[[56]](#footnote-56) but the general view has become the norm, advanced and enhanced by the use of theoretical approaches to intertextuality that came to dominate the study of Latin poetry in the 1990s. As Narducci has shown, there is an inherent and unresolvable tension in this kind of oppositional, intertextual succession, which might be characterized as Oedipal or Bloomian. In the most general sense, the *Aeneid* celebrates the coming of Caesar and the Principate, while the *Bellum Civile* characterizes the state of Rome under the Principate as a kind of slavery. Lucan’s poem therefore confronts its literary father with the aim of refuting and displacing it. Lucan’s poem, however, does not just refute Virgil’s at every point. Rather, it activates the resistance to the Empire already present in the *Aeneid*, shifting the emphasis rather than rejecting the whole. Moreover, it would be a mistake to characterize Lucan’s rejection of the Empire as unambiguous or monologic. For all the horror with which the *Bellum Civile* presents Caesar, he is a deeply compelling character, and as much as Lucan’s poem deplores the need to have an emperor, it celebrates the empire. Rome and Roman conquest are objects of desire in the poem, and one could characterize its position on Rome as anti-emperor, but pro-empire.[[57]](#footnote-57) And it is possible to explore the complexity of Lucan’s relationship with Virgil farther and in different directions. Many readers see Virgil’s criticism of Augustus in the sympathy the poem expresses for the victims of the Roman empire, whereas Lucan’s activation of Virgil’s resistance is less melancholy than it is angry.[[58]](#footnote-58) Narducci’s formulation has formed the basis of a new understanding of the deeply complex relationship between Virgil and Lucan.

Two books published in 1993 advanced and expanded our understanding of that complex relationship, taking advantage of different theoretical models to show how Virgil shaped the tradition of subsequent Roman epic. Both for ancient authors and modern scholars, Virgil’s *Aeneid* became the focal point for Latin epic intertextuality and a rupture that effectively began a new tradition. The epic of the Neronian and Flavian periods is inescapably and undeniably post-Virgilian. David Quint’s *Epic and Empire*, relying on psychoanalysis and narrative theory, shows Virgil’s *Aeneid* to combine two styles of narrative. One, characterized by a linear, teleological plot, Quint terms the epic of the victor. The other, characterized by a meandering, recursive, and repetitive plot, Quint terms the epic of the defeated. Subsequent epic, including both classical and Renaissance epic, tends to embrace one or the other of these plot types, though never exclusively. The *Bellum Civile*, for Quint, is primarily of the second type: the epic of the defeated. What Lucan rejects in Virgil is the teleological narrative type: the epic of the victor. While *Epic and Empire* takes a diachronic, literary-historical approach, Philip Hardie’s *The Epic Successors of Virgil* takes a thematic approach, showing how Ovid, Lucan, Statius, Valerius Flaccus, and Silius Italicus negotiate themes they inherit from Virgil, from older epic, and from each other. The result is less schematic and less easily summarizable than *Epic and Empire*, but in all the complexity, Virgil’s *Aeneid* emerges as a turning point, successfully imposing itself on the tradition as the beginning of a new age in epic poetry.

Studies of the epic tradition show that there is nothing inevitable or natural about the high points and low points of the literary history of the genre. Poets like Virgil and Lucan use allusion and manipulate intertextuality to position their poems in the tradition and to control their reception. Intertextuality not only looks backward to previous texts, but also forward to future ones. This insight has been the key to a major revision in our understanding of so-called Silver Age Latin poetry. In *Allusion and Intertext*, Stephen Hinds uses Lucan as his “test case”[[59]](#footnote-59) for a revision and expansion of Gordon Williams’ argument in *Change and Decline* that post-Augustan authors themselves characterized their period as one of cultural and literary decline. This is an example, Hinds argues, of authors seeking to control the reception of their works by placing them in a tradition, and we should be just as skeptical of a text’s claims to belong to a period of decline as we are of attempts to position a text at the height of a Golden Age. It is a testament to the skill of Lucan as “one of the most powerful of all post-Augustan theorists of decline and decadence”[[60]](#footnote-60) that his claims have been so often believed, and Hinds attributes the late-twentieth century revival of Lucan’s literary fortunes to scholars’ refusal to accept uncritically the appearance of Lucan’s insistence on decline. From this point of view, arguments like Narducci’s, or Quint’s or Hardie’s, that reconsider Lucan’s place in the Roman epic tradition, make it possible also to see Lucan’s departures from the norms of that tradition as bold challenges rather than admissions of inferiority.

While Virgil’s *Aeneid* still retains its place as the turning point for Roman epic, consigning its predecessors to near oblivion and dominating the reception of its successors, it is also increasingly possible to see Lucan’s *Bellum Civile* as a new beginning and a reference point for future Roman epic. We may not take seriously Statius’ claim that Lucan’s poem surpasses that of Virgil, at least insofar as we can detect its influence and characterize its reception, but there is a logical periodization that places Lucan at the beginning of a new era in Roman epic. Tim Stover, for example, shows the influence of the politics of the *Bellum Civile* on the politics of Flavian epic.[[61]](#footnote-61) Stover is particularly focused on Valerius Flaccus, but Stefano Rebeggiani explores a similar dynamic in Statius’ *Thebaid*.[[62]](#footnote-62) Alain Gowing helps to explain how the historical moment encourages viewing the Neronian period as a new beginning for Roman literature, making the argument in *Empire and Memory* that it is in this period that a history of the Principate takes shape.[[63]](#footnote-63) Under Augustus and Tiberius, the *Res Publica* was both the Republic and the current government, but for Neronian authors, the radical break of the Augustan revolution changed the way they viewed the past. Neronian historians primarily wrote about the Augustan and post-Augustan periods,[[64]](#footnote-64) and even Seneca, who used extensive Republican exempla in his Claudian prose, greatly reduced his use of Republican exempla under Nero.[[65]](#footnote-65) Such a gap, however, was perfect for epic poetry, which is characterized by a setting in the distant past, disconnected from the present.[[66]](#footnote-66) Even in its Roman historical variant, which could and did sometimes take on contemporary events, the proper subject of epic is ancient origins, and the epic style lends a feeling of antiquity and permanence to recent or contemporary events. Lucan’s is the first epic of a lost Republic, in which the Republican period can be represented as an inaccessible past on the other side of a radical break in historical development, opening up to historical epic a whole new way of representing Roman history. In this light, the bold linguistic and thematic experimentation of the *Bellum Civile* sets it apart, not as one in a line of Virgilian successors, but as the first experiment in a new age and the model for future poems.

While most scholars of Roman epic are not prepared to decentralize the *Aeneid*, studies of Lucan’s intertextuality have also recently become broader and more inclusive of authors besides Virgil. Some of this work is fairly straightforward *Quellenforschung*, but the value of such a fundamental approach should not be dismissed, and especially where these studies make more explicit use of theoretical models of intertextuality, this is a promising area of continuing inquiry. Valéry Berlincourt, Lavinia Galli Milic, and Damien Nelis edited a 2016 volume on *Lucan and Claudian: Context and Intertext*, which aims to broaden our understanding of the intertextuality of the two authors and focus on the ways they interact with not only Virgil, but also, among others, Lucretius, Ovid, and Caesar. In the process, the volume shows Lucan’s importance to Claudian as well as his reliance on previous authors. Masters’ *Poetry and Civil War in Lucan’s* Bellum Civile drew attention particularly to Lucan’s engagement with Caesar, and Andrew Zissos’ 2013 chapter “Lucan and Caesar: epic and *commentarius*” seeks to intensify the focus on that particular aspect of Masters’ book. Caesar was not Lucan’s only historiographical model, and Jan Radicke’s 2004 *Lucans poetische Technik: Studien zum historischen Epos* focuses particularly on Lucan’s use of Livy. Paolo Asso’s 2011 *Brill’s Companion to Lucan* includes a whole section on intertextuality, with contributions from Jackie Murray on Apollonius, Sergio Casali on Virgil, Alison Keith on Ovid, Ruth Caston on elegy, and Eleni Manolaraki on philosophy, with a focus on the Nile digression in book 10. All of these chapters draw on and suggest further scholarship, and it is worth singling out here Jonathan Tracy’s *Lucan’s Egyptian Civil War* for further discussion of Lucan’s relationship with natural philosophy, as well as Richard Tarrant and Stephen Wheeler’s articles in a special issue of *Arethusa* on the ancient reception of Ovid.[[67]](#footnote-67) Annemarie Ambühl, in *Krieg und Bürgerkrieg bei Lucan und in der griechischen Literatur* (2015), extends studies of Lucan’s sources and intertexts beyond Latin literature to Greek. Here it is difficult, though not impossible, to support the arguments with precise verbal parallels, but even so there is rewarding insight in investigating Lucan’s reception of his Greek predecessors.

Analyses of intertextuality are often these days most thorough in commentaries, and this is an area of continuing work. For some time there was not much available beyond Postgate’s 1896 commentary on book 7, his 1917 commentary on book 8, and Getty’s 1940 commentary on book 1 (now Getty 1979), but there are now Cambridge University Press “green and yellow” commentaries on book 2 (Fantham 1992) and book 7 (Roche 2019) and a recent Oxford University Press commentary on book 1 (Roche 2009). Other useful commentaries include Vincent Hunink’s book 3 (1992), Paolo Esposito (2009) and Paolo Asso (2010) on book 4, Pamela Barratt’s book 5 (1979), Monica Matthews on the storm episode in book 5 (2008), Martin Korenjak (1996) on the Erichtho episode in book 6, Roland Mayer’s book 8 (1981), Claudia Wick (2004) and Martin Seewald (2008) on book 9, and Emanuele Berti (2000) on book 10. Also worth noting are Charles Tesoriero’s 2000 University of Sydney doctoral thesis commentary on the Erichtho episode and, for teachers, Susanna Braund’s Bolchazy-Carducci commentary on selections from book 1, 3, 6, 7, 8, and 9 (2009). Scholars using commentaries for detailed analysis and *Quellenforschung* are therefore well served, though not uniformly so, for every book of the epic, but there is work that remains to be done. Another area where work relevant to Lucan is progressing rapidly is in commentaries on Lucan’s successors, especially the Flavian epic poets. In these commentaries, Lucan scholars can see detailed work on the intertextual aspects of Lucan’s early reception, although such commentaries usually focus more on Virgil than they do on Lucan.

For all the effort to expand our understanding of Lucan’s relationships with multiple predecessors and successors, his two most significant relationships are with Virgil and Caesar, and both of those relationships are dominated by inconsistency and unresolved tension. This tension can be captured in general terms, but at specific points it is very difficult to resolve the relationships into any definite meaning. For example, at the moment when Lucan seems to give us the title of his poem as *Pharsalia* (*Pharsalia nostra / vivet*, “Our *Pharsalia* will live,” 9.985–6), he is addressing Caesar, and so he also presents his poem’s relationship to Caesar. It is not clear, however, what exactly Caesar’s *Pharsalia* is. Lucan may be suggesting the kind of relationship between poet and historical agent that takes Homer and Achilles as a model, suggesting that Caesar is Achilles to Lucan’s Homer. On the other hand, even if Caesar is Lucan’s Achilles, the relationship is also one of a different kind: one between a historiographer and a poet of historical epic. Marking an intertextual relationship so explicitly invites an attempt to characterize it, and like the relationship between Lucan and Virgil, this one hovers between respect for a model and a defiant challenge. In a poem that asserts that it is *nefas* to retell the story of the civil war, the assertion that both the historiography and the epic of the civil war will live on is a confession and an attack. Moreover, the relationship is complicated by Lucan’s use of an epic topos, significantly used by Virgil in the episode of Nisus and Euryalus, drawing Virgil’s *Aeneid* and virtually all Roman epic into the issue and calling into question whether epic memorialization is a benefaction or a crime. Lucan defies simple characterizations of his intertextual relationships, and it is not possible to assert that the *Bellum Civile* is purely an anti-*Aeneid*, or that Lucan primarily adheres to the historiographical model of Caesar or of Livy. Nevertheless, these kinds of assertions are the starting point for deep and rewarding explorations of Lucan’s intertextuality.

## 2.4. The Completeness of the Poem

We began this chapter with a brief discussion of the title of Lucan’s epic—a longstanding problem destined to have no resolution. It seems appropriate to close the chapter with a more recent and fashionable problem, and one that is equally unlikely to find any solution: the closure of the poem. There can be no doubt that the poem is incomplete. The tenth book is the shortest by a significant margin and it ends too suddenly for any kind of resolution at all. That the poem ends approximately where Caesar’s own narrative cuts off and stops with the word “Magnum,” (Lucan’s most common name for Pompey the Great) combined with the appropriateness of a sudden stop to a poem that insists that too much has already been written, does not mean that the poem is complete. Rather it emphasizes the poem’s incompleteness, and the thematic appropriateness of its incomplete state. The question is whether Lucan intended to continue the poem, and if so where he intended to stop it. Put in these terms the question is unanswerable. We can never know for sure Lucan’s mind, and he may have changed his mind about where he meant to end the poem.[[68]](#footnote-68) One could imagine, for example, Lucan reaching the point he did, realizing at some point that he would not be able to continue, and being satisfied with the final word and with the incompleteness, without having planned ahead of time to stop where he did. Such a scenario is just as plausible as the scenario Masters describes, in which Lucan decided well ahead of time to end his poem on an endless note, or the scenario more commonly believed, in which Lucan died intending to write more of the *Bellum Civile*.[[69]](#footnote-69) The argument that Lucan’s intention should have minimal effect on our appreciation of the poem and the appropriateness of its incomplete state is compelling, but the unanswerable question is at least as compelling, and the speculation is not fruitless. Depending on the projected ending and number of books, different structural effects may be perceived, and whatever ending a reader imagines might have been will change the way they read what is there.[[70]](#footnote-70) The incompleteness of the poem, whether Lucan intended it or not, affects our interpretation of the poem by compelling us to project it beyond its end, but without any hope of finding a definitive ending. In ending his poem on a note of incompletion, Lucan takes to an extreme a feature that has been crucial to epic since its inception.[[71]](#footnote-71) And yet, despite the absurdly extreme form of incompletion the poem adopts, the temptation for readers to give up is never overwhelming. Lucan’s insoluble problems have, from the first century to the twenty-first, compelled readers to come back to a poem that insistently denies them satisfaction.

# 3. Valerius Flaccus

In the previous chapter, we argued that the insoluble problems posed by Lucan’s *Bellum Civile* have fascinated and compelled readers rather than pushing them to give up on interpreting the poem. As a result, the history of Lucan’s reception has frequently included controversy, frustration, and denigration, but almost never a lack of engagement. The same cannot be said of Valerius Flaccus’ *Argonautica*. It is true that recent scholarship has sometimes seen the *Argonautica* as “a surprising mythological counterpart to Lucan’s iconoclastic historical epic,”[[72]](#footnote-72) but the history of the poem’s reception has taken a different course. Most scholars characterize that history with a story that goes something like this. The *Argonautica* was not much appreciated in antiquity and was largely ignored in the medieval period until the rediscovery of the first three and a half books by Poggio Bracciolini in 1416 and then of the whole poem as we have it now (seven and a half books) by Niccolò Niccoli around 1429. Following its rediscovery, the poem was again largely ignored except to be discounted as a derivative successor of Apollonius and Virgil, treated at best as an exercise in textual criticism, until the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, when scholars finally began to appreciate its literary merits and treat it as a subject for interpretive scholarship.[[73]](#footnote-73) Although there are some similarities between this story and the revival of interest in Lucan and Statius in the late twentieth century, the general dismissal and denigration of Valerius’ poem are more analogous with those of Silius Italicus’ *Punica*.

Readers of Lucan and Statius can point to the evidence we have that the authors’ premodern reception was in large part positive to make the case that modern criticism of the poems is misplaced. Scholars of Valerius’ *Argonautica* have a more difficult task, not because the evidence is not positive, but because there is so little of it. Little survives of Valerius’ contemporary reception besides a few traces in the works of his fellow Flavian authors. Quintilian’s terse obituary—a declaration that “we have recently suffered a great loss in Valerius Flaccus” (*multum in Valerio Flacco nuper amisimus*, *Inst*. 10.1.90)— yields two insights. First, it indicates that Valerius must have died sometime before Quintilian published in the early 90s CE, and that the *Argonautica*, like Statius’ poems, therefore does not postdate the Flavian dynasty. Second, Quintilian attests that, for all Valerius’ later obscurity, at least one near contemporary had a high enough opinion of him to mourn his passing.

Subsequent history has not been kind to Valerius. The story of his complete eclipse, apart from a brief Renaissance vogue, is to some extent a product of the very narrative of redemption that characterizes all the authors in this volume: scholars have perceived that Valerius was (unjustly) dismissed until recently, and have thus not looked hard for traces of his work. Andrew Zissos has pushed back against this narrative, identifying engagement with the *Argonautica* in late antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the early modern period.[[74]](#footnote-74) Compared to Lucan and Statius, however, Valerius’ reception has indeed been quite limited, and scholars working on Valerius, like students of Silius, have had to do their work on a text equipped with relatively little previous interpretation. This particular challenge has been compounded by problems of text and transmission which only began to be addressed in the 1970s; as with Statius then, reevaluation of the *Argonautica*’s higher order meanings has gone hand-in-hand with work on basic textual problems. Accordingly, we begin our survey of scholarship with the poem’s text and transmission.[[75]](#footnote-75)

## 3.1. The Text: Manuscript, Date, and Completion

The *Argonautica* seems to have circulated hardly at all during the Middle Ages, and only one pre-humanist manuscript survives, the ninth-century V (Vatican City, BAV, Vat. lat. 3277). New copies proliferated following the rediscovery of the poem in the early fifteenth century, but the text remained “unusually problematical,”[[76]](#footnote-76) and debate continues to this day about how much oddity and obscurity of expression is to be attributed to corruption and how much to Valerius’ own idiosyncratic style. Following a surge of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century interest (the *editio princeps* was published in Bologna in 1474 and was followed by several more incunables), philological work on the poem grew sparser. Two commentaries on the entire poem emerged in the nineteenth century; the only older translation of note is the original Loeb edition.[[77]](#footnote-77)

Valerius’ text thus reached the twentieth century in a difficult state, with the result that textual criticism was both especially necessary for the poem and came to dominate other forms of scholarship. These two facts are summarized (inadvertently) by Leofranc Holford-Strevens’ assertion (as reported by Andrew Zissos) that “Valerian studies seem in danger of falling prey to the worship of manuscripts—a particular vice for such a poorly transmitted poem.” Zissos offers this quotation to underline the continued importance of careful textual work, in particular emendation, to our basic understanding of the poem.[[78]](#footnote-78) In an important recent survey of Valerius’ transmission, P. Ruth Taylor-Briggs re-purposes the quotation to describe the “perverse imbalance” between textual critical and literary critical Valerian scholarship for most of the twentieth century—as Taylor-Briggs continues, however, “Textual criticism … exists to serve the needs of literary criticism, to provide better access to the poet’s voice.”[[79]](#footnote-79)

Access to this voice was markedly improved in 1970 by W. W. Ehlers. To this point, all modern editions had been grounded in the ninth-century manuscript V, which was believed to be the ancestor of all other extant manuscripts. Ehlers demonstrated that the manuscript discovered and collated by Niccoli around 1429 (L = Florence, BML, plut. 39.38) preserved a text both older and more authentic than V, and furthermore was the ancestor of most extant humanist manuscripts of the poem. Ehlers followed his 1970 study with a new Teubner edition; more recently, French editions have been produced by Gauthier Liberman (for Budé) and Jean Soubiran.[[80]](#footnote-80) Equipped with a better understanding of the *Argonautica*’s text and transmission, scholars in the last few decades have produced a remarkable number of translations[[81]](#footnote-81) and commentaries; indeed, while much fundamental work remains to be done for the other Flavian epicists, readers of Valerius are now spoiled for choice with multiple modern commentaries on almost every book of the poem.[[82]](#footnote-82)

Interpretation of the *Argonautica* has also been complicated by questions about its dates of composition, beyond the certainty that it is Flavian. Quintilian’s obituary for Valerius (see above, p. 35) provides a *terminus ante quem* of the early 90s CE. But questions remain about just how “recent” the death was that Quintilian describes as *nuper*, which could refer to something even more than a decade before.[[83]](#footnote-83) A *terminus post quem* of 70 CE is supplied by the epic’s opening invocation (1.5–21), addressed to Vespasian and including a reference to Titus’ suppression of the Jewish revolt. It is not clear, however, that Vespasian is addressed as a living emperor, and arguments have been offered that the proem was written under Domitian, Titus, or Vespasian.[[84]](#footnote-84) Few scholars argue that composition extended much into Domitian’s reign, and W. W. Ehlers and Tim Stover have offered persuasive arguments that the epic is essentially Vespasianic.[[85]](#footnote-85) This early date tends to be supported by intertextual links with other Flavian authors, which usually look like allusions to Valerius (rather than allusions by Valerius, or bidirectional influence).

The epic breaks off abruptly in the eighth book at the start of a speech by Jason, and it is generally agreed that the poem was left unfinished at Valerius’ death (as opposed to the ending of a complete poem being lost later in its transmission). [[86]](#footnote-86) Like scholars of Lucan and the *Achilleid*, Valerian scholars have speculated on the author’s intentions for a complete poem. Arguments for a ten- or twelve-book epic gave way to Willy Schetter’s model of an eight-book poem, twice the length of Apollonius Rhodius’ *Argonautica*;[[87]](#footnote-87) our text would therefore be only a few hundred lines short of complete. Zissos endorses this model, focusing on the middle of Valerius’ epic and its function as “narrative caesura”, a rupture between two “thematically and teleologically disconnected halves” of the epic, where the first emphasizes the positive potential of the Argo’s journey and the second “insistently adumbrates a tragic conclusion to the Argonauts’ voyage.”[[88]](#footnote-88) The effect of this caesura is to ground the text in antinomy, a governing structure that recurs in plot and character and forms the basis of many other thematic arguments that we will discuss here.

The inevitable suggestion that the poem is incomplete by design[[89]](#footnote-89) seems less likely to convince than equivalent arguments for Lucan and, especially, the *Achilleid* (see above, 2.4, and below, 4.4a). There is, however, value in reading the poem as a typically incomplete epic,[[90]](#footnote-90) and in Debra Hershkowitz’s influential analysis of the text, its open ending stimulates, rather than limits, interpretive avenues, leaving the reader with an entire literary tradition’s worth of possibilities: “The presence of these multiple possibilities is what characterizes the epic’s openness, and this openness is complemented by the epic’s incompleteness, which signals the epic’s poetic potential: anything could happen next.”[[91]](#footnote-91) Whatever the case, the ending as it exists has shaped the literary analyses that scholars from the last decades of the twentieth century onwards have developed, to which we now turn.

## 3.2. Intertextuality and Belatedness

One of the primary shifts in the landscape of Latin literary scholarship over the last few decades has been an increasing emphasis on the meaningfulness of intertextuality. The 1911 entry on Valerius Flaccus in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* demonstrates the previous attitude toward the author, borne out of a general scorn for post-Virgilian authors:

He is wholly without originality, and his poetry, though free from glaring defects, is artificial and elaborately dull. His model in language was Virgil, to whom he is far inferior in taste and lucidity. His tiresome display of learning, rhetorical exaggeration and ornamentations make him difficult to read, which no doubt accounts for his unpopularity in ancient times.

The judgment is delivered in a few key phrases: *without originality*, *far inferior* to his *model*, *tiresome display of learning*—in other words, Valerius engaged with Virgil but was not Virgil. This criticism is similar to that leveled against other post-Virgilian poets, and yet no reader at all familiar with more recent work on imperial epic will be surprised that the late twentieth century decisively repudiated such negative judgments.

The rise of intertextual studies provided an opportunity to recharacterize Valerius’ poem. Work on the *Argonautica* was stimulated by Dennis Feeney’s *The Gods in Epic*, which situates Valerius in a wider discussion of generic self-consciousness in his use of divine forces,[[92]](#footnote-92) and Philip Hardie’s *The Epic Successors of Virgil*, which reframes post-Virgilian epic’s engagement with Virgil as vitally creative rather than stiflingly derivative.[[93]](#footnote-93) The majority of contemporary scholarship that understands the *Argonautica* as a significant player in the Latin literary landscape thus focuses on how the poem generates meaning through intertextuality and metaliterary engagement with predecessors. Unlike for Lucan or Statius, little of this contemporary work has been in the form of monographs, with the conspicuous exceptions of Hershkowitz’s *Valerius Flaccus’ Argonautica*: *Abbreviated Voyages in Silver Latin Epic* and Stover’s *Epic and Empire in Vespasianic Rome*.[[94]](#footnote-94) Scholarship has otherwise appeared largely as articles and chapters, for example, a series of important shorter studies by Zissos.[[95]](#footnote-95) Valerius has benefited especially from the proliferation of edited volumes on Flavian or imperial epic in recent years.

As Hershkowitz argues, intertextuality “is the main process by which Valerius signals his awareness and ensures his reader’s awareness of his epic’s belatedness.”[[96]](#footnote-96) Scholars have explored a range of Valerian intertextual techniques.[[97]](#footnote-97) The volume on *Flavian Epic* in the “Oxford Readings in Classical Studies” series[[98]](#footnote-98) includes a translation of an insightful article by Roberta Nordera (originally published in 1969) that explores how Valerius’ highly allusive style allows him to express his independence from Virgil. In the same volume, Zissos (originally published in 1999) considers Valerius’ use of “negative allusions”—the parts of Apollonius’ *Argonautica* that he omits—as a sort of test for his readers, as well as an acknowledgement of his own position in the epic canon. Alain Deremetz describes the various narrative devices, including allusion, that Valerius uses to produce a form of literary history. He is, in turn, able to use this constructed epic lineage to issue a self-conscious critique of the genre as he sees it and, of course, his position within it.[[99]](#footnote-99)

Valerius’ awareness of his belatedness, or rather his construction of it, shapes the way in which he engages with his models, always remaining in dialogue with the entire tradition that precedes him. Hardie, for example, illustrates Valerius’ tendency (like other post-Virgilian epicists) to imitate his predecessors in combination, arguing that this layered intertextual engagement works as a form of literary criticism.[[100]](#footnote-100) These overlapping and complex intertextual networks are classified by Stover, who focuses his attention on the Argo’s construction in book one, as Valerius’ attempts to construct himself as a *doctus poeta* worthy of his predecessors: “(Re)building Argo entails the skillful refashioning of a complex and saturated poetic tradition. Valerius wants us to know the difficulties he faced in reconstructing Argo, but he also wants us to know that he is up to the challenge.”[[101]](#footnote-101) Peter Davis contends that Valerius uses the Argo’s voyage as a metaliterary representation of his participation in “literary conversation” with previous authors, ultimately concluding that the ship represents a feeling of responsibility that Valerius has as a Roman *vates* to retell Rome’s history.[[102]](#footnote-102) Likewise, Helen Slaney argues that Valerius’ recycling of epic topography, intentionally filling the Argo’s journey with landscapes familiar to Romans from previous epics, has the effect of producing a cohesive Roman empire.[[103]](#footnote-103)

While agreeing that Valerius’ poem is deeply shaped by its author’s belated position in the literary canon, scholars’ perspectives on how Valerius feels about this belatedness, however, differ. Helen Lovatt focuses on the anxiety that this belatedness reveals, arguing that the metaliterary use of *fides* in Valerius, a concept that can be traced throughout the Roman literary canon, not only confesses the *Argonautica*’s belatedness but also the political anxieties of the Flavian era.[[104]](#footnote-104) Hershkowitz sees a somewhat more confident author as he engages self-consciously with his two primary epic models: “[t]he *Argonautica*, with its abundant intertextuality, does not issue a hopeless challenge to Apollonius or Vergil so much as signal the productive interaction between these (and many other) texts. […] [B]elatedness, far from assuring its failure, is the central element in its empowerment of a tale weakened by time and repetition.”[[105]](#footnote-105) Valerius imitates Virgil under the cover of Apollonius in a move Hershkowitz identifies as an attempt to create a new *Aeneid* through dissimulation: “as an epic trying to be the *Aeneid*, but dissimulating as an *Argonautica*,” Valerius’ poem “is really an *Aeneid* in Argonaut’s clothing.”[[106]](#footnote-106)

## 3.3. Intertextual Models: Virgil, Apollonius, and Others

In much of scholarship, Virgil and Apollonius act as the two poles between which Valerius oscillates. Scholars debate whether Valerius is more Virgilian or Apollonian, drawing a variety of different—yet not necessarily mutually exclusive—conclusions. Especially recently, scholarship also turns to a third option: that there may be one or more mediating texts that either reconcile this dichotomy or complicate the web of influences so much that any resolution is rendered impossible.[[107]](#footnote-107) Apollonius of Rhodes’ treatment of the Argonaut myth is naturally a central influence for Valerius,[[108]](#footnote-108) and he follows its plot closely. However, it also serves as a source from which he may diverge.[[109]](#footnote-109) Virgil in turn is Valerius’ most evident model for the epic structure. The *Argonautica* teems with sustained and detailed engagement with the *Aeneid*.[[110]](#footnote-110) As with Apollonius, scholarship has found tensions between Valerius’ embrace of Virgil as a model and resistance to his influence.[[111]](#footnote-111) In either case, Virgil presented a starkly different epic from that of Apollonius, and these two divergent models needed to be at least partially reconciled in Valerius’ account of Jason’s journey. To resolve these tensions, three other influences have also been proposed: Homer, Ovid, and Lucan.[[112]](#footnote-112)

Some studies focus primarily on Valerius’ direct engagement with Homer,[[113]](#footnote-113) but more often the Homeric texts are understood as offering a model for traditional epic alongside Virgil. Oscar Fuà details both the direct and indirect intertexts with Homeric epic present in Valerius’ work and explores how these appropriations are often filtered through intermediary texts, usually Virgil’s *Aeneid*.[[114]](#footnote-114) Marco Fucecchi argues that, by integrating the Homeric and Virgilian epic traditions, Valerius subjects love and war to a “programmatic redefinition as literary themes” to effect a metapoetic redefinition of epic categories.[[115]](#footnote-115) In contrast to these studies, which treat Homeric influences as one of many the models of Valerius, Zissos argues that Homeric epic should be considered Valerius’ central model, proposing that it balances Virgil and Apollonius.[[116]](#footnote-116)

As is the case with all authors in this volume, Valerius’ engagement with Ovid remains understudied. Keith reads Valerius as the earliest extant example of a mythological epic re-casting and re-evaluating of Virgil’s *Aeneid* through the lens of Ovid; elsewhere, she reads Valerius’ mythological landscapes as particularly Ovidian.[[117]](#footnote-117) Jessica Blum explores Ovid’s *Heroides* as models for Valerius’ female characters.[[118]](#footnote-118)Several recent studies have examined the connection between Valerius’ work and Lucan as a predecessor capable of resolving the tension between Valerius’ primary models. For some, Lucan’s epic serves as a framework through which Valerius is able to reject both Apollonian and Virgilian epic, creating instead a new epic for the Flavian dynasty. Thus, Emma Buckley argues that Valerius’ relationship with Lucan facilitates his production of a new poetic and political beginning while simultaneously acknowledging that civil war is inevitable in both myth and reality:

The Argonautic quest-epic, as Valerius writes it, like the Flavian dynasty itself, is unable to escape the repetitious regressions of *bellum civile* […]. Valerius’ *Argonautica* is written through a thoroughly traditional and “classicizing” Homeric-Virgilian template; but its poetic associations with Lucan’s *Civil War* reveal an alternative reading for the epic [...], flirting with the potential for two narratives of power for the Flavian era: the disabling stasis of *bellum civile* as well as the *claustra*-breaking quest epic for a new age.[[119]](#footnote-119)

This duality is echoed in the ongoing disagreements in scholarship about whether Valerius’ use of Lucanian poetics reveals an optimistic or pessimistic perspective on Vespasian’s rule. Stover, for example, argues that the *Argonautica* is essentially in favour of Flavian rule, or at least advances the restorative narrative of Vespasian in the years following the civil war, “a strategy Valerius carries out by distancing his Argonauts from the image of Lucan’s gigantomachic Caesar.”[[120]](#footnote-120) John Penwill argues instead that the destruction wrought by the quest for power throughout the text—supported by Valerius’ engagement with Lucan’s poetics—confounds attempts to read the epic as optimistic.[[121]](#footnote-121) At the very least, the connections to both Lucan and Ovid render the universe of Valerius’ epic chaotic, as argued by Darcy Krasne: “The pervasiveness of cosmic dissolution and the threat of its perennial recurrence, embellished by hints of civil war, in turn become a means of speaking implicitly to civil war’s similar effects and inevitability.”[[122]](#footnote-122) Nevertheless, returning to Stover, the calming of the sea-storm is also an intentional ordering of this chaotic world, as, “like Jupiter, Vespasian sought to stabilize and reunify a world that had been thrown into confusion by the ‘storms’ of civil discord.”[[123]](#footnote-123) For still others, such as Zissos, Valerius’ allusions to Lucan are designed to entirely undermine—or at least complicate—his own epic’s seriousness through the heavy use of irony.[[124]](#footnote-124) Further work on Valerius and Lucan will doubtless shed more light on this important and complex intertextual relationship.

## 3.4. Mythological Characterization

Valerius’ poem, like all of the Flavian epics, is meaningfully post-Lucanian, but Valerius does not follow Lucan in writing a historical epic. Instead, his chosen subject of Jason and the Argonauts foregrounds questions of myth and heroism. Studies of these issues address how Valerius responds to the particularities of Apollonius’ Hellenistic approach to his heroes and works to reassert a more “traditional” epic heroism.[[125]](#footnote-125) James Clauss argues that this is achieved through Valerius’ engagement with his predecessors at the intersection of myth and heroism: “Intertextuality and myth work hand in glove to articulate and account for the return to an older sense of greatness based on heroic aspirations.”[[126]](#footnote-126) Myths, or more specifically the myths that had been told before Valerius, become in the *Argonautica* a primary site for the redefinition of heroism and thus the (possible) rehabilitation of Jason’s problematic legacy.

Jason’s character is heavily associated with Hercules in Valerius. In particular, Valerius alludes to Virgil’s depiction of Hercules as an ideal model for Aeneas’ heroism; he thereby frees Jason from his “passive” portrayal in Apollonius and frames him as “more heroic and more like Virgil’s *pius Aeneas*.”[[127]](#footnote-127) Virgil’s Aeneas is of course far from straightforwardly heroic, and Valerian scholarship has (predictably) read the connection between Jason and Aeneas in optimistic and pessimistic terms.[[128]](#footnote-128) Joachim Adamietz was an early example of the former, reading Jason as a positive hero and the rightful heir to Aeneas and the Virgilian Hercules’ legacy.[[129]](#footnote-129) Erich Lüthje, in contrast, offered a more pessimistic reading of Jason’s Virgilian pedigree, reading him as a failed hero with a flawed personality.[[130]](#footnote-130) A middle ground between these two poles was established by François Ripoll and François Spaltenstein.[[131]](#footnote-131) The former explores Hercules’ expanded role in Valerius (compared to the *Aeneid*) as the apparently perfect embodiment of a Virgilian heroic ethos, but both authors ultimately conclude that Jason’s characterization shifts from episode to episode depending on the traits Valerius seeks to emphasize. Cristiano Castelletti further explores the nuances of Jason’s characterization, and argues that his contradictory nature results from an evolution that occurs in parallel to the structure of the poem.[[132]](#footnote-132) This analysis draws from Zissos’ thematic division of the epic:[[133]](#footnote-133) in himself “embodying the antithesis between epic exaltation and tragic pessimism, Jason demonstrates the antinomies embedded in Valerius’ narrative.”[[134]](#footnote-134) As Jason moves across the poem’s mid-point fissure, he becomes something other than Virgilian, and other than positive.

Hercules is of course not simply a tool for characterizing Jason, but is also a prominent character in Valerius’ poem. Lovatt explores Hercules as a member of the Argo’s crew and as an eventual subject of catasterism. She argues that Valerius does not use Virgilian intertextuality to glorify Jason, but rather to emphasize the parallelism between Hercules’ fate and the teleology of the entire epic, which stands in contrast to the fate of its protagonist: “Valerius reminds us that Jason is not in fact destined for catasterism. The ship will reach the stars […] but Jason will be remembered for his passive beauty and his reliance on others.”[[135]](#footnote-135) Hercules’ characterization also relies on intertexts beyond Virgil. For Buckley, Hercules is meant not only to strengthen Jason’s positive image but also to emphasize the overdetermined nature of the tragedy at the conclusion of the narrative. She demonstrates how Valerius’ allusions to Senecan tragedy center his understanding of the aftermath of the epic plot while still presenting a redemption of Jason, if a complicated one.[[136]](#footnote-136) Valerius likewise engages with various myths from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, including Perseus’ rescue of Andromeda, which he recasts in the scene between Hercules and Hesione.[[137]](#footnote-137)

Valerius’ Hercules is shaped by his connection to Hylas. As a character not associated with Virgil, Hylas offered Valerius a special opportunity to explore other intertextual models.[[138]](#footnote-138) Thus, Martha Malamud and Donald McGuire discuss Valerius’ self-conscious appropriation of Ovid for his description of Hylas’ abduction.[[139]](#footnote-139) Mark Heerink compares the abduction with Propertius 1.20, presenting the episode as a metapoetic critique of the elegist.[[140]](#footnote-140) In a later chapter, he argues that Valerius uses his Hylas episode to demonstrate not the boundlessness of his ability to imitate Virgil, but rather its limits. Instead, the episode appropriates material from Ovid as well as from genres outside epic, such as bucolic poetry.[[141]](#footnote-141)

Just as Apollonius’ Medea has tended to be viewed as a more compelling character than his Jason, most scholarship on Valerius’ characters focuses not on Jason but Medea.[[142]](#footnote-142) Valerius’ treatment of Medea is intense, nuanced, and heavily intertextual.[[143]](#footnote-143) Medea is a character with whom Valerius seems entranced: as Kirsty Corrigan argues, he mentions her very early in the epic, and portrays her sympathetically and even with some degree of reverence.[[144]](#footnote-144) Indeed, it has been argued that the *Argonautica* is a valorization not of the deeds of the Argonauts but rather those of Medea.[[145]](#footnote-145) Valerius’ Medea is at once an innocent maiden[[146]](#footnote-146) and the doomed perpetrator of violent acts, a dichotomy emphasized through Ovidian and Senecan intertextuality in scenes involving her emotional fluctuations and her devotion to Roman filial *pietas*.[[147]](#footnote-147) Valerius, to a certain extent, makes it his mission to reconcile the roles that Medea has played as both princess and mother: “Valerius confronts the problem of reconciling the Medea familiar from epic (the princess who helps the foreign hero) with the Medea well known from tragedy (the woman who kills her sons).”[[148]](#footnote-148) For Davis, it is Valerius’ emphasis on Medea’s future that is unique among these portrayals, with both halves of the poem—which are, as Zissos has argued, otherwise nearly entirely thematically separate[[149]](#footnote-149)—invoking the full span of Medea’s story. Thus, Medea stands in contrast to Castelletti’s conceptualization of Jason, who shifts as he moves across the poem’s fissure.[[150]](#footnote-150) Instead, Medea is consistent, but complex: “[Valerius] creates a Medea radically different from her predecessors, a girl manipulated by divine forces and so destined to become a murderer with a pivotal role to play in human history.”[[151]](#footnote-151)

Medea’s characterization, however, is not limited to a straightforward duality: she is not just princess and mother, epic and tragic, but each and every one of the Medeas that have existed in the literary canon. Feeney recognizes that her very presence destabilizes the generic conventions of the second half of epic, given her most recent literary depictions in Ovid and Seneca.[[152]](#footnote-152) Stover provides an analysis of the exemplars Venus presents to Medea in book 7, which he argues amount to a collection of pseudo-Medeas developed from Medea’s previous iterations in Roman literature.[[153]](#footnote-153) Zissos discusses the way in which Valerius’ character resists the compulsion to become any one Medea.[[154]](#footnote-154) Furthermore, Valerius emphasizes Medea’s agency in this process at every turn. We receive a strong sense of her perspective as she gazes out from the walls in book 6 and provides a gendered reading of the conventionally masculine epic activity below.[[155]](#footnote-155) Alessandro Perutelli describes the uniqueness of Valerius’ Medea as a psychologically complex character, taking as his case study Medea’s dreams and their metaliterary relationship with Apollonius.[[156]](#footnote-156) In the end, “Valerius’ *Argonautica* emerges as Medea’s story: the tale of her love and her adventure.”[[157]](#footnote-157)

## 3.5. Current Trends and Future Directions

Textual and intertextual work have dominated contemporary Valerian studies, and will likely continue to do so in the immediate future. The difficulties of Valerius’ style and complexities of his transmission will continue to challenge editors, and of all the texts in this volume, the *Argonautica* presents the most opportunities for conjectural emendation. The recent proliferation of commentaries and of digital tools like the Packard Humanities Institute database, *Musisque Deoque*, and the Tesserae Project has dramatically increased our store of potential intertexts, many of which remained to be evaluated.[[158]](#footnote-158) Valerius’ poem is of course well suited to textual and intertextual studies, but their dominance is also a consequence of the epic’s subject. Unlike Lucan and Silius Italicus’ historical epics and Statius’ *Thebaid*, treating mythic material that had long-established political resonances, the Argonautic myth is less obviously amenable to political readings.

The optimistic/pessimistic political debate that dominated Statian studies in the 1990s (see below, 4.1.a) was less prominent in scholarship on Valerius, with some notable exceptions. Thus, Davis explains Valerius’ turn toward mythological epic—in contrast to Lucan’s turn toward historical epic—as a way for the poet to take refuge from the corruption of the political landscape of the late first century.[[159]](#footnote-159) This corrupt landscape is reflected, according to Peter Toohey, in Jason’s dealings with Minerva, with their relationship mirroring Domitianic Rome[[160]](#footnote-160)—or it is perhaps obscured, as Ruth Taylor-Briggs argues, in the elaborate allegory the Argo presents, which praises Vespasian’s virtues.[[161]](#footnote-161) But political readings have become more common in recent years, led by Bernstein and Zissos, who argue that the political and class structures underlying the epic reflect the changing sociopolitical realities of Flavian Rome.[[162]](#footnote-162) Valerius is understood to depict the complex relationship that the Roman elite had developed with imperial rule by the Flavian era,[[163]](#footnote-163) as well as the dynamics within the imperial house itself.[[164]](#footnote-164) Political readings have begun to organize around an optimistic/pessimistic framework. Stover, as discussed above, proposes that the ideals of Valerius’ text are meant to reflect the restorative aims of the Flavian dynasty.[[165]](#footnote-165) Leo Landrey sees the Lemnian episode as a restaging of the siege on the Capitoline in 69 CE, casting Hypsipyle as a Domitianic figure in her withdrawal from participation in civil strife, ultimately an optimistic role for the Flavian emperor-to-be.[[166]](#footnote-166) In contrast, Bernstein argues that the gap between the understandings that the characters and the readers have about causality—alongside the predominance of tyrants—renders a wholly optimistic reading of the politics behind the text impossible.[[167]](#footnote-167) Gesine Manuwald explores the collapse of boundaries between east and west and compares it to the writing in Latin of the Greek journey of the Argo, a story of conquest that at once defines and disrupts the limits of such concepts; she thereby sees Valerius’ text questioning the Roman imperial project.[[168]](#footnote-168) Robert Cowan presents a middle ground, with optimistic and pessimistic elements existing in tension: hostile forces are afforded sympathetic characterizations, and Valerius’ heroes run afoul of seductive power.[[169]](#footnote-169) For Attila Ferenczi, such complicated interpretations reflect Valerius’ deep philosophical concern with exploring an ethical framework against which to measure human actors.[[170]](#footnote-170) Sociocultural readings of the *Argonautica* will likely continue to be productive.

Another area of recent interest is Valerius’ own reception. Zissos provides a full overview of this reception throughout the centuries,[[171]](#footnote-171) and revisits one particularly striking example in his 2014 contribution to *Brill’s Companion to Valerius Flaccus*: Giovan Battista Pio’s sixteenth-century conclusion to the *Argonautica*. Here, he discusses Pio’s position as both (Valerian) continuator and (Apollonian) translator: Pio’s experimental supplementation of Valerius with Apollonian material demonstrates the challenges faced by those participating in the Argonautic tradition. Pio’s complex response to his twin models is also explored by Buckley,[[172]](#footnote-172) who further discusses how the Renaissance author adapts his sources to create a poem of relevance to his own time; she also briefly considers the four-book *Vellus Aureum* of Maffeo Vegio, a still under-studied work by the Renaissance’s most famous continuator of classical epic.[[173]](#footnote-173) These authors will repay further study, but in general, scholars of Valerius’ reception face a qualitatively different problem[[174]](#footnote-174) than those of, for instance, Lucan and Statius. So rare is explicit engagement with Valerius for almost all of his (lack of a) *Nachleben* that Michael Barich found it worthwhile to speculate about the putative response of Valerius’ first readers to the verbal artistry of his poem.[[175]](#footnote-175) Nevertheless, implicit engagement with the *Argonautica* (by means of allusion) has become a fertile area in Flavian studies, and traces of Valerius have been found in Martial,[[176]](#footnote-176) Juvenal,[[177]](#footnote-177) Statius,[[178]](#footnote-178) and Silius.[[179]](#footnote-179) Stover’s *Valerius Flaccus and Imperial Latin Epic* (published too late to be fully considered here) will considerably advance our understanding of Valerius’ links to his fellow Flavian epicists (as well as his later reception by Claudian).

After the Flavian era, Valerius’ star fell precipitously, and it is unlikely that future study will substantially change the narrative of the *Argonautica*’s long neglect. Nevertheless, scholars ought not to allow this narrative to continue reinforcing itself. Zissos’ important survey identifies potential Valerian allusions in various late antique, medieval, Renaissance, and early modern works of great complexity; almost all of these would repay further study. Moreover, given unavoidable uncertainties about the *Argonautica*’s circulation before its Renaissance rediscovery, scholars might be a little bolder in suggesting new instances of Valerian reception. For instance, Gervais draws on circumstantial evidence that a text of the *Argonautica* was available in thirteenth-century France[[180]](#footnote-180) to tentatively suggest an allusion to Valerius in the thirteenth-century poet-scholar John of Garland’s *Integumenta Ovidii*.[[181]](#footnote-181)

Nevertheless, even Zissos’ avowed attempt to revise “the widespread notion of a perpetually obscure and inconsequential poem”[[182]](#footnote-182) gives the last word to E. M. Forster, who opines that, like “most Romans,” Valerius Flaccus was “frightfully stupid.”[[183]](#footnote-183) As is the case for Silius Italicus, this history of neglect and disdain offers tantalizing possibilities for work that treats Valerius’ lack of an extensive reception as a feature that must be reckoned with. Poems with rich reception histories seem more appropriate subjects for reception study, but it is a characteristic of the revivals of Neronian and Flavian epics in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that they insistently engage with earlier periods of dismissal or denigration, even if only to deny that the poems deserve such treatment. Such engagement with reception shows that the very fact of a poor reception history is an important aspect of a poem like the *Argonautica*, and that the reception of such poems can be as enticing a subject for study as the that of more richly and positively received poems.

# 4. Statius

Throughout this volume we have argued that scholars of Neronian and Flavian epic have seen in the reception histories of their texts stories of unjust dismissal followed by a modern rehabilitation. Of the four authors we consider, the narrative of redemption that has developed for Statius has had perhaps the most influence on the scholarship, feels the most “true,” and has been the most useful in prompting productive study. Statius was a popular author from his lifetime to the early modern period, suffered a precipitous decline into near obscurity by the twentieth century, and then enjoyed what has been termed a “Statian renaissance” beginning in the 1970s and a “*nouvelle vague*” of scholarship in the current century.[[184]](#footnote-184) Statius declares his own success with the Roman elite at the conclusion to his *Thebaid* (12.812–15), and Juvenal further testifies to his popularity (*Sat.* 7.82–6). The poet whom Sidonius Apollinaris affectionately calls *Papinius noster* (“our [Publius] Papinius [Statius], *Carm.* 22.6) rivaled Virgil as a model for late antique poets like Claudian, who himself is currently experiencing a scholarly renaissance.

Although his *Silvae* were forgotten in the Middle Ages, Statius’ two epics circulated in hundreds of manuscripts (464 are extant)[[185]](#footnote-185) and exerted influence on many authors. The *Achilleid* was a central text in the medieval curriculum; the *Thebaid* was read as a serious poem that covertly criticized the tyrannical Domitian, spoke out against the horrors of civil war, and exhorted Statius’ fellow citizens to concord.[[186]](#footnote-186) The poet was redeemed as a Christian in the medieval allegorical tradition[[187]](#footnote-187) and especially as Dante’s guide through Purgatory in the *Divine Comedy*. Statius’ influence on the Middle Ages would guarantee his canonicity in medieval studies, even when he fell out of favour with classicists. Thus, two influential texts in the Statian renaissance ground their discussion of the *Thebaid*’s gods in C. S. Lewis’ treatment of Statius as a predecessor of medieval allegory.[[188]](#footnote-188)

The beginning of Statius’ fall has been attributed to a single historical event: Poggio Bracciolini’s rediscovery of the *Silvae* in 1417. Before this, Statius had been understood as hostile to Domitian and misidentified as one Papinius Statius Surculus, a rhetorician from Toulouse.[[189]](#footnote-189) But the *Silvae* revealed his extensive praise of Domitian as well as his identity as a Neapolitan and son of a Greek father. Statius was thereafter tarred with the twin brushes of “courtier” and “southerner/easterner.”[[190]](#footnote-190) Furthermore, efforts to defend the classical canon by narrowing its bounds in the early modern period began to exclude authors like Lucan and Statius in favour of the Augustans.[[191]](#footnote-191) Modern scholars have persuasively linked Statius’ eclipse to these ideological shifts as opposed to any intrinsic quality of his poetry.[[192]](#footnote-192) And thus, the editors of *Brill’s Companion to Statius* could declare that “Classicists have now begun to appreciate what other fields have long recognized: Statius is a central author in the canon of Western literature whose critical dismissal was an aberration and whose redemption was inevitable.”[[193]](#footnote-193)

Statius’ premodern popularity is of course just as open to interrogation as his more recent dismissal. Juvenal’s praise of Statius’ “courtesan *Thebaid*” (*amicae / Thebaidos*, *Sat.* 7.82–3) is hardly straightforward.[[194]](#footnote-194) His poetry’s influence on late-antique authors was part of a broader shift from Augustan to post-Augustan aesthetics in the period,[[195]](#footnote-195) while in the Middle Ages his epics benefited from the unavailability of Greek sources for the Trojan and Theban myths—and indeed from the unavailability of the *Silvae*’s important biographical context. Nevertheless, more than one modern devotee of the “rich and fascinating texture” of Statius’ poetry[[196]](#footnote-196) might admit that, if a narrative of unfair dismissal and deserved redemption could be true for any ancient author, then surely it would be true for “our Papinius.”

Regardless of its truth, this narrative has been particularly influential and particularly useful to modern scholars because the rehabilitation of Statius gained much of its initial force not by responding to accusations that his poetry was bad, but rather that it was meaningless. In his seminal 1986 reevaluation of the *Thebaid*, Frederick Ahl identified the “ultimate low point” in Statian criticism: R. M. Ogilvie’s judgment from six years earlier that “The *Thebaid* cannot be said to be about anything,” in that it does not represent “the author’s testament about the world.”[[197]](#footnote-197) Scholarship has of course progressed considerably in the intervening years, but accusations of meaninglessness persist: Richard Jenkyns has declared as recently as 2015 that “Statius’ *Thebaid* has no sufficient reason to exist.”[[198]](#footnote-198)

Pronouncements such as this would attempt to cut off Statius’ texts from the various ties that bind them to the wider world in which they were written and the changing worlds in which they have been received up to the present day. They therefore act as spurs not so much to aesthetic defences of Statius’ poems as to more productive explorations of their meaning. And indeed, as the Statian renaissance of the late twentieth century has evolved into the *nouvelle vague* of the early twenty-first, successive generations of scholars have progressively enriched our sense of the meaning to be found in the *Thebaid* and *Achilleid* by paying close attention to their intertextuality, in the broad sense: situating the poems in the literary, cultural, and political contexts that informed their production and the various later contexts that shifted their meaning for subsequent readers.

In light of this work to draw *more* connections for Statius’ poetry, it may perhaps surprise that in the following we offer separate discussions of the *Thebaid* and *Achilleid* and, in keeping with the scope of this volume, do not discuss the *Silvae*. The transmission and reception of Statius’ individual poems have been partly or (in the case of the *Silvae*) wholly separate for much of their history, and the majority of modern scholarship treats each of the texts separately. As such, it seemed useful to include a dedicated section on the *Achilleid* in order to properly characterize the nature of modern scholarship on that poem as distinct from the larger body of scholarship on the *Thebaid*.

Scholarship on the *Silvae* is even more clearly separated from work on Statius’ epics, and of course for medieval readers before the rediscovery of the *Silvae*, understanding of Statius’ poetry was confined solely to his epics. But, in a pleasant reversal of their earlier effect on Statius’ reputation, the *Silvae* played a leading role in his late twentieth-century rehabilitation, in part because the valuable information they offered about Statius and his world was harder to dismiss as “meaningless” than the mythological content of the epics. In his groundbreaking 1973 monograph on the *Thebaid*, David Vessey prefaces his reading of the epic with a chapter on the *Silvae*, and subsequent readers have drawn various useful connections between Statius’ occasional and epic poetry. Moreover, the notably epic quality of the *Silvae* has been explored by scholars such as Carole Newlands and, more recently, Michael Putnam, in a series of articles reading individual *Silvae* in the Virgilian epic tradition.[[199]](#footnote-199) Work such as this serves as a reminder that the *Silvae* do not simply offer useful biographical and cultural context for readings of Statius’ epics, but are themselves complex literary texts that can reward the same kind of sophisticated critical approaches that are used for the *Thebaid* and *Achilleid*.

## 4.1. The *Thebaid*: The Statian Renaissance

The Statian *nouvelle vague* of the current century was born from foundational work at the end of the twentieth century, when a series of important articles, monographs, and commentaries firmly established the *Thebaid* as a meaningful text worthy of close study. William Dominik provides a good overview of the beginnings of this Statian renaissance, in particular the indebtedness of late twentieth-century Anglophone scholarship to German and Italian scholarship in the 1950s and 1960s.[[200]](#footnote-200) The renaissance reached Anglophone readers with the publication of David Vessey’s *Statius and the Thebaid* in 1973. Although many of his arguments failed to convince contemporaries and successors,[[201]](#footnote-201) Vessey dealt with a number of topics that would continue to interest later scholars: the style of the epic, which Vessey identifies as “mannerist” as opposed to “classicist”; its thematic unity, in answer to the traditional criticism of the epic as “episodic”; its place in Flavian Rome and the associated differences from the *Aeneid* as an Augustan epic; and the importance of Jupiter (whom Vessey reads in Stoic terms) and his authority to the interpretation of the epic.

### a. The Politics of the Thebaid: Optimists and Pessimists

Perhaps Vessey’s most influential contribution to subsequent scholarship was his essentially “optimistic” reading of the *Thebaid*. While not dismissing the overwhelming darkness of the epic, nor its possible connection to Domitian’s regime, Vessey emphasizes the devotees of *pietas* in the poem and follows C. S. Lewis in reading Theseus’ final intervention in spiritual terms as “the triumph of virtue over sin.”[[202]](#footnote-202) In the next two decades, scholars such as Frederick Ahl, William Dominik, John Henderson, and Debra Hershkowitz offered the “pessimistic” alternative by questioning the redemption offered by Theseus in book 12 and more fully exploring the gloom of the previous books. On some readings, the bad leaders and destructive war in books 1–11 offer a brooding meditation on Rome’s own troubled history of tyranny and civil war; on others, they constitute a harsh (albeit covert) criticism of Domitian himself.[[203]](#footnote-203)

Ahl’s “Reconsideration” of the *Thebaid* and Dominik’s monograph, *The Mythic Voice of Statius*, focus on the poem’s consistently negative portrait of power (human and divine), including a compromised Theseus.[[204]](#footnote-204) For both authors, this relentless theme reflects the epic’s subversive political intent. In reading the poem this way, they returned to what had been the dominant argument for the poem’s meaningfulness for most of its history: the medieval reading of Statius as a critic of Domitian and Roman civil strife (see above, p. 56). Medieval readers did not, however, have to reckon with the frequent overt praise of Domitian in Statius’ *Silvae*. To address this, Ahl and Dominik refer to Greco-Roman rhetorical discussions of “figured speech” to covertly censure tyrants.[[205]](#footnote-205) This invitation to read Statius’ text as capable of great nuance was important for future scholarship; in particular, the rejection of Vessey’s straightforwardly “optimistic” Theseus anticipated several later interpretations.[[206]](#footnote-206) Later scholars would respond to Ahl and Dominik by situating the *Thebaid*’s ideology in its complex intertextuality and considering other constructions of Domitian’s regime at the time Statius was writing.

Henderson’s influential, doubly reworked essay[[207]](#footnote-207) begins with the affirmation that an epic on the Theban civil war could not help but be meaningful, and politically so: Roman poetry by Statius’ day was inherently political, the topic of Thebes carried with it unavoidable political associations for both Greek and Roman writers,[[208]](#footnote-208) and the civil war of 69 CE was a fresh, insistent memory. Henderson also understood the *Thebaid* as an epic deeply shaped by the Oedipus myth in its obsession with ancestral guilt, polluted sight, and the associated problem of violence and how to express it; Oedipal too is the *Thebaid*’s reconfiguration along gendered lines of its literary father, the *Aeneid*. Thus, the epic’s conclusion in the laments of the Theban and Argive women presents readers with “[n]ot the Warrior display of *arma* *virumque*, but its disfiguration and displacement before the pain of Woman’s Bereavement.”[[209]](#footnote-209)

In *The Madness of Epic* (a survey of insanity in Homer, Virgil, Ovid, Lucan, and Statius) Hershkowitz, like Henderson, finds in the *Thebaid* a dark poetic theme expressed with a dark poetics.[[210]](#footnote-210) She argues that the poem is characterized by madness in a sexualized and incestuous form that is particularly Oedipal; the madness also invests the epic with a repeated pattern of human and divine characters seized by extravagant energy, followed by enervation and stagnation. And this pattern extends to Statius’ epic project itself, an epic of “*furor*, and the furious poetics necessary to write about,”[[211]](#footnote-211) which ends in the exhaustion of Henderson’s Women’s Bereavement, the funerals Statius cannot narrate (*Theb.*12.797–809). As for Theseus (the redemptive force crucial to “optimistic” interpreters): in Hershkowitz’s explicitly “pessimistic” reading, he does not “[restore] sanity to an insane world,”[[212]](#footnote-212) but rather falls prey himself to the madness of the Theban line.

Susanna Braund argues that the “optimist/pessimist” or “pro-/anti-Domitianic” interpretive framework echoes similar approaches to Virgil by the “European” and “Harvard” schools:[[213]](#footnote-213) as we note in our introduction, the redemption of the Neronian and Flavian epics was effected in part with methodologies that had been successfully used for Virgil’s earlier redemption. Braund’s argument for an epic that ends not in enervation but in repeated and emphatic closural gestures is an important example of optimistic Anglophone readings.[[214]](#footnote-214) But the true equivalent to Virgil’s European school arose in 1990s France. In a crowd of monumental books and dissertations,[[215]](#footnote-215) the two definitive French works of the Statian renaissance were Ferdinand Delarue’s *Stace, poète épique* and Sylvie Franchet d’Espérey’s *Conflit, violence et non-violence dans la Thébaïde de Stace*.[[216]](#footnote-216) Both defend the structure of the poem against criticisms of episodic disunity; particularly useful is Delarue’s characterization of the *Thebaid* as an Iliadic epic of *pathos*,as opposed to the *Achilleid*’s Odyssean epic of *ethos*. Both are interested in Statius’ models, going beyond Virgil to highlight important links with authors such as Callimachus, Lucan, and Seneca. And both focus on questions of evil and divine cruelty throughout the poem, which they (like Lewis and Vessey) see as remedied after the withdrawal of the gods by *humanitas*, and particularly the virtues of *clementia* and *pietas*.

### b. The Thebaid in the Ancient Canon

By the 1990s, Virgilian scholars had begun to look for frameworks other than what Philip Hardie called “the monotonously reductive debate” between pro- and anti-Augustan readings.[[217]](#footnote-217) The equivalent debate had in fact invigorated Statian scholarship of the 1980s and 1990s, but it too would soon yield to other interpretive frameworks, especially intertextual and sociocultural readings of the *Thebaid*. The groundwork for the former was laid in discussions of the poem by Hardie, Stephen Hinds, and Dennis Feeney, who approached Statius’ poem as integral to—or even a conspicuous high point of—ancient literature.[[218]](#footnote-218) Their studies well illustrate the postmodern sensitivity to authorial self-consciousness and negotiable canons that we note in our introduction (although of course these scholars had ample historical precedent for treating the *Thebaid* as canonical).

Hardie’s *The Epic Successors of Virgil* places Statius on equal footing with Ovid, Lucan, and the other Flavians in wide-ranging, theory-informed discussions of topics such as closure, religion and ritual, and poetic and political authority, all of which continue to interest scholars of Roman epic.[[219]](#footnote-219) Hardie also frames the engagement of imperial epic with the *Aeneid* as “creative imitation,” so that Virgil’s poem becomes for his successors not a “dead weight” but a source of their texts’ “restless and fertile energy.”[[220]](#footnote-220) This approach to the intertextuality of Statius and his peers has become the starting point of many subsequent studies. Hinds’ *Allusion and Intertext* turns to the *Thebaid*’s ending to explore the concept of secondariness, rebutting Gordon Williams’ arguments that the imperial authors’ self-fashioning as products of a decadent age should be taken as sincere.[[221]](#footnote-221) Instead, Hinds (following the lead of a sensitive reading by Martha Malamud)[[222]](#footnote-222) connects Statius’ famous instructions for his epic not to challenge the *Aeneid* (*Theb.* 12.816–17) with the “many mouths” *topos* that immediately precedes the epilogue (12.797–809), which can be traced back to Homer (*Il.* 2.488–90). An implicit claim that all epic is secondary to Homer therefore precedes an explicit claim of Statius’ secondariness to Virgil: the idea of secondary epic “is always in practice … open to revitalization, reframing, appropriation to a new narrative of secondariness.”[[223]](#footnote-223)

Feeney’s *The Gods in Epic* places the *Thebaid* both at the end of his survey of Greco-Roman epic and at the pinnacle—in a brief epilogue, Feeney declares Statius’ poem a “masterpiece.”[[224]](#footnote-224) Anticipating Hinds and Hardie, Feeney demonstrated how Statius self-consciously “confronts his belatedness head on,”[[225]](#footnote-225) and pointed the way for a later generation of critics for whom Statian self-consciousness has been a rich source of inquiry. Drawing inspiration, like Vessey, from C. S. Lewis,[[226]](#footnote-226) Feeney shows how the gods of the *Thebaid* are constrained to increasingly allegorical behaviour while the poem’s personifications are given expanded power, culminating in the appearance of Pietas in book 11 and the Altar of Clemency in book 12. But these too ultimately recede from the poem in a way: the personifications “cease to act as characters, and they come to be used, so to speak, without initial capital letters, as ways of speaking generally of human conditions.”[[227]](#footnote-227) And so, Feeney’s groundbreaking exploration of the gods in epic ends, remarkably, with no gods at all.[[228]](#footnote-228)

These three studies (especially Hinds’) adumbrated the potential for intertextual readings focused on precise verbal echoes, and facilitated by digital tools, that have come to dominate contemporary scholarship. Even more persuasive arguments for this kind of intertextual approach were offered by commentaries on *Thebaid* 7 and 9. The twentieth century had seen several earlier commentaries on individual books of the poems,[[229]](#footnote-229) but those by J. J. L. Smolenaars and Michael Dewar were the first to take Statius seriously as a good poet, and thereby discover that his poetry could both withstand and repay sustained close attention.[[230]](#footnote-230) Smolenaars’ commentary on *Thebaid* 7 offers the expected philological discussions of text and interpretation but is particularly important for its examination (in the introduction and throughout the notes) of Statius’ “multiple imitation” approach to intertextuality, whereby the author innovates on one or more primary models for each of his scenes by appropriating material from other sources. This trailblazing sensitive approach to the complexities of Statius’ intertextuality also characterizes Dewar’s commentary on *Thebaid* 9, who furthermore offers incisive discussions of Statius’ adventurous diction and difficult text. Dewar’s introduction includes an important discussion of Statius’ reception in late antique and medieval literature, which has become a topic of significant interest in current scholarship.

A multilingual edited volume on Statius was published on the 1900th anniversary of his presumed death, and this *Epicedion: hommage à P. Papinius Statius, 96–1996* may be understood as the last collective statement on Statius by the scholars of his renaissance.[[231]](#footnote-231) With 21 chapters by long-established and (at the time) emerging scholars, the volume covered Statius’ entire oeuvre and discussed issues of contemporary interest such as the *Thebaid*’s controlling themes, the meaning of its conclusion, the role of its gods, its use of earlier literature, and its place in Statius’ Rome. Many of the scholars who contributed to the volume have continued to write on Statius into the twenty-first century, but as the millennium approached, a new generation of scholars was emerging, and with them an even richer understanding of the many meanings of Statius’ poem.

## 4.2. The *Thebaid*: The Statian *nouvelle vague*

The transition from the late twentieth century Statian renaissance to the *nouvelle vague* of the twenty-first was characterized by two developments. First, the prevailing optimist/pessimist political framework gave ground to broader sociocultural examinations of the *Thebaid* and a series of monographs that situated ideological readings of the poem more fully in its complex intertextuality. Second, two new editions of the *Thebaid* and a major study of Statius’ manuscripts called into question the traditional understanding of Statius’ text and transmission. The editors, however, conspicuously failed to appreciate the complexity of Statius’ poetics; thus, like Ogilvie’s earlier accusation of “meaninglessness,” they have inadvertently encouraged further careful study of the *Thebaid*. The pace of publication increased during this period, and we must therefore be more selective in our discussion of the scholarship. We will focus on monographs and editions, but the first decade of the twenty-first century also saw two conference proceedings with several chapters dedicated to the *Thebaid*;[[232]](#footnote-232) an English commentary on *Thebaid* 12 and fully three commentaries (English, French, German) on the first part of book 4;[[233]](#footnote-233) several new verse translations, which should always be understood as evidence that a poem is worth careful study;[[234]](#footnote-234) and many articles and chapters on various topics.[[235]](#footnote-235) Perhaps most notable among these shorter studies are a series of articles by Alison Keith on Ovidian characters, themes, and settings in the *Thebaid* (more work on Statius and Ovid remains to be done) and Susanna Braund’s “A tale of two cities: Statius, Thebes, and Rome”, in which she explores how Statius exploits the symbolic potential of Thebes not as the dark Other of Athenian tragedy, but rather as a terrifyingly familiar Same for Rome and its history of civil strife.[[236]](#footnote-236)

### a. Sociocultural and Intertextual Readings

Where previous scholars had adapted a Virgilian political paradigm to find, for Ogilvie, Statius’ “testament about the world,” three books published between 2008 and 2010 turned instead to broader sociocultural approaches.[[237]](#footnote-237) All three afford the *Thebaid* a privileged place in broader examinations of Roman epic, continuing the successful strategy of Hardie, Hinds, and Feeney’s surveys of the previous decade. In particular, Neil Bernstein’s *In the Image of the Ancestors* gives the *Thebaid* pride of place among the four Flavian epics and their engagement with the *Aeneid*, anticipating the current trend of reading Flavian epic as a coherent corpus.

Bernstein argues that the diminished power of the great old Roman families and the rise of the emperor as *pater patriae* in the late first century CE are reflected in the Flavian epics, which “reverse the Homeric and Vergilian emphases on agnatic descent, positive ancestral example, and intrafamilial solidarity.”[[238]](#footnote-238) The darkest expression of this reversal is found naturally enough in the Oedipal dynamics of Statius’ Theban household. Bernstein also has sensitive discussions of Argia (whose heroism is motivated by ties of marriage rather than blood), Theban national identity, and Statius’ conceptions of his literary heritage in terms of kinship.[[239]](#footnote-239) Neil Coffee’s *The Commerce of War* examines economic language and behaviour in his chosen texts, focusing on Roman “economic morality,” in particular the distinction between aristocratic reciprocal exchanges and mercantile commodity exchanges, with Roman epic (like the Roman world more broadly) privileging the former. Like Bernstein, Coffee understands the *Thebaid* as a dark turn from the aristocratic nostalgia of the *Aeneid*; Statius’ epic is shot through with scenes of destructive consumption (Tydeus and the Sphinx, the gods’ greed for human suffering) and “reciprocity in retreat,” as *pietas* transforms from a reciprocal relationship with the gods to a “private rectitude.”[[240]](#footnote-240) Finally, Antony Augoustakis’ *Motherhood and the Other* applies Julia Kristeva’s psychoanalytical theories on motherhood and foreign otherness to the *Thebaid* and *Punica*. Augoustakis discusses most of the female characters in Statius’ epic to examine negotiation, transgression, and collapse of various “binarisms, such as same/other, male/female, Theban (Roman)/Argive (non-Roman), and by extension epic/elegy.”[[241]](#footnote-241) Particularly persuasive is his overarching distinction between the epic’s dominant (paternal, verbal) “symbolic” and marginalized (maternal, nonverbal) “semiotic” systems.

In tracing their respective themes through several epics, Bernstein, Coffee, and Augoustakis all argued implicitly for intertextuality as a productive approach to the *Thebaid*. More thoroughgoing intertextual readings had been supplied a few years earlier by three Cambridge monographs (carrying on the intertextual tradition of Hardie and Hinds’ CUP volumes).[[242]](#footnote-242) All three continued to consider the ideology of the *Thebaid*, and indeed tended towards “pessimistic” readings. But the primary focus had shifted to the *Thebaid*’s place in its literary heritage, in particular its negotiation of Homeric, Virgilian, and Callimachean models.

Randall Ganiban’s *Statius and Virgil* takes Statius’ engagement with his best-known model far beyond the homage implied by the epic’s epilogue: there is a Virgilian allusive program pervading the *Thebaid* (like the Homeric allusive program in the Virgil’s poem) which offers “a political critique of kingship and, by implication, of the Principate through a reevaluation of the *Aeneid* and its Augustan voice.”[[243]](#footnote-243) Ganiban focuses on futile Virgilian *pietas* and the problematic *clementia* of rulers in a dark post-Lucanian epic of *nefas*, and provides a strong counter to the Francophone arguments for redemptive *humanitas* at the epic’s conclusions. But most important are his close readings of Statius’ complex intertextual technique. To pick just one fruitful approach out of many: Ganiban shows how Hypsipyle first echoes Aeneas at Troy, but ends up playing the role of Dido (chapter 4); similarly, Statius’ Jupiter tries to imitate the Virgilian Jupiter but finds himself assimilated also to Virgil’s Juno (chapter 5); finally, Eteocles and Polynices in their final duel each take on aspects of Aeneas and Turnus at the end of Virgil’s epic (chapter 8). All of these collapsed distinctions work to pick apart the moral order of Statius’ model.[[244]](#footnote-244)

As Damien Nelis has shown, the Homeric allusive program of the *Aeneid* is inflected by a program of allusions to Apollonius of Rhodes.[[245]](#footnote-245) Similarly, Charles McNelis’ *Statius’ Thebaid and the Poetics of Civil War* laid out a Callimachean program for the *Thebaid* in the same year as Ganiban’s discussion of the Virgilian Statius. The *Thebaid*’s epilogue may name the *diuina Aeneis* but, as McNelis notes, this explicit allusion is preceded by a more subtle reference to Callimachean *agrupnia*.[[246]](#footnote-246) This tension between epic and Callimachean poetics informs McNelis’ reading of the entire poem, and, like Ganiban, McNelis understands Statius’ intertextual program in political terms: where Ganiban sees a critique of Virgil’s idealized Augustan conception of the Principate, McNelis finds Statius questioning the *Aeneid*’s teleological Augustan narrative of a permanent end to civil war. Many insightful close readings are offered in service of this overarching thesis, most notably discussion of the Necklace of Harmonia as a programmatic ecphrasis to rival the shields of Achilles and Aeneas (chapter 2).

The theses of Ganiban and McNelis both flatten some of the complexities of Statius’ intertexts—the *Aeneid*’s Augustan voice was of course already compromised in Virgil’s epic, and there is often no strong distinction between Callimacheanism and Virgilian (or indeed any Roman) epic. Helen Lovatt’s *Statius and Epic Games* was most successful of the three Cambridge monographs in capturing the rich polyvalence of Statius’ epic and its place in its literary tradition. Lovatt’s focus is, on the surface, more modest than Ganiban and McNelis’—seven chapters on the seven events of Statius’ games in *Thebaid* 6, each chapter divided into intertextual and intratextual discussions. But within this straightforward framework, Lovatt advances an ambitious and remarkably wide-ranging series of readings that explore issues such as Roman masculinity, ethnicity, power and politics, metapoetics, exemplarity, and self-reflexive intertextuality. In Statius’ epic games Lovatt identifies a flexible metaphor for real-world and poetic competition, and in addressing the latter she demonstrates the rewards that await scholars willing to consider Statius’ full literary heritage: not only the epic games of Homer and Virgil, but also the works of Ovid, Lucan, Apollonius of Rhodes, and Statius’ fellow Flavian epicists Valerius and Silius.

### b. Reevaluating the Text and Transmission

All these increasingly nuanced studies of the *Thebaid*’s meaning rested on a text that was understood to be largely unproblematic. The two major editions of the twentieth century emerged during the Statian renaissance.[[247]](#footnote-247) Donald Hill produced an edition of the *Thebaid* for Brill in 1983, revised in 1996. His editing follows the traditional understanding of a bipartite tradition, with one branch represented by the ninth/tenth-century manuscript P (the *codex Puteanus*, Paris, BnF, lat. 8051) and all other manuscripts belonging to the ω branch. Hill did, however, recognize widespread contamination in the tradition, with substantial variation of readings in the ω manuscripts, many instances where ω manuscripts agree with the readings of P, and several manuscripts that preserve both P and ω readings.[[248]](#footnote-248) In light of this, Hill drew readings eclectically from two dozen manuscripts, often choosing ω readings over those of the (supposedly) *codex optimus* P. In contrast, Roger Lesueur’s three-volume Budé edition and translation was founded on just eight manuscripts and rejected Hill’s “eclectisme systematique” in favour of an almost equally systematic preference for the readings of P, “sauf quand elles comportent des fautes grossières ou un texte inintelligible”.[[249]](#footnote-249) As a result, his text differs from Hill’s especially in places where Hill has rejected a reading of P (and sometimes rightly so).

The English/French scholarly divide we discuss above thus extended to the constitution of the text,[[250]](#footnote-250) but Hill and Lesueur nevertheless agreed on a bipartite tradition that mostly preserved Statius’ original text. Hill, for instance, printed only nine conjectures in *Thebaid* 2, and Lesueur printed seven. This *communis opinio* received its first challenge with the 2003 Loeb edition of Shackleton Bailey. His translation was a useful and necessary update to Mozley’s more archaizing 1928 Loeb translation, even if his opinion of Statius’ skills remained as lukewarm as Mozley’s—and this dismissive attitude compromised his editing, as Michael Dewar has shown.[[251]](#footnote-251) But the most obvious difference from previous editions was Shackleton Bailey’s (typical) willingness to engage in what Hill dismisses as “speculative emendation”:[[252]](#footnote-252) in *Thebaid* 2, we find 23 conjectures printed in the text. Whatever the merits of each individual choice,[[253]](#footnote-253) the overall effect was striking: an edition of the *Thebaid*, from one of the twentieth century’s greatest Latin editors, much more suspicious of the paradosis than previous editions.

This challenge to the transmitted text was greatly intensified a few years later in the magisterial but idiosyncratic edition of Hall, Ritchie, and Edwards, a three-volume work comprising a Latin text, a fluent English translation, and an extensive discussion of the text and transmission.[[254]](#footnote-254) Readers indulging in a bit of *sortes Papinianae* will find something to surprise on any page of the Latin text: *Thebaid* 2 contains 53 printed conjectures (38 of which are by either Hall or Ritchie). Hall et al. defend their editorial strategy as follows: “Our position is quite straightforward. We do not print conjectures unless we believe them to be necessary, that is to say, unless we think that the text, however intelligible as it may seem to some to be, is not what Statius left behind; and not to print conjectures when we deem them necessary seems to us to be an act of moral cowardice and dereliction of critical duty.”[[255]](#footnote-255) This attitude is, we think, correct, but where Hall et al.stumble—even more than Shackleton Bailey—is in their conception of “what Statius left behind.” They argue that “Statius was a popular author who wrote to be understood on a first hearing,” and therefore “we must not be content except with a text which makes immediate sense.”[[256]](#footnote-256) As Gervais has discussed elsewhere, this kind of “easy listening” *Thebaid* differs radically from modern scholarly understanding of Statius’ learned and difficult style, and therefore very many textual choices made by Hall et al. are unlikely to convince the scholarly community.[[257]](#footnote-257)

Lesueur and Hill founded their editions on eight and two dozen manuscripts, respectively;[[258]](#footnote-258) Hall et al. cite a dozen “primary” manuscripts regularly, and another 90 “secondary” witnesses. This greatly expanded study of the *Thebaid*’s manuscripts allows them to re-examine the traditional model of a bipartite transmission, and in their third volume they persuasively argue, first, that P is the sole witness for far fewer true readings than previously supposed and, second, that the ω family is a mirage. The dismantling of the bipartite model will have long-lasting consequences, and all future editors will have to respond to the strong argument by Hall et al. for eclecticism as the only viable editorial strategy for Statius’ poem. The work of Hall et al. was facilitated by Harald Anderson’s monumental study of Statius’ manuscripts, a three-volume work published as a revised edition in 2009 but available to scholars in other forms since 1999.[[259]](#footnote-259) Anderson’s third volume treats Statius’ medieval *accessus* and *vitae*; it is a revised version of his PhD dissertation, completed under the supervision of Frank Coulson (The Ohio State University), who has done more than almost any living scholar to improve our understanding of the medieval reception of classical literature. Anderson greatly expanded his study of medieval Statian scholarship for a 2020 article in the *Catalogus Translationum et Commentariorum* series. Most valuable for students of the *Thebaid* itself is Anderson’s catalogue of 463 Statius manuscripts, 254 containing the *Thebaid* (volume 1, with accompanying indices in volume 2). This impressive work has already become an indispensable tool for editors of the poem.[[260]](#footnote-260)

## 4.3. The *Thebaid*: Current Trends and Future Directions

Study of the *Thebaid* has continued to accelerate in the last decade, which has seen eight monographs emerge from the Anglophone, French, and Italian traditions, five full-scale commentaries on individual books, and a 34-chapter companion to Statius published by Brill. Most indicative of the *Thebaid*’s importance in contemporary Latin studies is its prominent place in many monographs and edited volumes on Flavian literature or Roman epic. Scholars have also examined various aspects of the *Thebaid* in shorter studies, such as articles by Helen Dalton on Statius’ virtuosic refashioning of Virgil’s *arma uirumque*, and Kyle Gervais and Michael Putnam reexamining the end of the *Thebaid* in light of the *Aeneid*’s conclusion.[[261]](#footnote-261) As the rate of publication on the *Thebaid* has accelerated, so has the variety of scholarly approaches to the poem. Jean-Michel Hulls’ *The Search for the Self in Statius’ Thebaid: Identity, Intertext and the Sublime* was published too late to be fully considered in this volume, but exemplifies the wide range of theoretical and methodological pressure that can be applied to Statius’ poem.[[262]](#footnote-262) There is further meaning to be found by reading the *Thebaid* with an eye to topics like violence and vision, landscape and environment, genre (especially the presence of elegy and tragedy), the posthuman, and sublime aesthetics. In more general terms, recent scholarship has focused on literary-philological commentaries, (re)examinations of the *Thebaid*’s poetics or politics, intertextuality, sociocultural contexts, and reception. All of these areas are likely to be productive in the coming years.

### a. Commentaries

The remarkably dense meaning to be found in the *Thebaid* is perhaps best understood through the intense slow reading approach of commentary writing, and these studies have proliferated in the last decade. Several commentaries on shorter section of the poem have been completed as PhD theses, which augurs well for close study of the poem in the near future.[[263]](#footnote-263) Full-scale editions, translations, and commentaries on individual books have been published by Stefano Briguglio (book 1), Kyle Gervais (book 2), Laura Micozzi and Ruth Parkes (both on book 4), and Antony Augoustakis (book 8).[[264]](#footnote-264) The Italian commentaries by Briguglio and Micozzi may not reach as wide an audience as the quality of the scholarship deserves, but the other works all enjoy the imprimatur of Oxford University Press (like Dewar on book 9), further testament to the centrality of the *Thebaid* in contemporary Latin literary studies.

All of these commentaries were published after the edition of Hall, Ritchie, and Edwards radically revised our understanding of the *Thebaid*’s transmission and challenged scholars to reevaluate—or reaffirm—their understanding of Statius’ style. Augoustakis, Briguglio, and Gervais follow Hall et al. in their approach to the manuscripts, in particular their rejection of the traditional bipartite model of the poem’s transmission; Micozzi and Parkes (who completed substantial portions of their commentaries before the availability of Hall et al.) maintain the old P/ω notation. Nevertheless, as a whole these modern editors reject the textual choices of Hall et al.—a good index of that edition’s idiosyncratic understanding of Statius’ style. But the careful textual discussions to be found everywhere in these commentaries contribute to the reinvigorated scholarship on Statius’ text.

Alongside their strong textual focus, the commentaries are notable for their avowedly literary (rather than traditionally philological) nature. Following in the footsteps of Dewar on *Thebaid* 9 and Smolenaars on *Thebaid* 7, recent commentators have paid particular attention to the *Thebaid*’s rich intertextuality. But whereas commentators of the Statian renaissance did their work with the aid of traditional scholarship and comparatively limited digital resources (most notably the Packard Humanities Institute Classical Latin Texts database and the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae), commentators of the *nouvelle vague* have access to digital tools such as *Musisque Deoque* and the Tesserae Project, which can produce collections of potential intertexts so large that the commentator’s task is changed from hunting for connections between texts to eliminating spurious textual links. Recent commentators have responded to the challenge by offering rich and careful accounts of the *Thebaid*’s full range of Greek and Latin intertexts, including its links with Statius’ Flavian contemporaries, a topic of significant interest to current scholarship. In doing so, they echo the work of many other modern Statian scholars, but the commentary form allows them to explore the bewilderingly dense web of the *Thebaid*’s literary network with greater depth and subtlety as it shifts from one line of the poem to the next.

Recent commentaries also pay close attention to the *Thebaid*’s intratextuality, which is, as Gervais argues, “a special case of intertextuality ... and is equally important: every textual link, whether internal or external, has the potential to yield meaning and stands on equal footing in theory.”[[265]](#footnote-265) The commentators note, for instance, correspondences between various books, reaffirming the Statian renaissance’s refutation of the *Thebaid*’s supposed “episodic” structure—accordingly, *Thebaid* 1 and 12 are linked in a close by return, *Thebaid* 2 and 8 correspond as the second book of the epic’s two halves, and *Thebaid* 4 and 7 begins successive movements of the epic’s four-part structure.[[266]](#footnote-266) But as with the epic’s intertextuality, the commentary form allows a more thoroughgoing exploration of the *Thebaid*’s intratextuality, so that hardly a passage goes by where the reader is not directed to meaningful connections with other parts of Statius’ epic.

In keeping with recent scholarly trends, the commentators also consider the *Thebaid*’s later reception; Augoustakis and Parkes in particular offer extended treatments in their introduction. Literary discussion in the introduction and notes to all of the commentaries also take up various subjects of interest to contemporary scholarship: generic tensions, delay, poetics of excess, authorial self-consciousness, the optimistic/pessimistic debate, the epic’s theology, and the importance of civil war. Collectively, these five commentaries show that the fullest understanding of the *Thebaid*’s manifold meanings is available to those who, while not losing sight of the forest, are prepared to inspect the details of each new tree that comes their way.

### b. Poetics and Politics

Recent monographs on the *Thebaid* include Tatiana Korneeva’s *Alter et ipse*, astudy of doubles and mirroring in the epic, Robert Simms’ *Anticipation and Anachrony in* *Statius’ Thebaid*, an intertextual study focused on the poem’s reception by its first readers, and Melisande Tomcik’s *Aurores et crépuscules dans la Thébaïde de Stace*, whose modest title belies the richness and nuance of the intertextual readings to be found in the volume.[[267]](#footnote-267) Four other studies promise to shape future scholarship by taking new approaches to long-standing questions of the *Thebaid*’s style and ideology.

Stylistic discussions have until recently been dominated by Vessey’s influential categorization of the poem as “mannerist.”[[268]](#footnote-268) Although this framework has allowed sensitive stylistic analysis,[[269]](#footnote-269) it also tends to discourage reading the *Thebaid* on his own terms. Rather, it accommodates the poem to a broader—and later—tradition of European art and literature, and defines the *Thebaid* by what it lacks, namely the classicism of the *Aeneid*. Two recent monographs suggest new frameworks for understanding the epic’s place in the shifting aesthetics of Roman poetry. Arianna Sacerdoti’s *Novus unde furor* offers a supple close reading of *Thebaid* 12—long considered the book that holds the key to Statius’ epic—and argues for a “poetica del *furor* e della *novitas*” that draws heavily on Senecan tragedy and the subversive poetics of Lucan.[[270]](#footnote-270) Anne Lagière’s *La Thébaïde de Stace et le sublime* expands on previous discussions of Statius’ sublime poetics, which did not define the concept precisely and focused primarily on the Capaneus episode.[[271]](#footnote-271) Lagière’s meticulously defines the sublime via pseudo-Longinus’s Περì Ὕψους, which she persuasively dates to the first century CE, and extends her reading across the whole poem.

The two most important recent monographs on the *Thebaid* return to questions of power and politics that had animated the beginning of the Statian renaissance. Federica Bessone’s *Epica e potere* comprises revisions of five previously published essays,[[272]](#footnote-272) but offers a coherent argument for the political purpose of the *Thebaid*’s mythological theme: “parlare del potere e (indirettamente) al potere.”[[273]](#footnote-273) Bessone offers a Senecan reading of the epic, identifying a positive discourse on power, indebted to *De Clementia*, situated within a more pessimistic context reminiscent of Senecan tragedy (and influenced by Lucan). She furthermore situates the portrayals of *clementia*, Theseus, and the absent gods of *Thebaid* 12 in contemporary imperial ideology whereby the emperor lays claim to Jupiter’s divine authority. Particularly noteworthy is Bessone’s reading of Argia as an epic heroine imbued with a novel feminine *uirtus* and embodying the Flavian virtue of conjugal *fides* as a private equivalent to Theseus’ public *clementia*.

Stefano Rebeggiani’s *The Fragility of Power* is deeply influenced by Bessone’s reading of the *Thebaid*’s Flavian politics and Lucanian/Senecan poetics;[[274]](#footnote-274) his work also builds on Brian Jones’ 1992 reappraisal of Domitian’s reign that has shaped contemporary Flavian scholarship. But in his most important contribution, Rebeggiani argues that Statius had as a primary audience various elite Romans (in particular the Annaeans) on tentative good terms with Domitian early in his reign, “who seeks to present himself as an embodiment of *clementia*, a friend of the Senate, and the polar opposite of Nero.”[[275]](#footnote-275) The *Thebaid’s* gloomy parade of tyrants and the cautious optimism of its finale would therefore have been born of current pro-Flavians and anti-Neronian propaganda; soon, however, the political climate turned and the poem opened irresistibly to anti-Domitianic readings. Rebeggiani expands Bessone’s nuanced political approach to *Thebaid* 12 to the entire epic, exploring various topics relevant to contemporary Flavian discourse: Nero, solar imagery, Hercules, narratives of crisis and external saviours, and the Gallic sack of Rome. Overall, he demonstrates that the *Thebaid*’s political intertexts admit the same deep and careful attention that scholars have begun to afford to his literary intertexts.

### c. Sociocultural approaches

Three edited volumes explore the cultural, ethical, and religious contexts in which Flavian literature was produced.[[276]](#footnote-276) Chapters in Manioti’s *Family in Flavian Epic* and Augoustakis, Buckley, and Stocks’ *Fides in Flavian Literature* focus on the women of the *Thebaid*, who fall just as far short of Roman ideals as the epic’s men. In the former volume, Nikoletta Manioti explores the unsettling mixture of cooperation and competition in Statius’ innovative account of Argia and Antigone; she surveys some fraught relationships between historical Roman sisters and sisters-in-law, but finds richer intertexts in mythical Greek models, arguing that Statius draws in particular on the Homeric sisters-in-law Andromache and Helen at Hector’s funeral but inflected through the tragic model of the sisters Antigone and Ismene.[[277]](#footnote-277) Carole Newlands argues that “marriage is at the heart of Statius’ *Thebaid*,”[[278]](#footnote-278) with the *discordia* of Oedipus and Jocasta’s marriage—the opposite of the ideal Roman marital *concordia*—casting a pall over the betrothal of Atys to Ismene and the marriage of Argia to Polynices (both relationships cut short by the men’s death). Newlands suggests that this marital discord is framed in part through the figure of the elegiac *relicta* (particularly in Ovid’s *Heroides*) and in part through contemporary Roman ideals of the powerful but loyal wife.

In *Fides in Flavian Literature*, Antony Augoustakis and Alison Keith both focus on women’s *fides* in Statius’ epic.[[279]](#footnote-279) *Fides* was a central virtue in the imperial propaganda of the Flavians as they looked back to the Augustan past after the civil wars. The virtue is closely associated with *pietas*, as Augoustakis and Keith both note, and their focus thereby provides a useful expansion on the greater prominence given to *pietas* in Roman epic in the wake of the *Aeneid*.[[280]](#footnote-280) Keith argues that the *fides* of the *Thebaid*’s women inadvertently precipitates the destruction of their husbands, brothers, sons, and fathers; Augoustakis argues that the virtue is easily manipulated and ends up devoid of value, giving way to *nefas* in Statius’ perverse epic universe. Both authors are cautiously agnostic as to what this implies for the imperial *fides* that is the political context for Statius’ epic.

Augoustakis’ *Ritual and Religion in Flavian Epic* offers 20 chapters grouped loosely into discussions of “Gods and Humans,” “Death and Ritual,” and “Ritual and the Female,” with the majority of chapters focused on the *Thebaid*. The chapters range widely across topics such as prophecy and portents of various kinds, prayer, hymns, religion and politics, pollution and purification, ritual murder and suicide, funerals, and Orphism. As with so much else in Statius’ dark epic universe, many of these practices are presented as perverse or compromised. Collectively, the studies show that religion and ritual is as pervasive, multifaceted, and meaningful to the epic and Statius’ literary intertexts (and indeed, most authors bring the cultural and literary together); a monograph focused on the topic in the *Thebaid* would likely be fruitful.

### d. Intertextuality

Six recent edited collections have examined Statius’ response to his literary predecessors and contemporaries.[[281]](#footnote-281) Two volumes, Augoustakis’ *Flavian Poetry and its Greek Past* and Papaioannou and Marinis’ *Elements of Tragedy in Flavian Epic*, explore important but still understudied models for the *Thebaid*. Some chapters focus on intertexts that can be discussed in great depth, such as Senecan tragedy and Sophocles and Euripides’ Theban plays;[[282]](#footnote-282) other chapters adopt a more speculative approach to fragmentary texts like Republican tragedy and Euripides’ *Hypsipyle*.[[283]](#footnote-283) Authors also ask more general questions about what intertextuality with a genre implies: how do we recognize a Statian scene as “tragic”?[[284]](#footnote-284) How do tragic ideas of *anagnorisis* and guilt and causality influence Statius’ narrative strategies?[[285]](#footnote-285) How does engagement with Greek models help Statius in his poetic self-fashioning as a “transnational [i.e., bicultural] *uates*,” drawing on both archaic Greek and contemporary Roman models of poetic production?[[286]](#footnote-286)

A pair of volumes by Coffee, Forstall, Galli Milić, and Nelisoffer innovative intertextual strategies with a specific focus on the problems and possibilities of new digital tools. The number of productive Statian intertexts continues to expand thanks in part to these tools: Michael Dewar on Statius and the Neoterics and Astrid Voigt on Jocasta’s models in Greco-Roman poetry and prose are particularly valuable studies.[[287]](#footnote-287) At the same time, scholars have identified increasingly subtle allusive techniques beyond the more obvious word and phrase reuse. Helen Lovatt discusses intertextuality in the *Thebaid*’s narrative transitions and reveals how their text reuse is often only made meaningful by similarities of narratological functions.[[288]](#footnote-288) Micozzi surveys ironic (or “impertinent”) allusions—perhaps the most important kind of intertextuality in the *Thebaid*[[289]](#footnote-289)—and notes how often Statian allusions rely on features such as correspondence of syntax or sound units smaller than a word. These various features of Statius’ style are visible only to the human eye, for now at least.[[290]](#footnote-290)

Manuwald and Voigt’s 23–chapter *Flavian Epic Interactions* brings together established and emerging Flavian scholars to discuss the politics and poetics of Statius and his contemporaries. The discussion is wide-ranging, but the most innovative chapters are those in Part III, “Flavian Epic Intertextuality,” which examine the allusive relationship between the three Flavian epicists. The relationship between Statius and Silius is most difficult to assess because the chronology of their epics’ composition is uncertain and overlapping, and it seems likely that in some instances the two poets were responding to one another in real time. This possibility is assessed in chapters by Raymond Marks, Jean-Michel Hulls, and Jörn Soerink; further studies on this rare and challenging kind of intertextuality promise more insight into Statius, Silius, and the nature of poetic production in ancient Rome.[[291]](#footnote-291)

Finally, Ginsberg and Krasne’s *After 69 CE* reminds that political and sociocultural approaches to the *Thebaid* are inevitably intertextual as well. Authors in the volume study how the Flavians responded to civil war as a series of historical events, a central component of the Roman cultural imagination, and a literary *topos* treated with canonical authority by Lucan. But chapters on Statius once again reveal his wide and daring intertextual vision.[[292]](#footnote-292) Timothy Stover explores Argonautic intertexts for the Necklace of Harmonia in *Thebaid* 2 to argue that Statius tendentiously reframes Valerius’ poem as a dark epic of civil war. Marco van der Schuur turns to Seneca’s *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae*, tragedies whose fraternal conflicts stop just short of breaking out into civil war; by moving beyond Seneca’s endpoint, Statius dramatizes the process of continuing a poetic tradition whose each new text positions itself as authoritative. Federica Bessone demonstrates how style and intertextuality are implicated, arguing that Statius twists and perverts his models to suggest that discord is not only his epic’s theme but also permeates its texts at every level.

### e. Reception

At the end of the Statian renaissance, the edited volume *Epicedion* brought together established and emerging scholars to articulate a collective vision of the past and future in Statian studies. In 2015, at perhaps a similar turning point came the publication of *Brill’s Companion to Statius* edited (with the assistance of Kyle Gervais) by two long-standing authorities on Statius, William Dominik and Carole Newlands. The 34 chapters of the volume cover Statius’ entire corpus, but with a strong focus on the *Thebaid*, and treat sociocultural matters, central themes such as conflict and power, and intertextuality. But what promises to have the greatest impact on future scholarship is an extended section on Statius’ reception from late antiquity to the modern day, treating some of the most important figures in European literature: Boccaccio, Chaucer, Claudian, Dante, Dryden, John of Garland, Politian, and Pope. In keeping with current trends to bring classical reception back home to the field of classics itself, seven of the nine chapters in this section are written by classicists. Much work remains to be done. In antiquity, Claudian is currently receiving renewed attention as the rehabilitation of imperial poets continues in chronological order; Claudian was a careful reader of Statius, whose *Silvae* provided an important model for his own occasional poetry and whose *Thebaid* offered a dark model against which to react in his panegyrics.

For later periods, studies of Statius’ scholarly reception have led the way. Harald Anderson, to whom Statians are already deeply indebted (see above, n. 17 and §4.2b), has now published a monumental survey of commentaries, translations, and adaptations of Statius’ texts from late antiquity to the early modern period for the *Catalogus Translationum et Commentariorum* series.[[293]](#footnote-293) Very few of the authors and manuscripts that Anderson discusses will be familiar to Statian scholars, but many of them would repay further study. An example of such a study (published before Anderson’s) is provided by Valéry Berlincourt’s *Commenter la Thébaïde (16e-19e s.)*.[[294]](#footnote-294) This volume surveys and analyses the methodologies of early modern editions, translations, and commentaries, many of which are still indispensable to modern commentators on the *Thebaid*. Comprehensive accounts of the epic’s pre-modern reception outside of scholarship have yet to be written, but the poem was of course a central text for much of this time, and the author of some future *Statius in the Middle Ages* or *Statius in the Renaissance* will find almost as much to work with as the authors of the equivalent Virgilian volumes.[[295]](#footnote-295)

Statius’ star had fallen so far by the modern period that scholars searching for the *Thebaid*’s contemporary reception beyond academia find almost no obvious objects of study. But this is perhaps as much an opportunity as an obstacle. Indeed, two of the more adventurous approaches to the *Thebaid* in recent years radically privilege the reader as capable of generating meaning that an author could not have intended: Kyle Gervais’ and Tim Noen’s readings of the *Thebaid* alongside the films of Quentin Tarantino and Samuel Beckett’s *The Unnamable* (Statius of course was no fan of Tarantino or Beckett’’, and there is no evidence that the modern auteur or author allude to the *Thebaid* in the traditional sense).[[296]](#footnote-296) If nothing else, these studies are a reminder that the meaning of the *Thebaid* is to be found in its intertextuality, in the broad sense: the literary, cultural, and political contexts that informed its production and influence is reception up until the present day. With this in mind, refracting Statius’ “testament about the world” through the lenses of Tarantino or Beckett represents perhaps the most forceful rebuttal to Ogilvie’s failure to discover any meaning in the *Thebaid*.

## 4.4. The *Achilleid*

Like the *Thebaid*, Statius’ *Achilleid* was popular from late antiquity to the early modern period, and thereafter fell steadily out of favour until a resurgence in the late twentieth century. The reasons for its varied reception history are similar to those of the *Thebaid*’s reception, but with some important differences. While the imprint of the *Thebaid* can be found throughout the high literature of late antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance, the centrality of the *Achilleid* was thanks in part to its status as an elementary text in the medieval curriculum, especially as part of the *Liber Catonianus* alongside Claudian’s *De Raptu Proserpinae* and other texts. Because of this, however, the *Achilleid* was perhaps never felt to be as meaningful as Statius’ longer epic: where the *Thebaid* was understood as a poem with an urgent political message (see above, p. 56), the purpose of the *Achilleid* was taken to be pedagogical, as a pleasant and edifying text for boys to read before graduating to more serious concerns.[[297]](#footnote-297)

The *Achilleid* suffered along with the *Thebaid* following the Renaissance rediscovery of the *Silvae* and Statius’ true identity (see above, p. 57). But even before this, the reintroduction of Homer’s poems to Western Europe had begun to change perceptions of the *Achilleid*, which had until then been valued as one of the few classical sources for the life of Achilles (alongside texts such as the *Ilias Latina*). With the new availability of the *Iliad*, readers began to understand the *Achilleid* as an even more distant follower to its professed Homeric predecessor (cf. *Ach.* 1.3–4) than the *Thebaid* was to its professed Virgilian one (cf. *Theb.* 12.816–17).[[298]](#footnote-298) Moreover, before the modern period, the *Achilleid* was typically read as a complete poem, and accordingly divided into five short “books” and supplied with a more clearly closural final line.[[299]](#footnote-299) The modern understanding of the poem as incomplete, and therefore not representing Statius’ full intentions, furthered its decline into perceived meaninglessness. The presumed limits of interpretability are well summarized by Kathleen Coleman, who argues that the *Achilleid*, as a “fragmentary” poem, “offers only limited scope for self-contained analysis of structure, characterization, diction and all the other features exhibited by a literary work in its entirety.”[[300]](#footnote-300) Or, in Stephen Hinds’ blunter formulation: “[t]he combination of being a fragment and being by Statius proved near-fatal to the *Achilleid* in modern times.”[[301]](#footnote-301)

The twentieth century produced several editions, translations, and commentaries on the *Achilleid* in various languages, but few sustained attempts at literary criticism were made before the mid-1990s.[[302]](#footnote-302) The rehabilitation of the *Achilleid* lagged somewhat behind that of the *Thebaid* in the 1980s and early 1990s, in part because Statius’ shorter and more lighthearted poem did not seem as amenable to serious political readings as the *Thebaid*—and indeed, lacked the *Thebaid*’s medieval tradition of this kind of reading (see above, p. 56).[[303]](#footnote-303) Scholars did detect in the *Achilleid* a more personal “testament about the world” (to borrow Ogilvie’s phrase again). Reading the poem against the *Silvae*, David Slavitt saw poetic meditations on the cultivated and leisured life of the Roman elite for whom Statius wrote.[[304]](#footnote-304) Elaine Fantham similarly found in the *Silvae* and *Achilleid* representations of Chiron that reflect the importance of surrogate and foster fathers for Statius, the son of a famous teacher and foster father of an ill-fated boy.[[305]](#footnote-305)

A more promising avenue for interpretation was offered by the poem’s stylistic departure from the tradition of Homeric-Virgilian epic that Statius had followed in his *Thebaid*. The *Achilleid* was compared by various scholars to the genres of pastoral, new comedy, or the novel,[[306]](#footnote-306) or, in Delarue’s more sustained Aristotelian argument, read as an Odyssean epic of *ethos* as opposed to the *Thebaid* as an Iliadic epic of *pathos* (see above, §4.1a). But the most influential arguments were offered by Stephen Hinds, in his *Allusion and Intertext* and associated articles, and Gianpiero Rosati, in the introduction to his Italian edition and translation.[[307]](#footnote-307) As scholars of the *Thebaid* were organizing themselves into a Virgilian paradigm of “optimistic” and “pessimistic” political readings, Hinds and Rosati applied to the *Achilleid* the current focus in Ovidian scholarship on gender and genre. On these readings, the *Achilleid* blends the most epic of subject matters—the life of Achilles—with an Ovidian elegiac and metamorphic sensibility that privileges love, disguise, transformations, and gender fluidity. This confrontation of genres allows Statius an avenue for originality in the face of the epic tradition and, furthermore, characterizes (the epic) genre itself as something constructed and constantly open to negotiation and reconfiguration.

Gender and genre thereafter became almost the exclusive focuses of scholarship on the poem, especially following Peter Heslin’s influential 2005 monograph on the subject (see below, §4.4b). But it perhaps suits the *Achilleid*’s status as one of the “charming oddities of classical literature”[[308]](#footnote-308) that another important moment in the late twentieth-century rehabilitation of the poem was David Slavitt’s highly idiosyncratic 1997 translation of the *Achilleid* alongside Claudian’s *De Raptu Proserpina*. In keeping with his long-standing practice, Slavitt offered versions of the poems, in a compelling modern idiom, that were by turns faithful translation and literary critical digressions. This strategy presented real challenges to instructors for whom the translation was the only modern option available in English,[[309]](#footnote-309) but Slavitt succeeded in reminding readers of the *Achilleid*’s several poetic virtues that were reflected—or elided—by his translation. Furthermore, he paired Statius’ poem with its natural companion in Claudian’s *DRP*, as the poems had been paired in the medieval *Liber Catonianus*, and as they soon would be again in an important argument by Peter Heslin.

### a. The Text of the Achilleid

The renewed literary critical interest in the *Achilleid* at the turn of the millennium was followed by important textual and commentary work in the next decade. The twentieth century had produced several editions, translations, and commentaries,[[310]](#footnote-310) but the nine-year period between 2003 and 2012 saw a reprint of O.A.W. Dilke’s edition and philological commentary,[[311]](#footnote-311) the editions and translations of Shackleton Bailey and Hall et al. (on which, see above, §4.2b), and three commentaries—in French by Ripoll and Soubiran and in Italian by Renée Uccellini (on *Ach.* 1.1–396) and Gianfranco Nuzzo—that balanced literary and philological concerns.[[312]](#footnote-312)

Shackleton Bailey and Hall et al. did not affect our understanding of the *Achilleid*’s text and transmission to the extent that they did with their work on the *Thebaid*. As he had for the *Thebaid*, Shackleton Bailey usefully modernized Mozley’s older Loeb translation, but not his outdated conception of Statius’ poetics.[[313]](#footnote-313) But unlike for the *Thebaid*, the number of conjectures that Shackleton Bailey printed was modest and in line with previous editors (three in the first 500 lines of the poem, compared to, e.g., three in Dilke’s edition and one in Marastoni). Hall et al. showed no such restraint, however, printing a full 31 conjectures in *Ach.* 1.1–500 (almost all by Hall himself). But in the absence of a similar multiplication of conjectures by Shackleton Bailey, and working with a poem whose style was considered less challenging than the *Thebaid*, Hall et al. perhaps succeeded less at provoking a renewed scepticism of Statius’ text than highlighting their idiosyncratic conception of Statius.

Editors before Hall et al. did not envisage quite as neat a transmission history for the *Achilleid* as for the *Thebaid*’s bipartite P-ω tradition. Rather, Dilke, Marastoni, and Méheust edited on the basis of six or seven manuscripts, including the *codex Puteanus*, and offered two competing bifid stemmata for these manuscripts, each supposing significant contamination between the two branches.[[314]](#footnote-314) By 1983 already, Michael Reeve worried that this group of seven manuscripts was insufficient, and suggested that “[s]omeone enterprising might tackle the whole tradition.”[[315]](#footnote-315) This was the work undertaken by Hall et al., on the foundation of Anderson’s study of the manuscripts (see above, §4.2b), but the result was only one more entry in list of “primary” manuscripts, as well as 43 “secondary” manuscripts whose readings Hall et al. cite frequently in their edition. This expanded list of witnesses does not seem likely to influence the text of the *Achilleid* in as lasting a way as the work by Hall et al. on the *Thebaid*.

The commentary of Ripoll and Soubiran was published before the edition of Hall et al. but includes extensive textual discussions. So too do the commentaries of Uccellini and Nuzzo (although neither are convinced by many choices made by Hall et al.). But the primary value of these commentaries is their comprehensive and minute literary focus. All three introductions engage with many of the same questions as contemporary literary scholars. They are particularly useful in considering the *Achilleid*’swide range of Greek and Latin intertexts, from the Epic Cycle to Statius’ Flavian contemporaries; Ripoll and Soubiran’s 99-page introduction offers especially good discussions of the poem’s relationship with tragedy, comedy and elegy, and the novel, and an argument for Delarue’s model of an Odyssean “ethical” epic. But it is of course in the notes that the most detailed work on Statius’ poetry is to be found, and the intertextual focus of all three commentaries will provide significant material for future scholarship in this vein.[[316]](#footnote-316)

### b. Gender and Genre in the Achilleid

The primacy of gender and genre in the *Achilleid*, adumbrated by scholars of the 1990s, was firmly established by Peter Heslin’s adventurous *The Transvestite Achilles*, which remains the only dedicated monograph in any language on the poem.[[317]](#footnote-317) Heslin’s multifaceted reading includes an anthropological study of Achilles on Scyros in ancient myth, discussions of the rape of Deidamia through the lenses of gender theory and Lacanian psychoanalysis, an elaboration of Hinds and Rosati’s generic analyses, an argument for Thetis’ failure as a rhetorician and “reader” of her intertextual models,[[318]](#footnote-318) and a survey of the Scyros episode in early modern opera that suggests the potential for future productive work on the *Achilleid*’s reception. But perhaps the most important contribution to the scholarship was Heslin’s persuasive argument that the *Achilleid* is not a “fragment,” as it has almost always been described, but rather a complete and coherent sample piece which Statius probably released in the hopes of securing patronage for a longer poem. Heslin also once again pointed the way for future work of the *Achilleid*’s reception by suggesting that Claudian’s *De Raptu Proserpinae* is incomplete by design, and that Claudian thereby recasts the short teaser that Statius had written “in a spirit of hopefulness” as “an example of poetic insufficiency ... a monument to aporia.”[[319]](#footnote-319)

Scholars since Heslin have enthusiastically taken up his invitation to read the *Achilleid* as a coherent text able to withstand and repay close analysis along intertextual and other theoretical lines. Most of this work has been published in high-profile journals, a testament to the *Achilleid*’s current scholarly appeal. Christopher Chinn, Laura Micozzi, and Lorenzo Sanna offer sustained readings of Achilles’ intertextuality with Ovid’s Centauromachy in *Metamorphoses* 13 (Chinn) and *Ars* *Amatoria* (Micozzi and Sanna).[[320]](#footnote-320) Francesca Econimo turns to the poem’s Aulis interlude and explores generic tensions as represented by Calchas, *vates* in the outdated Homeric tradition, and Ulysses, embodiment of the new flexible epic-elegiac blend that Statius has undertaken.[[321]](#footnote-321) Marco Fantuzzi also addresses this generic play, but sees the elegiac/erotic dimension (which Statius may have drawn from the anonymous Hellenistic *Epithalamium of Achilles and Deidameia*) ultimately subordinated to tragic and epic models for Achilles’ decision to leave Deidamia; Statius thereby undertakes to “dignify” the Scyros episode for a Roman audience uncomfortable with its challenges to Achilles’ masculinity.[[322]](#footnote-322)

Recent articles have also expanded their intertextual focus beyond the dominant epic-elegiac paradigm, demonstrating the interpretive possibilities of readings centered on a wide variety of other authors. Charles McNelis shows Callimachaean and Virgilian models for Achilles in tension with one another (recalling his longer 2007 study on the *Thebaid*); he also links Achilles to representations of Bacchus and Hercules in comedy.[[323]](#footnote-323) Elaine Fantham’s 2011 collected works reprints one of the earliest intertextual analyses of the *Achilleid*, focused on Seneca’s *Troades*.[[324]](#footnote-324) Dániel Kozák shows how Achilles’ songs at various points in the poem draw on Catullus 64, while Sara Myers answers an implicit challenge from Hinds by offering a “Horatiocentric” reading of the *Achilleid* in which Statius develops the generic play already present in Horace’s depictions of Achilles.[[325]](#footnote-325) Alison Keith also finds traces of lyric in the Statian Achilles, not only Horace’s poetry but also Greek lyric and Statius’ own *Silvae*.[[326]](#footnote-326)Ruth Parkes, Alessandro Perutelli, and François Ripoll contribute to the current focus on Flavian epic interactions with studies on Valerius and Silius in the *Achilleid*.[[327]](#footnote-327) Finally, Pavlos Sfyroeras and Anne-Marie Taisne return to Statius’ most prominent, but oddly understudied predecessor, Homer.[[328]](#footnote-328)

The *Achilleid* has also received sociocultural and political readings. Kozák shows how the important Flavian value of *fides* is questioned and compromised in the *Achilleid*, as it was in the *Thebaid*.[[329]](#footnote-329) Ripoll argues that the willing subordination of the Greek leaders to Achilles’ popularity at Aulis reflects a shift in power dynamics from Homeric to imperial Roman society.[[330]](#footnote-330) But as was the case for the *Thebaid*, such readings are also inevitably intertextual. Thus, Alessandro Barchiesi reads Achilles in the context of contemporary Roman male elite education while also exploring allusions to Homer, tragedy, Hellenistic poetry, and various Roman models.[[331]](#footnote-331) Similarly, Federica Bessone’s study of family in the *Achilleid* focuses on the different literary models that each of Achilles’ relatives evoke in exerting their influence on him.[[332]](#footnote-332)

### c. Future Directions

Despite sustained focus on gender and genre in Statius’ short poem, more work is possible. The scholarly and popular understanding of gender is rapidly evolving, and even Heslin’s sophisticated treatment in 2005 left room for further exploration, such as Mairéad McAuley’s study of essentialist/epic and constructivist/Ovidian gender models that links Statius’ characterization of Achilles with his conception of his poem as an epic and himself as an epic poet.[[333]](#footnote-333) Similarly, the recent commentaries on the *Achilleid* and the proliferation of potential intertexts offered by contemporary digital tools promise even more sophisticated intertextual studies. Heslin’s persuasive argument against the *Achilleid* as a “fragment” was taken up by Delarue, who showed that the poem can be understood as an epyllion.[[334]](#footnote-334) Further comparisons with this genre (beyond Catullus 64 and the *Epithalamium of Achilles and Deidameia*) may be fruitful. Because the *Achilleid* was composed after the *Thebaid* and most of the *Silvae*, treating these earlier works as intertexts is particularly productive, as seen in Ruth Parkes’ discussion of allusions to the *Thebaid* throughout the *Achilleid*, and Neil Bernstein and Russell Craig’s discussions of, respectively, fosterage and ephebic liminality in the *Silvae* and *Achilleid*.[[335]](#footnote-335) Further intertextual studies such as this are possible.

Carole Newlands’ 2012 *Statius, Poet between Rome and Naples* points the way towards two other areas for future study, geography/topography and reception. Newlands shows how Achilles’ growth into adulthood is reflected in his movement from boyhood in Chiron’s cave to sexual maturation on the island of Scyros to heroic manhood on his sea voyage towards Troy. She also shows how the poem’s sophisticated and transgressive play with gender is muted in medieval readings of the poem, which was understood to have been written for the moral instruction of boys, and was used as such in the medieval curriculum. Some work has already been done in these two areas. Articles by Antony Augoustakis, Dennis Feeney, and Victoria Moul all focus on geography as a third axis of meaning alongside gender and genre, so that the poem negotiates questions of West/East, Greek/barbarian, or Roman/non-Roman in addition to the well explored male/female and epic/non-epic tensions.[[336]](#footnote-336) Ruth Parkes has discussed the *Achilleid*’s reception by Claudian in a pair of articles and, as discussed above, Heslin treats reception in the early modern period.[[337]](#footnote-337) Newlands’ focus on the *Achilleid* in the medieval school curriculum has been greatly expanded by Harald Anderson’s monumental study of premodern commentaries and translations of Statius.[[338]](#footnote-338) In contrast to the *Thebaid*, where the problem is a multiplicity of known but as-yet poorly studied premodern receptions, for the *Achilleid*, the challenge will be to uncover its subtler influence on later authors and disentangle that influence from the *Thebaid*’s.[[339]](#footnote-339) Where receptions are found, however, they will often be able to repay sophisticated analysis, as suggested by Parkes’ intertextual reading of the anonymous eleventh-century verse epistle, the *Deidamia Achilli*.[[340]](#footnote-340)

The contemporary rehabilitation of the *Achilleid* began by exploring how Statius skillfully manipulates his literary heritage both to carve out a space for himself in the epic tradition and to call into question the immutability of that tradition. It is thus fitting that perhaps the most influential recent publication on the *Achilleid* is a 2015 verse translation by Stanley Lombardo, with an introduction by Peter Heslin. This volume followed Lombardo’s well received translations of the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, *Aeneid*, and *Metamorphoses*, all of which have begun to be widely used for literature in translation courses. And so Statius’ incomplete epic once again finds itself on the curriculum, as it was in the Middle Ages, beating out the other epics treated in our volume, and perhaps priming the next generation of readers to understand it not as a charming generic enigma, but as an integral and natural part of the Homeric-Virgilian-Ovidian epic canon.

# 5. Silius Italicus

A particular narrative of development has persistently characterized the late twentieth and early twenty-first century surge in appreciation of and scholarship on Neronian and Flavian epic. That narrative, as we discussed in our introduction, has told a story that partial and unreliable judgements about the poor quality of “silver” epic in comparison with first Homer and then Virgil have hindered scholarly engagement with imperial epic, but such judgments have now been rightly corrected. Lucan, Statius, Valerius Flaccus, and Silius Italicus are therefore now receiving the attention and praise that they have always deserved. Yet we should be suspicious of the stories we tell ourselves about the development of scholarship, and all the more so the more obviously correct they seem. We should at least historicize such stories of development, and scholarship has now reached a point when historicization of this particular story may be productive. We noted in our introduction as contextual developments, for example, that the resurgence of Neronian and Flavian epic has found amenable the postmodern distrust of canon formation, and the most powerful expression of this in studies of Latin poetry has been in the applications of theories of reception and intertextuality to the construction of literary histories.[[341]](#footnote-341) And yet, no poem has resisted the progressive narrative as persistently as Silius Italicus’ *Punica*, even though that resistance has finally crumbled. If we are to attempt to situate and historicize the progressive story of scholarship on Neronian and Flavian epic, we could do worse than to analyze Silius’ long resistance to redemption.

Silius’ resistance to redemption is in part a matter of chronology. In the history of scholarship on Roman epic, we might say that Virgil’s *Aeneid* received its rescue in the middle of the twentieth century, and the march of appreciation moved chronologically through Ovid, then Lucan, and finally to the Flavian epicists. Claudian might constitute a coda to the teleological narrative of the appreciation of Classical Latin epic. There is undoubtedly some truth to the story we have been telling ourselves about Latin epic, but even the most dominant narratives of the progress of scholarship are partial and tendentious. This is not to say that the redemption of the *Punica* is a mistake and that it is genuinely so bad that it is unworthy of study by serious scholars of Latin epic, but rather that the reason it has been less studied was not really because of the perception of inferior quality. Similarly, what changed to motivate a surge in scholarship on the poem was not a new and more positive evaluation of its merit. It is not the case that scholars can finally see the excellence of Silius’ *Punica* and therefore have written about the poem. It is rather the case that as more scholars have published more about the poem, its quality seems better in the light of its now richer reception. In other words, judgments of the quality of the *Punica*, whether the negative evaluations of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries or the now frequent assertions of Silius’ skill and talent as a poet, are an effect rather than a cause of the reception history of the poem. We begin with three recent topics of interest in Silian studies that have shaped the current positive reception of the *Punica*: exemplarity, civil war, and intertextuality. We then look back at the poem’s earlier reception, arguing that this history is itself a potentially fruitful topic of interest for further study.

## 5.1. Exemplarity in the *Punica*

Although the *Punica* is unlikely to be read outside of universities for the foreseeable future, the small and thriving community of scholars interested in post-Virgilian Latin epic has generated and welcomed a surge in Silian scholarship in the twenty-first century. The origins of the redemption of Silius can be traced to Edward Bassett and Michael von Albrecht through Frederick Ahl, Martha Davis, and Arthur Pomeroy.[[342]](#footnote-342) But perhaps the greatest sign of the breaking of Silius’ long resistance to redemption was the publication of two English-language monographs on the poem, Raymond Marks’ 2005 *From Republic to Empire: Scipio Africanus in the* Punica *of Silius Italicus* and Ben Tipping’s 2010 *Exemplary Epic: Silius Italicus’* Punica. Both of these monographs take an approach that emphasizes exemplarity in the poem, describing a complex and dynamic system of characters who find and use exempla for themselves as well as serve as exempla for readers of the poem. Within the poem, the key character is Hercules, and Hannibal and Scipio in particular compete to see who will inherit the hero’s legacy. For the Flavian period, the key character is Scipio, who serves as a model for future Roman emperors. Ultimately, however, the poem seems to deny the possibility of unitary models, and the dynamics of exemplarity in the *Punica* at least call into question the influence that any individual can have on the course of history.

The more Silius’ interpreters work on exemplarity in the poem, the richer and more complex the topic becomes. For Marks, writing the first extended treatment of the poem in English since Ahl, Davis, and Pomeroy’s book-length article in 1986 and the first full monograph in any language since von Albrecht’s in 1964, it was necessary to present a structure to work with.[[343]](#footnote-343) The focus on Scipio in particular allows Marks to show a progression in the poem from an early period in which many Romans occupy leadership roles, use exempla, and serve as exempla themselves, to a later period in which Scipio becomes a synecdochic hero and a model for Domitian as the one who represents the many.[[344]](#footnote-344) Tipping complicates the issue by emphasizing the many over the one and arguing that Silius calls into question the value of exemplarity even as he makes it a major theme of his epic.[[345]](#footnote-345) He begins by noting that Silius’ proem turns Virgil’s *virum* into *viros* and *Aeneadum*, transforming the singular focus of the *Aeneid* into the multiplicity of exempla in the *Punica*.[[346]](#footnote-346) There are, for example, minor figures like Marcus Atilius Regulus, who do not strictly belong in an epic on the Second Punic War, but are brought in specifically and explicitly as exempla.[[347]](#footnote-347) Yet Tipping ultimately brings his focus to three major figures in the poem, Hannibal, Fabius Maximus, and Scipio, all of whom are problematic and ambivalent as models for Romans, and who themselves find problematic and ambivalent models for their own roles. If, as Tipping argues, no individual emerges as a hero in an epic about the roots of Roman virtue and the seeds of its downfall, exemplarity provides not models to follow so much as problems to think with. Scholars have taken up the challenge that Silius offered to his Roman readers, to think with his exempla. To take just one example, Robert Cowan has shown how Silius uses “sideshadowing” (in contrast to foreshadowing) as a form of counterfactual history to show that seemingly widely divergent outcomes, like Carthage becoming the *caput mundi* instead of Rome, would not have been so different after all.[[348]](#footnote-348) In this way, Silius demonstrates the prominence of broad historical forces over the individual contributions of even the most exemplary of historical figures. There is a richness in this theme that still has much to give.

## 5.2. Civil War in the *Punica*

Although it was one kind of milestone for Silius scholarship in the twenty-first century to see the publication of monographs taking seriously the poem’s literary aspects, no Greek or Roman author can be said to have really arrived in the current century until they have a companion volume. The companion has replaced many of the functions of an older style of monograph that used to serve as a comprehensive introduction to an ancient author or text, and a skillfully edited companion can do much to advance the cause of an author like Silius.[[349]](#footnote-349) The publication of Antony Augoustakis’ *Brill’s Companion to Silius Italicus* in 2010 was a landmark moment in Silian scholarship.[[350]](#footnote-350) Because there is comparatively little written about the *Punica*, a volume like this one that brings together the major scholars working on Silius at the time cannot help but set the tone for further work, in addition to summing up the current state of the field. Although there are a number of themes that the contributors emphasize, including intertextuality, exemplarity, ekphrasis, and gender, there is also an unstated but repeated emphasis in multiple contributions on the theme of civil war in the *Punica*, an emphasis also reflected in Tipping’s analysis of the involvement of so many Roman exempla in civil wars.[[351]](#footnote-351) The various approaches and results suggest that there is a rich vein of thematic material to be mined here, and that scholarship will continue to develop in this area.

There are in the volume three different approaches to civil war in the *Punica*. All of them share the ideas that civil war is a persistent theme in Roman epic and in Roman culture in general, and that Silius, having lived through 68 and 69 CE and having a successful career in the Flavian period despite his support for Vitellius, can be expected to explore issues related to civil war in his literary work. The most developed avenue for exploring the significance of civil war in the *Punica* is that of Neil Bernstein, whose work on kinship, including especially fathers and sons, in the poem leads him to consider the ways in which brothers, fathers, and sons find themselves fighting each other in the war against Hannibal.[[352]](#footnote-352) Stories of fratricide and interfamilial conflict are so associated with civil war that even accidental killings of family members associate the fighting in the Second Punic War with civil war.

As Marks argues, a second way in which Silius makes the war civil is through a program of allusion to Lucan’s *Bellum Civile*.[[353]](#footnote-353) In general, Silius’ uses of Lucan inevitably borrow the language of civil war to describe the Punic War. But more than that, Marks identifies a specific program of allusion that replays Lucan’s epic from beginning to end twice: once in books 1–10, during which the Romans are aligned with Lucan’s Pompey and the Carthaginians with Lucan’s Caesar, and then again in books 11–17, during which the alignment is reversed. The third way in which the *Punica* presents its topic as civil war is in the incorporation of Carthage into the Roman Empire. Elizabeth Klaassen points out that by the time Silius was writing his poem, Carthage was a thoroughly Roman city, and the second greatest city in the empire.[[354]](#footnote-354) No longer is it unimaginable that Carthage could be the *caput mundi*. In fact, it is quite close to being a kind of secondary *caput mundi* in reality, and if a war had broken out between Rome and Carthage in the Flavian Period, it would very much have been civil.[[355]](#footnote-355) This is related to the tendency of states to project their current territorial extent into the limitless past and future, making all wars between eventually conglomerated groups retrospectively civil, and a linking of Bernstein’s argument with Klaassen’s would suggest that something like Benedict Anderson’s “reassurance of fratricide” is operative in Silius’ *Punica*.[[356]](#footnote-356)

## 5.3. Intertextuality in the *Punica*

A poem whose most notable feature is its *cura* (see the next section) can be expected to be highly allusive, and Silius does not let us down.[[357]](#footnote-357) Writing in a period in which Latin epic and historiographic predecessors were plentiful and regarded as classics, Silius demands that his readers approach his poem in relation to the tradition of Roman epic and historiography rather than in isolation. In this respect, it is appropriate that two significant trends in Silian scholarship currently are commentaries, which tend to highlight allusions, and monographs or volumes that integrate Flavian epic thematically rather than isolate particular texts.[[358]](#footnote-358) The proem of the *Punica* intertextually constructs a trilogy of historical epic comprising Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Lucan’s *Bellum Civile*, and the *Punica*, the last as a belated, but in terms of the historical narrative, central contribution.[[359]](#footnote-359) Despite the attempt to construct its centrality, the development of literary history has made the poem “late,” and the disappearance of the poem until after Petrarch’s *Africa* means that, with the exception of the possibility of mutual influence with Statius’ *Thebaid*, Silian intertextuality until the fifteenth century moves only in one direction.[[360]](#footnote-360) Readers can find many intertexts in earlier works, but later works seldom make use of the *Punica*.

The unidirectionality of Silian intertextuality has encouraged *Quellenforschung*, which focused in the early twentieth century particularly on the relationship of the *Punica* to historiographical sources, especially Livy. In addition to suggesting a relation to his epic predecessors, Silius’ proem announces a Livian affiliation with its first word, *ordior*—a word Livy uses twice in his preface. In 1877, Max Heynacher argued that it should be possible to find traces of lost historiographical sources in the places where the *Punica’s* narrative departs from that of Livy. This approach led to a series of attempts to identify systematically possible sources for Silius, including both extant and lost works, culminating in John Nicol’s 1936 monograph, *The Historical and Geographical Sources Used by Silius Italicus*. Already in the thirties, resistance to this kind of approach began to dominate, beginning with Alfred Klotz (1927) and continuing with Paola Venini (1972a, 1972b) and H.-G. Nesselrath (1986). Critics have argued that the demands of the epic genre and the narratological aims of the poem can explain any divergence from Livy and make it impossible to identify historiographical sources with any certainty. In exchange for such a loss of certainty, interpretive gains can be made. For example, Bruce Gibson makes the case that what is most interesting about Silius’ use of historiographical sources is not the information he gleans from them, but rather the narrative techniques of historiography that can be adapted to historical epic.[[361]](#footnote-361) In an age in which source-hunting for its own sake is out of fashion, ideas rooted in literary intertextuality offer broader interpretive possibilities.

Such possibilities are all the more apparent in Silius’ relationships with his poetic predecessors, including especially Virgil and Lucan. The biographical tradition, beginning with Pliny’s note of Silius’ devotion to Virgil (*Ep.* 3.7), suggests that readers might look to the *Aeneid* as a primary model for the *Punica*, and perhaps to the *Eclogues* and the *Georgics* as well. It has been pointed out that the unusual number of books in the *Punica*, 17, corresponds not only to the number of years in the Second Punic War, but also to the number of books that make up Virgil’s three major works.[[362]](#footnote-362) As Tipping notes, Silius’ proem makes the *Punica* a kind of sequel to the *Aeneid*, resolving Dido’s curse calling for an avenger who will fight against the descendants of Aeneas.[[363]](#footnote-363) The *Punica*, however, is not just a sequel, but also a complex and ambivalent repetition of the *Aeneid*, and Hannibal is not just Dido’s avenger, but also a new Aeneas. Von Albrecht calls Silius’ Hannibal a “Gegenbild zu Aeneas” and Vessey calls him a Punic Aeneas.[[364]](#footnote-364) He is not only an inversion of Aeneas, seeking to destroy Rome rather than to found it, but also an epic hero receiving a shield depicting the history of his people and, among other activities similar to those of Aeneas, visiting the temple of Apollo that Daedalus made at Cumae. Such thematic correspondences also contain specific, verbal echoes of the relevant passages in the *Aeneid*. Hannibal, however, is not just Aeneas, but also Turnus. Klaassen argues that Silius uses a Virgilian technique of double models, and so just as Turnus and Aeneas are both repetitions of both Achilles and Hector, Hannibal, Fabius, and Scipio are also both Aeneas and Turnus.[[365]](#footnote-365) The connections with the *Aeneid*, both thematic and verbal, make it hard to interpret the *Punica* without taking into account its manipulation of models from Virgil’s epic.

The *Punica* is no slavish imitator of the *Aeneid* and of Virgilian poetic techniques, as was once a significant charge leveled against it, but rather an epic with its own flavor and its own characteristic techniques. One such technique is the counterfactual condition. Klaassen points out in her analysis of Silian imitation of Virgil that Silius complicates the doubling of literary models with counterfactual speculation about role reversal. In book seven, for example, Silius has the Roman prisoner Cilnius speculate to Hannibal that if Fabius were Carthaginian, the Carthaginians would win the war (7.36–37).[[366]](#footnote-366) In the final book, Silius similarly speculates about reversing the ethnicities of Scipio and Hannibal (17.401–405). Cowan shows that such counterfactuals are a key characteristic of Silius’ epic style, beginning with the question in the proem of which city would become the *caput mundi*.[[367]](#footnote-367) It might seem that Silius is attributing world-historical significance to the skill and talent of individual, historical actors, but Cowan argues that the interchangeability of generals rather shows the dominance of historical forces and the insignificance of seemingly important historical turning points. The fact that counterfactual thinking shows up in analyses of Silian intertextuality and exemplarity suggests that it is not only a form of historical thinking, but also a characteristically Silian way of constructing literary tradition.[[368]](#footnote-368) He inherits a tradition, but he reimagines it through exemplarity and intertextuality by imagining Hannibal as an Aeneas who ultimately loses instead of winning. Silius may use the Virgilian technique of doubling his models, but conceptualizing it explicitly through counterfactuals is an innovative, Silian approach. Now that scholars have abandoned the idea of allusion as slavish imitation and instead see the creative possibilities in intertextual reuse of poetic material and technique, new avenues have opened for the interpretation of the *Punica*. Scholars who once (perhaps slavishly) used methods developed by reading Virgil to read Silius are now developing more uniquely Silian modes of interpretation.

## 5.4. Silius’ Ancient and Early Modern Reception

In the early twenty-first century, there is hardly a greater growth area in Classical Studies than Classical Reception Studies, and Silius presents us with an unusual case. It is easy to justify whole books on the literary, cultural, and scholarly receptions of such richly received texts as Virgil’s *Aeneid,* Lucan’s *Bellum Civile*, or Statius’ epics. It is more difficult to justify lengthy studies of poorly received texts like the *Punica*, but it is just as important to address the receptions of such texts. Reception histories tell us much about the received text, and the absence of a rich reception history combined with the negative judgment of Silian scholarship for centuries informs our readings of the *Punica* as much as a rich history of praise would. After all, the poverty of Silius’ reception history has not prevented contemporary scholars from discussing it. It seems that almost every modern study of the *Punica* includes a discussion of the poem’s reception, often as no more than a necessary prelude to a declaration that this reception has been unjust. And yet, if (as we think) it is not especially productive to argue that Silius’ *Punica* is good or bad, it is just as inadequate to dismiss negative judgments of the quality of the poem as inconsequential. Reception histories are sticky, and a long period of overwhelmingly negative evaluations means that projects like this one, surveying recent trends and future directions in scholarship, will bring that debate into focus as an issue that anyone working on Silius will have to confront. The point is not to agree or disagree, but to understand the effects of Silius’ reception history on current scholarship. The most obvious of these effects is that current scholarship on the *Punica* pays unusually close attention to prior receptions of the poem.

The origin of Silius’ negative reception is traditionally traced to the obituary letter in which Pliny the Younger asserts, *scribebat carmina maiore cura quam ingenio*” (“he wrote poetry with more diligence than talent,” *Ep.* 3.7). One of the standard early moves in the redemption of a “silver” Latin author is to argue that the characterization of their writing as deficient is a recent trend, and that the ancient, medieval, and/or early modern receptions of the author demonstrate that older, and therefore more authentic, interpretive communities appreciated better the true merits of the texts.[[369]](#footnote-369) Perhaps the clearest example of this approach is Lucan. Statius’ praise of him is taken to reveal that ancient authors who knew better than modern scholars how to appreciate Latin epic show us a better way to read the *Bellum Civile*.[[370]](#footnote-370) Such a view is difficult to accept in the wake of Hinds’ *Allusion and Intertext*, which demonstrates that ancient authors are not reliable guides in the construction of literary histories. Nevertheless, it would also be a mistake to ignore the judgments of earlier readers. Ancient readers may not have been better readers than we are today, but they were not worse readers, either.

The reception of Lucan over the centuries has been deeply ambivalent (as we have shown), allowing scholars who want to praise Lucan and those who would prefer to denigrate him equal opportunity to find critics to emphasize. The much sparser evidence for the reception of Silius makes such an approach less viable, as repeated reliance on the judgment of Pliny shows.[[371]](#footnote-371) In the late twentieth century, the view persisted that Silius was an inferior poet. Feeney’s criticism is particularly trenchant: “Ahl is part of a recent corporate attempt to do for Silius something of what he helped to do for Lucan (Ahl-Davis-Pomeroy 1986); he faces a qualitatively different problem.”[[372]](#footnote-372) Twenty-first century scholarship, however, has shown the power of the redemption narrative, and however different the problem, the result has been the same. Silius even has his version of a call to look to antiquity for a more positive reception. Thus Bernstein’s introduction to his 2017 commentary on *Punica* 2 re-evaluates Pliny’s comment, noting that *ingenium* and *ars* (or *cura*) is a traditional polarity of two positive qualities. He continues, “On this view, Silius’ *cura* is no defect, but an aesthetic preference for Callimachus’ polish in preference to Ennius’ rude verse. To condemn an ancient poet for exercising *cura* is more characteristic of the Romantics than of the ancient literary critics.”[[373]](#footnote-373) A sterner critic of Silius might still argue that the condemnation resides in the lack of *ingenium* more than in the abundance of *cura*. A similar approach might also note Quintilian’s point that poetry lacks the proper rhetorical balance between *ars* and *ingenium*,[[374]](#footnote-374) suggesting that Pliny here criticizes the *Punica* for being insufficiently rhetorical—hardly a criticism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. More significantly, these kinds of readings of Pliny look like a version of an appeal to shed the Romantic prejudices that caused nineteenth and twentieth century scholars to prefer the original genius of Homer to so-called secondary epic and to return to a more authentically ancient appreciation of ancient poetry.

The strategy of appealing to earlier receptions to redeem poetry from twentieth-century condemnation runs into some trouble in the case of Silius because Pliny’s letter and a few brief mentions by Martial are, for the most part, the last we hear of Silius until Poggio’s discovery of a manuscript of the *Punica* in Constance in 1417.[[375]](#footnote-375) The poem had not disappeared completely, however, and there are three pieces of evidence that there were at least some people reading the *Punica* in the Middle Ages. First, in a ninth-century manuscript (Bern, Burgerbibliothek, Cod. 363) there is an annotation referring to “*Silius Italicus XV lib. de bellis Punicis*.” Second, a priest named Wolferad in Constance added a reference to *Punica* 13.663 to an eleventh-century manuscript of Bede. Finally, a tenth-century catalogue, probably from Contance, lists Silius in its contents.[[376]](#footnote-376) There was at least one manuscript in Constance—the one Poggio discovered—and there may have been one in Switzerland. It is possible that there is a Swiss tradition deriving from this manuscript, separate from Poggio’s, although Reeve is not convinced.[[377]](#footnote-377) The *Punica* was there, but it seems not to have spread beyond one or at most two places. By the fifteenth century, however, any classical text was worthy of celebration, and many readers were excited by the distribution of a “new” one.

Modern scholars looking for positive evaluations and serious scholarly engagement with the *Punica* can find much in the fifteenth century, as Silius became a standard author for university curricula and scholarly commentary. Francis Muecke describes a community of Silian studies developing in Rome in the second half of the century.[[378]](#footnote-378) Silius was not among the first Latin authors to be printed in the 1460s, but did receive an edition in 1471, and soon after a set of lecture notes of Domizio Calderini in 1473, now published as a kind of commentary by Francis Muecke and John Dunston.[[379]](#footnote-379) Evidence of widespread interest in Silius, however, is not accompanied by much evaluative judgment of his work, either positive or negative. Calderini’s focus is on Silian allusivity, especially on the relationship of the poem to history as represented by Livy and Polybius, and shows little or no interest in the judgment of taste.[[380]](#footnote-380) What little remains of evaluation shows no hint of the earlier and later denigration of the poem. In the biography that precedes the commentary of Marso, there is a positive evaluation: *variumque est elegans multiplex ut quid divinum esse videatur*, (“it is diverse, elegant and complicated, so that it seems a thing divinely inspired,”)[[381]](#footnote-381) but as Muecke points out, this can be dismissed easily as a cliché. Taken together, the amount of interest in the *Punica* and the lack of evidence of harsh criticism of the poem’s quality suggests that the fifteenth century was a high point in the history of Silius’ reception.

The negative evaluations we now associate with Silian reception were not far away, and already in the sixteenth century we can see evidence of the poem’s marginalization. Perhaps the most famous statement comes from Julius Caesar Scaliger’s 1561 *Poetices Libri Septem* (324), describing Silius as, *quem equidem postremum bonorum poetarum existimo: quin ne poetam quidem* (“the one whom I judge the last of the good poets, indeed, not even a poet”). Already in 1953, however, Edward L. Bassett was keen to point out that Silius seemed still to be respected in sixteenth-century England. Sir Thomas Elyot wrote in 1531:

The two noble poetis Silius, and Lucane be very expedient to be lerned: for the one setteth out the emulation in qualities and prowesse of two noble and valiant capitaynes, one, enemy to the other, that is to say Silius writeth of Scipio the Romane, and Haniball duke of Cartaginensis: Lucane declareth a semblable mater, but moche more lament- able: for as moche as the warres were ciuil.[[382]](#footnote-382)

Bassett also notes similar judgments in William Webbe’s 1586 *A Discourse of English Poetrie* and Francis Meres’ 1598 *Palladis Tamia*, criticizing modern scholars for dismissing such praise of Silius as obviously misplaced.[[383]](#footnote-383) For the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, he describes mentions of or allusions to Silius Italicus in Milton, Dryden, Pope, and Addison, proving, as he claims, continued interest in the *Punica* until it fell out of favour in the nineteenth century. Even such a defender of Silius as Bassett, however, acknowledges that these references are merely “tacit acknowledgement of the merits of the author.”[[384]](#footnote-384)

An illuminating contrast can be drawn with Edward Paleit’s monograph on Lucan in sixteenth-century England, which shows, not tacit acknowledgement of Lucan’s merits, but deep and significant engagement with Lucan’s poem and a sense that interpretations of the *Bellum Civile* were vitally important for contemporary politics.[[385]](#footnote-385) The drive to rescue Silius from his detractors and to find early modern bits of praise or allusion miss the forest for the trees. It is possible to find positive judgments of Silius as well as negative ones, but the significance of the question of the quality of the poetry pales in comparison to the significance of the lack of extensive engagements with the poem. Gian Biagio Conte argues, “Of Silius Italicus it cannot be said that his *Nachleben* greatly exceeded his merits.”[[386]](#footnote-386) The witty condemnation of the quality of the *Punica* leads scholars inclined to appreciate the poem to dismiss such remarks as misguided, but whatever the truth or falsehood of the judgement of quality, the point that Silius’ *Nachleben* is not nearly as rich as that of other Latin epic poets cannot be so easily dismissed.

The poverty of Silius’ reception history is particularly apparent in the nineteenth century, in which Silius received little attention and lost even Bassett’s “tacit acknowledgment of the merits of the author.” It may be the case that if Pliny was correct in his judgment of Silian poetics, the preeminence of *cura* over *ingenium* in the *Punica* was not attractive to the taste of Romanticism,[[387]](#footnote-387) but even so there was plenty in Silius that should have been, and to some extent actually was, attractive to *Altertumswissenschaft*. Nineteenth-century work on Silius was concentrated in Germany and focused on technical issues of textual criticism, *Quellenforschung*, and rhetoric.[[388]](#footnote-388) Three new editions by Lemaire (1823), Lünemann (1824), and Bauer (1890) improved on those of previous centuries. Hermann Blass’ study of the manuscript tradition is an exemplary work of scholarship and shows what can be done with thorough work on a relatively small number of manuscripts (we now know of 32 manuscripts, though Blass knew only of 25) diverging from one another probably only in the fifteenth-century.[[389]](#footnote-389) The key focus of debate was on the possibility of a manuscript tradition independent of Poggio’s. Although Blass divided the manuscripts into two groups and there has been some subsequent speculation of a tradition independent of Poggio’s manuscript, it seems more likely that the two groups are derived from copies made of this manuscript at different times.[[390]](#footnote-390) A more difficult problem is the question of the authenticity of 8.144–223. These lines were not in Poggio’s manuscript, and scholars at the time detected a lacuna. Jacobus Constantius published the lines in 1508, and Heitland defended them, arguing that they came from a separate Italian and Swiss tradition deriving from a manuscript brought to Italy by Bartolomeo da Montepulciano.[[391]](#footnote-391) Delz and Reeve are doubtful.[[392]](#footnote-392) The debate remains unresolved, but the point is that such work on the text of the *Punica* in the nineteenth century gives the overall impression that the epic is worthy of study by professional scholars as a technical exercise simply by virtue of being a Latin epic that survived from antiquity, but that it bears no larger, cultural significance. The scholarly reception of the poem is sparse, and it is difficult to detect any literary reception at all.

## 5.5. Silius in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Silius began to receive interpretive and critical attention again, and that attention was overwhelmingly negative. In 1909, H. E. Butler helped to set the tone, describing the *Punica* as “the longest and worst of the surviving Roman epics.”[[393]](#footnote-393) Even in the late twentieth century, such a judgment was felt to be obviously correct, even though the *Punica* might be deemed worthy of attention simply by being a Roman epic. Delz begins the preface of his 1987 Teubner edition with the following excuse:

Silii edendi consilium cepi ante septem fere lustra, non admiratione quidem poetae mediocris instinctus, sed quia editionem a Ludovico Bauer confectam fundamento parum firmo niti et adnotationes eius criticas plurimis in locis mendosas esse perspexeram.[[394]](#footnote-394)

I took up the plan to edit Silius almost thirty-five years ago, not so much inspired by admiration for a mediocre poet, but because I had observed that the edition prepared by Ludwig Bauer depended on a foundation not firm enough and that in very many places his critical notes were wrong.

The *Punica* in the twentieth century was a worthwhile exercise in textual criticism, but it was hardly worthy of reading otherwise. The perception that only specialist scholars should be interested in Silius has until recently been reflected in the lack of English translations of the poem.[[395]](#footnote-395) Our century now has Augoustakis’ and Bernstein’s 2021 translation (see below, 5.6), but after Ross (1661) and Tytler (1828), the twentieth century saw only Duff’s complete translation (1934) and Wilson’s selections (1991). Duff’s translation for the Loeb series no doubt appeared only because of the series’ aim for a complete collection of texts and translations. The *Punica* was clearly not good enough or important enough to read for those without Latin.

Nevertheless, even amidst such negative judgments, interpretive work on Silius did appear, and not all scholars conformed to the *communis opinio* that the poem was the worst. The first prominent example of such a scholar was Bassett, who between 1953 and 1963 published a series of four articles on Silius in *Classical Philology*, beginning with a history of engagements with Silius in English that also served as a call to rehabilitate the poem. 1964 saw the publication of von Albrecht’s monograph, *Silius Italicus: Freiheit und Gebundenheit römischer Epik*, which served as the basis of Silius scholarship for the next half century. Bassett and von Albrecht were not completely alone, but they were the most notable exceptions to the vast majority of scholarship on Silius in the twentieth century, which was dominated by negative judgments of the quality of the *Punica*.[[396]](#footnote-396) Feeney calls Silius, “a quite remarkably bad poet, on virtually every count and according to virtually every authority.”[[397]](#footnote-397) Like Conte’s witty condemnation, Feeney’s judgment of the quality of the poem is easy to brush aside, but the point that the vast majority of judgments of the poem’s quality are negative was, at least at the time Feeney was writing in 1991, certainly true. The judgment of the poem may not correspond to a deep truth about the nature of the *Punica*, but the near universality of the opinion is difficult to question. Still, virtually every authority is not fully every authority, and today’s defenders of Silius can point to Bassett and von Albrecht as brave islands of rectitude in a sea of ignorance.

It was not until the twenty-first century that Silius finally became a subject of study without shame, and even the lingering traces are now disappearing. For the first decade of the century, scholarship was no longer apologetic, but was rather defensive. As an example, the Oxford University Press dust jacked blurb for Joy Littlewood’s 2011 commentary on *Punica* 7 begins, “Once stigmatized as ‘the worst epic ever written,’ Silius Italicus’ *Punica* is now the focus of a resurgence of critical interest and wide-ranging positive reappraisal.” The blurb for her 2017 commentary on *Punica* 10 contains no reference to the quality of the poem at all. Ben Tipping’s 2010 *Exemplary Epic: Silius Italicus’* Punica, itself a kind of landmark as an Oxford doctoral thesis on Silius published by OUP, begins, “Silius Italicus’ *Punica* should be *the* example of Roman epic.”[[398]](#footnote-398) It is hard not to detect a trace of defensiveness there, but it is growing faint. Ultimately, Silius scholars, writing primarily for each other, have grown comfortable with the status of the poem and its worthiness as a subject, but that worthiness will always have a place as a subject for debate.

## 5.6. Silius’ Resistance to Redemption

The fact that Silius had to wait until the current century for the rehabilitation of his reputation among scholars prompts the two related questions of why it took so long, and why it is happening now. We argued in our introduction that a confluence of four developments has produced circumstances favourable for a surge of interest in imperial Roman epic, and those four reasons all apply specifically to the *Punica*. Without reiterating them in detail here, we can summarize that postmodern thought and its distrust of canons has benefited Silius, that digital tools are especially powerful for reading a poem written with exceptional *cura*, that the increase in interest in other Latin epic poems has provided a kind of surrogate reception history for the *Punica*, and finally that the number of Classicists feeling pressure to publish in the twenty-first century has encouraged scholarship on lesser-covered works.

The answer to the question of why scholars in recent decades have found research on the *Punica* attractive does not quite answer the question of why Silius more than any other Classical epic poet has resisted being redeemed. It can explain the recent flourishing of scholarship on Silius, but it has more difficulty explaining the long delay before that flourishing. The answer is not, as Conte and Feeney claim, that Silius was a bad poet, but neither is the answer the scholars like Conte and Feeney unjustly considered Silius a bad poet, as Bassett and, more recently, Tipping, Dominik, and Bernstein suggest.[[399]](#footnote-399) The answer must be at least in part that a preference for mythological rather than historical epic and the unmanageability of a seventeen-book poem have discouraged scholarship and the inclusion of the *Punica* in curricula, but even these do not tell the full story. The greatest cause of Silius’ resistance to redemption is in the sheer momentum of reception history. Tastes do vary, and for all the distaste for Virgil in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,[[400]](#footnote-400) there was no doubt that he was a significant poet who had generated rich engagement from many readers over many years. The disappearance of the *Punica* from more than a millennium of literary history did the poem no favours, although being lost for a portion of the medieval period alone was not fatal to the possibility of a subsequent development of a rich reception history, as the example of Catullus shows. Nevertheless, the poem labored under a combination of historical contingencies, including the position of the Flavian period at the end of an era from which several Roman epics survive and at the beginning of an era from which none do until Claudian, the lack of a medieval tradition of exegesis, and the bad luck that the rediscovery of the *Punica* did not happen early enough to influence Petrarch’s *Africa*,[[401]](#footnote-401) all of which started the modern reception of the *Punica* in such a poor state that it would have taken an extraordinary literary event to put the poem on the road to a rich tradition of readings. The poverty of the poem’s reception now in the twenty first century exerts two opposing kinds of pressure. On the one hand, the growth of the discipline and the drive for novelty and originality make it sometimes more attractive to be one of a few to write on Silius than to be one of the relatively many to write on Virgil. On the other hand, the lack of a history of reception of the poem by canonical authors, artists, and scholars makes it more difficult to engage with a long-established community of readers. For a long time, the latter kind of pressure pushed scholars away from Silius, but in the twenty-first century it seems that the former is exerting itself more forcefully.

What the influence of the reception history of the poem on its modern reception shows is that the quality of Silius’ *Punica*, or lack thereof, resides not only in the text of the poem, but also in the accretion of meaning and significance to the poem over many readings by many people. Ignoring the necessity of such accretion of meaning leads to a crucial mistake among those who most ardently defend Silius. It would be easy to take too far Dominik’s criticism of “a tendency even for the most recent commentators to allow themselves to be influenced by previous criticism of Silius.”[[402]](#footnote-402) Dominik’s point is that we should not uncritically accept the negative judgments of earlier readers of Silius, but we should not confuse critically evaluating previous scholarship with the untenable idea of fully banishing that scholarship from our minds. Imagine if each scholar attempted to approach Silius or any other poem as though they were the first ever to read it. Such an approach can be helpful as a first step, but it makes the work of scholarship useless, to be discarded each time a new scholar reads a text purely and uninfluenced by previous readings. Taken to an extreme, it would not be possible to read a poem at all without some community of readers. This means that no reader of Silius today can free themselves from the reception history of the *Punica*, for good and for ill, and the poverty of that history means that Silius really is less readable than other Latin poets. Silius’ resistance to redemption has persisted because he is still waiting for one significant literary moment or a critical mass of smaller moments that will turn him into a significant author.

## 5.7. The Future of the *Punica*

The future of scholarship on Silius’ *Punica* certainly looks brighter than its past, at least since the fifteenth century. The inevitable march of redemption has now firmly taken hold of the poem, and possibilities are opening for interpretive work using both techniques borrowed from work on other Latin epic poets, such as Klaassen on Silius’ use of the Virgilian technique of double models, and techniques more singularly appropriate to the *Punica*, such as Cowan on Silius’ characteristic use of counterfactuals.[[403]](#footnote-403) Enough of a groundwork has been laid by Bassett, von Albrecht, Ahl, Davis, Pomeroy, Marks, Tipping, Bernstein, Augoustakis, Littlewood, and others that new work can enter a conversation with an interpretive community. And future Silian scholars, young and old, now have a much easier first step into his poem thanks to Augoustakis’ and Bernstein’s complete modern translation of the epic, published by Routledge in 2021.

No longer must we, as Dominik recommended a little over a decade ago, seek to avoid the influence of uncongenial scholarship and proceed as though approaching a newly discovered poem. And yet, we should not and cannot ignore the centuries of denigration and neglect of the poem, which have constructed its place in literary history and will continue to have an effect on the poem’s future receptions. This poem, more than any other from antiquity, tempts us to believe that we twenty-first century readers are enlightened scholars who have overcome the prejudices of the past to become better readers, but the inevitability of Silius’ redemption story also shows us that historical forces having little to do with the quality of the *Punica* have determined the direction of scholarship more than the individual or group efforts of twenty-first century scholars. At the very least, we might consider ourselves fortunate (or unfortunate, as some would say) to witness a new dawn in appreciation of the *Punica*, since most of us, if we had lived seventy years ago, would not have joined Bassett and von Albrecht in their judgments of the poem’s suitability for interpretive attention. An approach more oriented toward reception studies might even make use of the *Punica* as an exemplary model in an argument showing how reception histories and literary historical forces more than independent judgments of taste shape scholarly responses to classical poetry.

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1. e.g., Keith 2000; O’Hara 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. e.g., Bernstein 2008; Augoustakis 2010; Augoustakis 2013; Augoustakis 2016a. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Hardie 1993; Quint 1993. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Gowing 2005, 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Mayer 1982, 317–18; cf. Hinds 1998, 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Farrell 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Hinds 1998, 52–98. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The PHI database was first developed in the 1980s and made available on the CD-ROM; it was put online (<https://latin.packhum.org/>) in 2015 (Kozák 2018). Development of MQDQ (https://www.mqdq.it/) began in 2005; the Tesserae Project (https://tesserae.caset.buffalo.edu/) began in 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Coffee et. al. 2012; Fowler 1997, 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See, e.g., Bernstein, Gervais, and Lin 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Exact figures are difficult to find, but there are proxy measures are available. For example, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences reports a total of 32,244 bachelor’s degree completions in English language and literature, history, languages and literatures other than English (including linguistics and classical studies), and philosophy in 1949. In 2015, even after some decline, that number was 96,337 (<https://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/higher-education/bachelors-degrees-humanities>). The share of humanities degrees in comparison with other disciplines fell, but the growth in university attendance overall meant a nearly threefold increase. Historical data for Classical Studies in particular is more difficult to obtain, but the results of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences survey of Classical Studies departments in 2017 reports 2,005 full- and part-time faculty members in the discipline in the U.S. ([https://www.amacad.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2020–05/hds3\_classical\_studies\_profile.pdf](https://www.amacad.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2020-05/hds3_classical_studies_profile.pdf)). Interestingly, the number of humanities faculty members in the U.S. increased by 54% between 1999 and 2013 (<https://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/workforce/number-faculty-members-humanities-and-other-fields>). This is not necessarily good news, since at least some of the increase must be attributable to an increase in part-time and contingent positions, partly trackable in the data collected by the Society for Classical Studies (<https://classicalstudies.org/professional-matters/professional-matters-data-collection>). Still, it is safe to say that the number of Classicists seeking to publish has increased significantly since the middle of the twentieth century. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Putnam’s apology prefaced *The Poetry of the* Aeneid. This is the kind of apology readers at the time would expect of *any* work on Virgil’s Roman successors at all. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Bassett 1953, 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Paleit 2013. See also the chapters on Lucan and Silius below. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Ahl 1976, 326–332. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Twenty-first century commentators nearly always use *de Bello Civili*. See, for example, Matthews 2008, Roche 2009, Asso 2010, and Roche 2019. Twenty-first century monographs, volumes, and articles more frequently use *Bellum Civile*. See, for example, Sklenár 2003; Asso 2011; Dinter 2012; Paleit 2013; Tracy 2016 (but Tracy 2014 uses *de Bello Civili*, which is rare outside of editions and commentaries). Sometimes scholars translate the title and use *Civil War* in English. See, for example, Braund 2009 and sometimes Dinter 2012. There are some who still use *Pharsalia*. See, for example, Narducci 2002; Gowing 2005; Ahl 2015, 245n26; Joseph 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The examples that follow are, for the most part, the standard ones cited in handbooks and introductions, e.g. Bartsch 2005, 494–495; Braund 2010, 2–4. These barely scratch the surface of Lucan’s ancient reception, being only the explicit assessments of the poem in surviving texts. Newlands 2011 provides a chapter-length treatment of Statius’ biography of Lucan in *Silvae* 2.7. There has yet to be a focused study of Lucan’s ancient reception along the lines of, for example, Hardie 1993 for Virgil’s *Aeneid* or Paleit 2013 for Lucan’s sixteenth- and seventeenth-century receptions. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. On Servian influence and the composition of the scholia, see in particular Esposito 2011, with further literature. Hermann Usener edited the *Commenta Bernensia* in an 1868 Teubner. Johannes Endt edited the *Adnotationes super Lucanum* in a 1909 Teubner. Giuseppe Cavajoni has added further material in three volumes (1979, 1984, and 1990) of a *Supplementum Adnotationum super Lucanum*. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. On Abelard, see especially von Moos 1975; von Moos 1976. On Dante, see especially Marchesi 2011. In general on the medieval reception of Lucan, D’Angelo 2011 provides a thorough bibliography. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Bolgar 1963, 276; Braund 2010, 4. Bolgar notes that Lucan was the first Greek or Roman poet to be printed, and the only one to receive an edition “during the first five years that classics were printed (1465–1469).” See, however, von Albrecht 1997, 702, noting an edition of Virgil “with a dedication of Bishop Andreas of Aleria: Romae before 1469.” [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Paleit 2013, 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Paleit 2013, 33–39. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Paleit 2013, 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Scaliger 1561. For the defense of Lucan’s status as a poet rather than a historiographer, see i.88. On the belated status of Lucan, see v.270. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See also Paleit 2013, 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Braund 2010, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Housman 1926, xxxi; Paleit 2013, 199. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Paleit 2013, 211. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Paleit 2013, 255–312. On closure and the theme of endlessness at the end of the *Bellum Civile* see especially Masters 1992, 216–259. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Shelley 1964, i.432; Braund 2010, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Weiner 2015; McClellan 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. For comments on the quality and significance of these editions, see Housman 1926, xxx-xxxv; Braund 2010, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Saunders 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Housman 1926, xxvi. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. See also Tarrant 1983, 215. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. There are five complete manuscripts from the ninth century (M, Z, A, B, and R; M and Z share a common source, and A, B, and R are derived ultimately from Z) and four complete manuscripts from the tenth century (G, U, P, and V, all of which are independent). Housman considered M worthless and relied on Hosius’ readings of Z, P, G, U, and V, but virtually all other editors use primarily those five plus M. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Housman 1926, vii. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Housman 1926, ix. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Housman 1926, ix. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Tarrant 1983, 215 remains a good summary of current thinking. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Shackleton Bailey 1987. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. See especially Marti 1941; Marti 1945; Bruère 1950; Bruère 1951; Grimal 1960; Bruère 1961; Brisset 1964; Marti 1964; Grimal 1970; Marti 1970; Marti 1975; Gagliardi 1976. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Morford sometimes engages in a spirited defense of Lucan, somewhat ambiguously as very good but not as good as Virgil in the introduction (page ix) and more definitively later, e.g., p. 59. Nevertheless, his conclusion begins with Lucan’s “serious shortcomings” (85). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Roche 2009, 129–130, in his note on the passage, cites 22 publications on the topic, 14 of which were written after Grimal’s 1960 article. Particularly noteworthy are Conte 1966; Hinds 1987, 26–29; Masters 1992, 136–137; and especially Dewar 1994. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Feeney 1991; Masters 1992; Roller 1996; Hinds 1998. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. O’Hara 2007, 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Sklenár 2003, 2. See also Bartsch 1997; Leigh 1997. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Rudich 1997; Narducci 1999; Narducci 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Narducci 2002, 331. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. See above, p. 8 n 9. Lucan’s use of the *Aeneid* was an early test case for the Tesserae Project, as reported in Coffee et. al. 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. On Lucan’s use of apostrophe see especially D’Alessandro Behr 2007; Asso 2009. Also worth noting is J. D. Duff’s comment in the preface to his 1928 Loeb (page viii), singling out his decision to “suppress” Lucan’s use of apostrophe in his translation, believing that it is most often a “meaningless convention” and a “metrical device.” [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Ahl 1993, 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Ahl 1993, 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Narducci 1979, 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. E.g., Fraenkel 1924; Thierfelder 1934. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. See especially Narducci 1979, 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. The poem’s relationship with emperor and empire can be understood as even more complex than this: as Pogorzelski 2011 has argued, the image of Rome at the center of an imminent world empire at the beginning of Lucan’s poem gives way in its later books to a world divided between west and east, with Rome laying claim only to the former. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. On anger in Lucan, see especially Fantham 2003a. Anger is also a driving force of the *Aeneid* (see, e.g., Galinsky 1988; Putnam 1990), but since Parry 1963, much of the focus of so-called pessimistic readings of the poem has been on melancholy. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Hinds 1998, 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Hinds 1998, 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Stover 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Rebeggiani 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Gowing 2005, 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Gowing 2005, 82 [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Gowing 2005, 69–70 [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. The dependence of epic poetry on a gap between past and present goes back at least to Bakhtin 1981 (originally written in 1941, but not well-known until after 1970). Bakhtin’s argument is schematic and has attracted some criticism from students of epic. See, for example, Peradotto 1990, 53n.15, arguing that epic contains much of the temporality Bakhtin had called novelistic. The idea, however, still has value and currency. See, for example, Hardie 1993, 2 on the association of epic with the distant past, and Hardie 1997, 139–140 on the particular problems this poses for historical epic connected to the historical moment of composition. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Tracy 2014; Tarrant 2002; Wheeler 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Ahl 1976, 306 makes the point that Lucan’s experiences in 64 and 65 (namely that Nero banned Lucan from reciting poetry or advocating in the lawcourts in 64 and Lucan participated in the Pisonian Conspiracy in 65: Ahl 1976, 37) must have had a significant effect on his view of history and politics. Ahl is more hesitant about whether these changes also affected Lucan’s view of his poem, but expects that had Lucan outlived Nero, his poem would have needed radical revision. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Masters 1992, 216–259 provides Masters’ argument for the completeness of the poem as we have it and remains the most thorough treatment of the scholarship on the issue. See also, however, Ahl 1976, 306–326; Tracy 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Proposed end points include the death of Cato, the death of Caesar, Philippi, and Actium. Munda seems also possible, but finds few, if any serious proponents. See Masters 1992, 235n.34 for a list of proponents of these endpoints and of the argument that the poem as we have it ends where Lucan intended it to end. Marti 1970 proposes the Ides of March as the stopping point, suggesting that this would have meant sixteen books, encouraging readers to view the poem in tetrads. Ahl 1976, 319–326 argues that Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, and Statius’ *Thebaid* rather encourage us to view Roman epics in triads, since all contain multiples of three books, although he notes that Silius Italicus’ seventeen books demonstrate that there are other possibilities. This leads him to suggest Thapsus and the death of Cato as the endpoint of Lucan’s poem, noting also that two Scipios fight on opposite sides at Thapsus, near Carthage, highlighting the familial component of *bella…plus quam civilia* (1.1) and bringing back the emphasis on Carthaginian revenge through Roman civil war from 1.38. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. See especially Hardie 1993, 1–18; Hardie 1997. More generally on closure in Classical literature, see Roberts 1997. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Barich 2014, 31; see also Buckley 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. For this general trend and exceptions to it, see Zissos 2006b, 173–182. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Zissos 2006b. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Other surveys of Valerian scholarship include Ehlers 1971–72; Scaffai 1986; Cuypers 2012; Stover 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Zissos 2008: lxvi. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Wagner 1805 and Langen 1896; Mozley 1934. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Zissos 2008: v. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Taylor-Briggs 2014: 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Ehlers 1980; Liberman 1997–2002; Soubiran 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. English (Barich 2009), French (in Liberman’s 1997–2002 edition), German (Dräger 2003), Italian (Caviglia 1999), Polish (Śnieżewski 2004), Portuguese (Gouvêa Júnior 2010), and Spanish (López Moreda 1996; Río Torres-Murciano 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. On the entire poem: Spaltenstein 2002, 2004, 2005. On individual books: book 1 (Kleywegt 2005; Galli 2007; Zissos 2008); 2 (Harper Smith 1987; Poortvliet 1991); 3 (Manuwald 2015); 4 (Korn 1989; Campanini 1996; Murgatroyd 2009); 5 (Wijsman 1996); 6 (Fucecchi 1997, 2006; Wijsman 2000; Baier 2001); 7 (Taliercio 1992; Stadler 1993; Perutelli 1997; Davis 2020); 8 (Lazzarini 2012; Pellucchi 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Zissos 2008: xvii. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. See, respectively, Syme 1929, Getty 1936, and Strand 1972. A recently excavated inscription from Naples has renewed the debate (MacRae 2021, arguing for a Domitianic date, and Stover and Cairns 2022, maintaining a Vespasianic date). [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Ehlers 1991; Stover 2008, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Poortvliet 1991 and Schetter 1959 provide an overview of the issues; see also Hershkowitz 1998b, 6–34 for the abruptness of this ending. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Schetter 1959. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Zissos 2004a, 311. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Penwill 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Following Masters 1992, 251 on Lucan: “Either by coincidence or design, incompleteness (and its symptom, the sudden end) is almost a characteristic of the genre.” [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Hershkowitz 1998b, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Feeney 1991, 313–37. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Hardy 1993; see pp. 83–7 for Valerius. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Hershkowitz 1998b; Stover 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Zissos 1999, 2002, 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2006a, 2006b, 2008 (Introduction), 2009, 2012, 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Hershkowitz 1998b, 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. These include studies of intertextuality and various formal features of epic: Lefèvre 1971 analyzes the dedicatory proem and its relationship with previous epic proems; Gärtner 1994 uses Valerius’ similes as a case study to illustrate the way he plays with his poetic models (see also Blum 2017); Heerink 2014 identifies the variety of ways that Valerius uses ekphrasis to metapoetically situate himself within the literary tradition. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Augoustakis 2016a. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Deremetz 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Hardie 1989, 3–9. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Stover 2010, 649. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Davis 2016 (originally published in 1989). [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Slaney 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Lovatt 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Hershkowitz 1998b, 103–4. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Hershkowitz 1998b, 272. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. E.g., Perutelli 1982. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. See, e.g., Bessone 1991, which argues that it is Valerius’ “exemplary model.” [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Hershkowitz 1998b provides the most influential discussion of Valerius’ push-and-pull relationship with Apollonius (and Virgil). Her conclusion—that although Valerius is telling an Argonautica, he is not (re)producing *the Argonautica*—is supported by a variety of scholars who have produced formal studies identifying the differences between Valerius and Apollonius. See, for example, Adamietz 1970, who enumerates the differences in the portrayals of Jason and Hercules in Valerius, or Perutelli 1994, who situates Valerius’ *Medea* as far more psychologically complex than Apollonius’. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. E.g., Hudson-Williams 1973, Korn 1991. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. E.g., Hershkowitz 1998b, Ganiban 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. In addition to these, scholars have explored Valerius’ links to, e.g., Senecan tragedy (Buckley 2014) and pastoral (Heerink 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Some studies primarily focus on identifying connections between the texts. Garson 1969 surveys Valerius’ appropriation of Homeric material; the study explores specific verbal echoes, repeated episodes, and Valerius’ use of Homeric similes. Homeric intertextuality is a central topic in Fucecchi’s 1996 wide-ranging discussion of the battle narrative in Book 6, although he also mentions Valerius’ relationships with Virgil and Ovid. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Fuà 1988. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Fucecchi 2014, 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Zissos 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Keith 2014b and 2014a. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Blum 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Buckley 2010, 451. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Stover 2012, 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Penwill 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Krasne 2018, 364–5. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Stover 2010, 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Zissos 2004b. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Buckley 2006, 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Clauss 2014, 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Castelletti 2014, 173. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Further discussion of these two approaches can be found in Castelletti 2014, with bibliography. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Adamietz 1976, 37ff. Hull 1979 also offers a strongly optimistic reading; see also Hershkowitz 1998b, 50–7, 105–28. In an earlier work, Adamietz 1970 also compared the portrayals of Jason and Hercules presented in Apollonius and Valerius, arguing that the Latin *Argonautica* rehabilitates Jason while strengthening the bond between the two characters and augmenting the role that Hercules has. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Lüthje 1971, 14–26. See also Lefèvre 1991 and Wacht 1991. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Ripoll 1998; Spaltenstein 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Castelletti 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Zissos 2004a. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Castelletti 2014, 189. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Lovatt 2014, 228. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Buckley 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Frank 1971. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Garson 1963 provides a formal analysis of the episode, considering in particular the way it interacts with Apollonius’ recounting. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Malamud and McGuire 1993. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Heerink 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Heerink 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. On Apollonius’ Medea, Krevelen 1956, 4 argues, “Man kann schwer behaupten, daß die von Apollonios geschilderten Helden sich durch kräftige Eigenschaften auszeichnen. Nur Medea bildet eine lobenswerte Ausnahme.” Glei 2008, 6-15 surveys subsequent and frequently successful scholarly attempts to change this view but, following a comprehensive summary of the debates surrounding Jason (pp. 4-12), notes the impossibility of a similarly comprehensive summary of scholarly responses to Medea (p. 14). [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. For these complexities, see especially Salemme 1993; see also Corrigan 2013 and Buckley 2016, both with bibliography. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Corrigan 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Buckley 2016, 84 argues that Medea’s wedding ceremony, which draws on both Apollonius and Virgil, valorizes “the role of the transgressive female,” while Fucecchi 2014 illustrates the symbolic transition from maiden to goddess that Medea undergoes in books 7 and 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. She is presented, in this sense, as a mirror image of Virgil’s Lavinia in her relationship with her father Aeetes, who is linked to Virgil’s Latinus (Bernstein 2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Corrigan 2013, *contra* Stocks 2016, who presents Medea, a daughter who betrays her father despite her commitment to filial piety, in stark contrast with Hypsipyle, a daughter who rescues her father from certain death. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. Davis 2014, 210. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. Zissos 2004a. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Castelletti 2014. On this point, see Fucecchi 2016: the combination of elegiac and epic elements in depicting the Colchian–Scythian war and the opposing trajectories of Jason and Medea’s psychological states result in a tension between love and war resolved when Medea looks out from the walls and unites them (cf. Lovatt 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. Davis 2014, 210. In a similar vein, von Albrecht 1977 compares Valerius’ Io with her Ovidian predecessor, who serves as a demonstration of Valerius’ aim to free himself from the legacy of his literary models. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. Feeney 1991, 325–8. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Stover 2011. This scene is also discussed by von der Osten 2007. Baldini Moscadi 1999 reads the fear of Valerius’ Medea alongside that of the prophetess Phemonoe in book 5 of Lucan. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. Zissos 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Lovatt 2006, 67–78. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. Perutelli 1994. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. Corrigan 2013, 258. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. For these digital tools, see above, p. 8 n 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. Davis 1990. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. Toohey 1993. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. Taylor 1994-Briggs. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. Bernstein 2008 and Zissos 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Zissos 2003 sees the amphitheater in the *Argonautica* as an allegorical site of self-fashioning for a Roman elite that perceived itself as progressively more marginalized. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. Stover 2016 considers a variety of father–son relationships in the epic, which he argues represent the tensions lying behind Vespasian’s rise to power alongside his sons. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. Stover 2012. Bernhard Söllradl’s *Valerius Flaccus, Vespasian und die Argo*, published too late to be fully considered for this volume, similarly sees a positive appraisal of Vespasian’s reign, but tempered with worries about further civil wars in the future. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. Landrey 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. Bernstein 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. Manuwald 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. Cowan 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. Ferenczi 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. Zissos 2006b. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Buckley 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. For Vegio as a continuator of Virgil, see most recently Gervais 2022b (with bibliography). [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. To borrow Feeney’s phrase (below, p. 111). [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. Barich 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. Zissos 2004c presents the argument that Martial 7.19 is a direct comparison between Valerius’ epic and his own epigram, intended as proof of the latter’s superiority. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. *Satire* 1 (7–11) seems to outright mock Valerius in service of critiquing Flavian epic in general. For a full discussion of Juvenal’s misconceptions and ultimate intentions, see Buckley (2006, 7–11) and Henderson (1995, 110–1). [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. For Statius’ tendency to distance himself from Valerius’ project using allusion to his epic, see Stover 2009; meanwhile, Panoussi 2019 identifies their similarity, pointing out intertextual connections between Hypsipyle’s false rites in both authors and demonstrating their joint concern with the positive aspects of Hypsipyle’s active presentation. Parkes 2014b takes a middle position: Statius, in her analysis, uses intertexts to demonstrate his position as Valerius’ natural successor, at times correcting his narration to assert his own superiority. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. Silius, in Augoustakis’ 2014 interpretation, uses allusion to Valerius as one aspect of his overall mission to create a new national epic and advance Flavian ideology. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. First adduced by Coulson 1986 [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. Gervais 2022a, 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. Zissos 2006b, 165. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. Zissos 2006b, 182. The words are spoken by Mr. Pembroke in chapter 17 of *The Longest Journey*. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. Our use of these two terms follows Dominik 1996b and Whitton 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. Anderson 2009 and 2020, 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. Anderson 2020, 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. The *Super Thebaiden*, an allegoresis of Statius’s *Thebaid* in the style of Fulgentius’ late-antique *Aeneid* commentary and attributed to “S. Fulgencius Episcopus,” was likely written in the mid-twelfth century: Sweeney 1997, 694; Hays 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. Vessey 1973, 86–89 and *passim* and Feeney 1991, 364–76, following Lewis 1936, 49–56. [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. For the source of this confusion, and various laudatory etymologies of the name Surculus, see Anderson 2020, 75–6. [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. Newlands et al. 2015, 6–7. [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. Heslin 2005, xiii–xviii. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. Heslin 2005, xiii-xvii; Newlands 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. Newlands et al. 2015, 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. See, e.g., Vessey 1973, 7 and Fear 2000, 221–2 with bibliography. [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. Kaufmann 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. Dewar 1991b: xxxi. [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. Ahl 1986, 2808, quoting Ogilvie 1980, 292. [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. Jenkyns 2015, 269. This “donnish quip” is quoted with polite amusement by Whitton 2018, 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. E.g., Newlands 2002. Putnam 2017, 2019, 2020, 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. Dominik 1996b. See also Coleman 2003. Readers will also find invaluable help from Harald Anderson’s comprehensive and up-to-date “Bibliography of Statian Studies” at his “Via Stazio” website: <http://viastazio.com/stazio/index.htm>. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. E.g., reviews by Hill 1974 and Schmeling 1975. [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. Vessey 1973, 316 (and pp. 7, 13, 36 on Domitian); cf. Lewis 1936, 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. Other important works of the “pessimist” school include McGuire 1989 and 1997, Garthwaite 1984 and 1989, and Newlands 2002 on “faultlines” in the *Silvae*. [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. Ahl 1986; Dominik 1994. Dominik’s monograph expands a 1989 article; see also various articles on the *Thebaid*’s text, rhetoric, and characterizations (Dominik 1992, 1994a, 1996a, 1997) and his monograph analysing the *Thebaid*’s speeches, published in the same year as *The Mythic Voice of Statius* (Dominik 1994c). [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. The argument was introduced by Ahl 1984a and 1984b. [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. E.g., Hershkowitz 1998a; Ganiban 2007; McNelis 2007; Coffee 2009b. [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. Henderson 1991; 1993; 1998, 212–52. [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. See, e.g., Hardie 1990; Zeitlin 1990; Janan 2009; and especially Braund 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. Henderson 1993, 188. [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
210. Hershkowitz 1998a, 247–301 (revising Hershkowitz 1994 and 1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
211. Hershkowitz 1998a, 270. [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
212. Hershkowitz 1998a, 297. [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
213. Braund 1996. [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
214. See also brief discussion in Dewar 1992, 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
215. Ripoll 1998; Taisne 1994; and dissertations by Georgacopoulou 1994 and Morzadec 1995, published as monographs in Georgacopoulou 2005 and Morzadec 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
216. Delarue 2000; Franchet d’Espérey 2000. [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
217. Hardie 1993, 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-217)
218. Other important readings of the *Thebaid* and its literary heritage include Brown 1994 (a dissertation that unfortunately remains unpublished), Dietrich 1999, Hershkowitz 1997, and Nugent 1996. [↑](#footnote-ref-218)
219. Hardie 1993. [↑](#footnote-ref-219)
220. Hardie 1993, xi. [↑](#footnote-ref-220)
221. Hinds 1998; Williams 1978. [↑](#footnote-ref-221)
222. Malamud 1995. [↑](#footnote-ref-222)
223. Hinds 1998, 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-223)
224. Feeney 1991, 393. [↑](#footnote-ref-224)
225. Feeney 1991, 340. [↑](#footnote-ref-225)
226. Lewis 1936. [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
227. Feeney 1991, 390. [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
228. Jupiter’s abdication of responsibility in the finale is important to many readings of the poem; see especially a nuanced reading by Bernstein 2004. [↑](#footnote-ref-228)
229. Heuvel 1932 and Caviglia 1973 (book 1), Mulder 1954 (book 2), Snijder 1968 (book 3), Fortgens 1934 (book 6.1–295), Williams 1972 (book 10), Venini 1970 (book 11). [↑](#footnote-ref-229)
230. Smolenaars 1994; Dewar 1991b. [↑](#footnote-ref-230)
231. Delarue et al. 1996. [↑](#footnote-ref-231)
232. Nauta et al. 2006, Smolenaars et al. 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-232)
233. *Thebaid* 12, Pollmann 2004. *Thebaid* 4, Micozzi 2007b, Parkes 2003, Steiniger 2005 (the first two subsequently expanded into commentaries on the entire book). See also Pavan 2009 on *Thebaid* 6.238–549. [↑](#footnote-ref-233)
234. Joyce 2008 and Ross 2004 in English (both improving on Melville 1992); Micozzi 2010 in Italian; Rupprecht 2000 in German. [↑](#footnote-ref-234)
235. Bernstein 2004; Casali 2003; Chinn 2010; Dominik 2003; Hulls 2006; Jamset 2004; discussions in Keith 2000 (esp. 57–63, 95–100); Leigh 2006; Markus 2003; Newlands 2004, 2009; O’Gorman 2005; Pagán 2000; Parkes 2005a, 2009b, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-235)
236. Keith 2002, 2004–05, 2007; Braund 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-236)
237. Bernstein 2008; Coffee 2009a; Augoustakis 2010b. [↑](#footnote-ref-237)
238. Bernstein 2008, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-238)
239. See also Bernstein 2003 and 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-239)
240. Coffee 2009a, 225. See also Coffee 2006 and 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-240)
241. Augoustakis 2010b, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-241)
242. Lovatt 2005; Ganiban 2007; McNelis 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-242)
243. Ganiban 2007, 232. [↑](#footnote-ref-243)
244. For similar intertextual confusion in the portrayal of Statius’ Tydeus, see Gervais 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-244)
245. Nelis 2001. [↑](#footnote-ref-245)
246. McNelis 2007, 22–3; see further Gervais 2021, 11–20. [↑](#footnote-ref-246)
247. Superseding earlier twentieth-century editions: Garrod’s *OCT* (1906, with a second edition in 1926) and Klotz’s Teubner (1908, updated by Klinnert in 1973). [↑](#footnote-ref-247)
248. Hill 1983, ix. [↑](#footnote-ref-248)
249. Lesueur 1990, 1.lxviii. [↑](#footnote-ref-249)
250. Cf. Dewar 1991a. This may be no coincidence, if stemmatic and eclectic textual criticism may be mapped onto optimistic and pessimistic reading strategies (although we hesitate to push the analogy). [↑](#footnote-ref-250)
251. Dewar 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-251)
252. Hill 2005, 552; similar criticism in Asso 2004. [↑](#footnote-ref-252)
253. Gervais disagreed with 13 of Shackleton Bailey’s 23 printed conjectures in his text of *Thebaid* 2 (Gervais 2017b). [↑](#footnote-ref-253)
254. Hall, Ritchie, and Edwards 2007–08. [↑](#footnote-ref-254)
255. Hall, Ritchie, and Edwards 2007, 1.viii. [↑](#footnote-ref-255)
256. Hall, Ritchie, and Edwards 2007, 2.vii–viii. [↑](#footnote-ref-256)
257. Gervais 2017b, xxi–xxii. [↑](#footnote-ref-257)
258. Shackleton Bailey’s stripped-down *apparatus criticus* employs only the *sigla* P, ω, and ϛ[##stigma, not sigma] (referring to *codices recentiores*). [↑](#footnote-ref-258)
259. Anderson 2009, 1.xv–xvi. [↑](#footnote-ref-259)
260. Augoustakis 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-260)
261. Dalton 2020; Gervais 2017a; Putnam 2016. See also Agri 2020; Bennardo 2017; Chinn 2011; De Gussem 2016; Gervais 2015; Kozak 2020; Lovatt 2018; Parkes 2011b, 2014a; Spinelli 2019, 2021; Voigt 2016; and sections on Statius in important monographs by Chaudhuri 2014, Lovatt 2013, McAuley 2016, and McClellan 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-261)
262. Hulls 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-262)
263. Bernardo 2010–11; Colacicco 2012–13; Manasseh 2017; Martinez Zepeda 2017–18; Mottram 2012; Soerink 2014a. [↑](#footnote-ref-263)
264. Briguglio 2017, 2020; Gervais 2017b; Micozzi 2019; Parkes 2012; Augoustakis 2016b. [↑](#footnote-ref-264)
265. Gervais 2017b, xxviii n. 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-265)
266. Parkes 2012, xxv n. 38–9 surveys previous discussions of the epic’ structure. [↑](#footnote-ref-266)
267. Korneeva 2011; Simms 2019; Tomcik 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-267)
268. Vessey 1973, 7–14 and 1986, building on Curtius 1948 and various discussions in German scholarship on Statius and other Latin literature (see Dominik 1996b: 135–6 n. 61) [↑](#footnote-ref-268)
269. E.g., Dewar 1991, xxxi–xxxiv. [↑](#footnote-ref-269)
270. Sacerdoti 2012, 16. See also Sacerdoti 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-270)
271. Lagière 2017; cf. Leigh 2006, who acknowledges a debt to Delarue 2000 (see Leigh n. 1). [↑](#footnote-ref-271)
272. Bessone 2011, revising Bessone 2006, 2008a, 2008b, 2009, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-272)
273. Bessone 2011, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-273)
274. Rebeggiani 2018, ix. [↑](#footnote-ref-274)
275. Rebeggiani 2018, 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-275)
276. Manioti 2016b; Augoustakis, Buckley, and Stocks 2019; Augoustakis 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-276)
277. Manioti 2016a. [↑](#footnote-ref-277)
278. Newlands 2016, 143. [↑](#footnote-ref-278)
279. Augoustakis 2019; Keith 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-279)
280. See Ganiban 2007 on *pietas* in the *Thebaid*. Gervais 2021b is a recent attempt to shift the focus towards *fides*, specifically Aeneas’, in Virgil’s epic. [↑](#footnote-ref-280)
281. Augoustakis 2014; Papaioannou and Marinis 2021; Coffee, Forstall, Galli Milić, and Nelis 2015 and 2020; Manuwald and Voigt 2013; Ginsberg and Krasne 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-281)
282. Gervais 2021a; Hulls 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-282)
283. Augoustakis 2021; Soerink 2014b. [↑](#footnote-ref-283)
284. Parkes 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-284)
285. Cowan 2021; Marinis 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-285)
286. Bessone 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-286)
287. Dewar 2020; Voigt 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-287)
288. Lovatt 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-288)
289. Gervais 2017b: xxxv, following Micozzi 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-289)
290. Micozzi 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-290)
291. Marks 2013; Hulls 2013; Soerink 2013. Lovatt 2010 is an important predecessor to these chapters. Her provocatively reader-centered approach underscores the challenges and possibilities offered by exploring Silio-Statian intertextuality: in deciding the direction or nature of a particular verbal echo, “we should look for readings which offer the most interesting story” (158). [↑](#footnote-ref-291)
292. Stover 2019; van der Schuur 2019; Bessone 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-292)
293. Anderson 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-293)
294. Berlincourt 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-294)
295. Comparetti 1872 and Wilson-Okamura 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-295)
296. Gervais 2013; Noen 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-296)
297. Anderson 2020, 83–5. [↑](#footnote-ref-297)
298. Cf. Heslin 2005, xiii. [↑](#footnote-ref-298)
299. Anderson 2020, 67–8; cf. Anderson 2009, 1.XIII; Hall et al. 2007–08, 3.207–8. [↑](#footnote-ref-299)
300. Coleman 2003, 24. See also Mendelson 1999, 295 with bibliography, who also offers an early and sensitive reading of the poem through the lens of gender. [↑](#footnote-ref-300)
301. Hinds 1997, 199 = 1998, 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-301)
302. Aricò 1986 and the introduction to Méheust 1971 are notable exceptions. [↑](#footnote-ref-302)
303. A subversive reading was attempted by Benker 1987, but cf. Dewar 1988. Konstan 2016 is more cautious and successful. [↑](#footnote-ref-303)
304. Konstan 1997, 84–6. [↑](#footnote-ref-304)
305. Fantham 1999 and 2003b. [↑](#footnote-ref-305)
306. Hinds 1997, 199 = 1998, 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-306)
307. Hinds 1997 = 1998, 123–44, 2000; Rosati 1994, 5–61 = 1992. [↑](#footnote-ref-307)
308. Dewar 2000, 302, whose review insightfully demonstrates how Slavitt’s translation “tends to trivialize [Statius] and over-interpret [Claudian]…. committing both of the sins most common in contemporary criticism of classical literature.” [↑](#footnote-ref-308)
309. As noted by Heslin 1998. [↑](#footnote-ref-309)
310. There is a Teubner by Marastoni (1974), a Budé by Méheust (1971), and a CUP edition with commentary by Dilke (1954, reissued in 2005). The OCT by Garrod (1906) is now out of date. Translations include a German version by Rupprecht (1984) and an Italian translation of Statius’ *opera* by Traglia and Aricò (1980). The only reliable English translations of the twentieth century was Mozley’s 1928 Loeb edition. [↑](#footnote-ref-310)
311. Dilke 2005, with a new introduction by Robert Cowan. [↑](#footnote-ref-311)
312. Ripoll and Soubiran 2008; Uccellini 2012; Nuzzo 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-312)
313. Shackleton Bailey 2003, 2.7–8. [↑](#footnote-ref-313)
314. Dilke 1954 and Méheust 1971 argue for a P and Ω branch with contamination between the two; Marastoni 1974 argues that P is the ancestor (through a lost intermediate) of the other six manuscripts. [↑](#footnote-ref-314)
315. Reeve 1983b, 397. [↑](#footnote-ref-315)
316. Anglophone readers, who must still rely on Dilke’s old philological commentary, eagerly await the new commentary that has been announced by Charles McNelis. [↑](#footnote-ref-316)
317. Heslin 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-317)
318. This thesis was picked up by Ganiban 2015 and McAuley 2016, and partly rejected by McNelis 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-318)
319. Heslin 2005, 66. We may compare Jamie Masters’ argument that Lucan’s poem is deliberately incomplete (see above, §2.4); for the *Achilleid* as “a down payment against future patronage,” Heslin (p. 66) compares Barchiesi’s similar argument about Ovid’s *Fasti* (1997, 259–62) [↑](#footnote-ref-319)
320. Chinn 2013; Micozzi 2007a; Sanna 2007. See also Davis 2006. Chinn 2015 is Ovidian in its exploration of complex visuality. [↑](#footnote-ref-320)
321. Econimo 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-321)
322. Fantuzzi 2012; see also Fantuzzi 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-322)
323. McNelis 2015, 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-323)
324. Fantham 2011, reprinting Fantham 1979. [↑](#footnote-ref-324)
325. Kozák 2016; Myers 2015, 180 n. 3, citing Hinds 1998, 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-325)
326. Keith 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-326)
327. Parkes 2009a; Perutelli 2006; Ripoll 2014, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-327)
328. Sfyroeras 2014; Taisne 2008. As Sfyroeras notes, Statius himself may have deterred work on Homeric intertextuality by promising to work around and fill in the gaps of the Iliadic Achilles (*Ach.* 1.3–7). [↑](#footnote-ref-328)
329. Kozák 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-329)
330. Ripoll 2019, echoing a similar reading of the divine council in *Theb.* 1 by Dominik 1994a: 161–4. [↑](#footnote-ref-330)
331. Barchiesi 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-331)
332. Bessone 2016. See also Bessone 2020b, and a similarly extensive intertextual study focused on vision (2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-332)
333. McCauley 2010. An important recent volume on ancient cross-dressing and transgender dynamics has a chapter on Achilles’ Scyros myth (Guidetti 2019), but this does not mention the *Achilleid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-333)
334. Delarue 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-334)
335. Parkes 2008; Bernstein 2008; Craig 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-335)
336. Augoustakis 2015–16; Feeney 2004; Moul 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-336)
337. Parkes2005b, 2014–15; Heslin 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-337)
338. Anderson 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-338)
339. Anderson 2020, 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-339)
340. Parkes 2011a. [↑](#footnote-ref-340)
341. Martindale 1993 uses a fusion of Jaussian reception studies and Derridean deconstruction to challenge the value of the Classical canon while at the same time arguing for the necessity of a canon of some sort. Hinds 1998 shows that allusion and intertextuality are tools Latin poets use to construct a literary tradition and compete for places in it, in the process arguing that scholars should not so readily trust what ancient authors tell us about their own literary traditions. [↑](#footnote-ref-341)
342. Bassett 1953, 1955, 1959, 1963; von Albrecht 1964; Ahl, Davis, and Pomeroy 1986. [↑](#footnote-ref-342)
343. After breaking such new ground with his monograph, Marks has continued to publish influential chapters and articles, most notably on the intertextuality of the *Punica* with earlier imperial poetry. See especially Marks 2010, Marks 2013, Marks 2014, and Marks 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-343)
344. On the “synecdochic hero,” see also Hardie 1993. [↑](#footnote-ref-344)
345. Tipping 2010, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-345)
346. Tipping 2010, 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-346)
347. Tipping 2010, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-347)
348. Cowan 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-348)
349. There are a few who still bemoan the rise of the so-called companion industry (e.g. Rengakos’ 2012 *BMCRev* review of the *Homer Encyclopedia*, “Although in recent years the blossoming Companion-Industry (to which the present reviewer has, unfortunately, contributed) is falling more and more to disrepute”), but for the most part we believe the rise of companions and handbooks has been a benefit to the discipline. [↑](#footnote-ref-349)
350. The official copyright date is 2010, but the volume appeared early enough that it is occasionally listed as 2009 after the Library of Congress call number. [↑](#footnote-ref-350)
351. Tipping 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-351)
352. Bernstein 2008; Bernstein 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-352)
353. Marks 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-353)
354. Klaassen 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-354)
355. See also the related argument in Cowan 2010 that different outcomes in the civil wars would not have been very different at all. [↑](#footnote-ref-355)
356. Anderson 1991, 199–203. For a use of the idea in relation to Roman epic, see Pogorzelski 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-356)
357. For a full bibliography of scholarship on Silian intertextuality, see Dominik 2010, 441–442. Dominik’s bibliography is organized by source—our notes below are organized more thematically. [↑](#footnote-ref-357)
358. In addition to Spaltenstein’s commentary on the entire poem in two volumes (1986 and 1990), there are now commentaries on books 2 (Bernstein 2017), 7 (Littlewood 2011), 9 (Bernstein 2022), and 10 (Littlewood 2017). Much work in this area remains to be done. Recent monographs and volumes integrating Flavian epics include, for example, Bernstein 2008, Augoustakis 2010b, Augoustakis 2013, and Augoustakis 2016a. [↑](#footnote-ref-358)
359. Tipping 2010, 1–7. Ahl, Davis, and Pomeroy 1986 also focus on this trilogy. [↑](#footnote-ref-359)
360. On the likely mutual influence with Statius’ *Thebaid*, see Lovatt 2010. On the chronology of Poggio’s discovery and Petrarch’s *Africa*, see Muecke 2010, 402–403. [↑](#footnote-ref-360)
361. Gibson 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-361)
362. Von Albrecht 1999, 316. Von Albrecht attributes the idea to Marks. [↑](#footnote-ref-362)
363. Tipping 2010, 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-363)
364. Von Albrecht 1964, 177; Vessey 1974, 128. See also Klaassen 2010, 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-364)
365. Klaassen 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-365)
366. Klaassen 2010, 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-366)
367. Cowan 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-367)
368. Klaassen 2010. See also Ganniban 2010, 97–98. [↑](#footnote-ref-368)
369. An interesting twist on this strategy is Gordon Williams’ 1978 argument that modern attempts to redeem “silver” Latin are misguided, as is demonstrated by the fact that the Latin poets of the imperial period insisted themselves that their poetry did not measure up to that of the Augustan period. Hinds 1998 makes the case that we should not trust ancient narratives of literary decline any more than we should trust assertions by poets that their work is the apex of a tradition. On “interpretive communities,” see especially Fish (1982). [↑](#footnote-ref-369)
370. See above, 2.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-370)
371. See Dominik 2009, 431–432 on the influence of Pliny on subsequent judgments. Notable in Dominik’s survey are Newman 1986, 230–232 responding that Silius does indeed possess *ingenium*, Matier 1988 arguing that Pliny is being malicious, and Browne 1853, 438–439; Duff 1927, 454; and Laidlaw 1951, 142 citing Pliny as evidence for their own, similar views. [↑](#footnote-ref-371)
372. Feeney 1991, 251n.4. [↑](#footnote-ref-372)
373. Bernstein 2017, xiv. [↑](#footnote-ref-373)
374. See especially Peirano Garrison 2019, 88–132. [↑](#footnote-ref-374)
375. Martial 4.14, 6.64, 7.63, 8.66, 9.86, 11.48, and 11.50. For the history of the manuscripts and the sparse evidence for the medieval reception of the poem, see Bassett 1976 and Reeve 1983a. [↑](#footnote-ref-375)
376. Reeve 1983a, 389. [↑](#footnote-ref-376)
377. On the possibility, see Clark 1899. For the arguments against it, see Reeve 1983a, 390. [↑](#footnote-ref-377)
378. Muecke 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-378)
379. On the early editions of the *Punica*, see von Albrecht 1997, 969 and Muecke 2010. Muecke’s and Dunston’s edition of Calderini’s unpublished commentary is Muecke 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-379)
380. On the role of “the judgment of taste” in twentieth-century scholarship on Latin literature, see Martindale 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-380)
381. Muecke 2010, 421 (translation is Muecke’s). [↑](#footnote-ref-381)
382. Quoted in Bassett 1953, 155–56. [↑](#footnote-ref-382)
383. Bassett 1953, 156. [↑](#footnote-ref-383)
384. Bassett 1953, 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-384)
385. Paleit 2013. See also the chapter on Lucan above. Certainly Elyot seems to have thought that Silius was as vital for contemporary politics as Lucan was, but his passing note does not have the depth of contemporary authors’ engagements with Lucan. It would not be possible to find enough material for a monograph on Silius in the style of Paleit’s on Lucan. [↑](#footnote-ref-385)
386. Conte 1994, 495. [↑](#footnote-ref-386)
387. Saunders 2012 contains no reference to Silius, although this may be partially a result of the preferences of twenty-first century scholars as well as of Romantic tastes. [↑](#footnote-ref-387)
388. Dominik 2010, 427 contains a catalogue of examples of nineteenth-century scholarship broken down into the categories of “philology, textual criticism, *Quellenforschung*, literary devices, and the dates of the *Punica*’s composition.” [↑](#footnote-ref-388)
389. Blass 1867. [↑](#footnote-ref-389)
390. On the speculation of a tradition independent of Poggio’s discovery see Clark 1899, Reeve 1983a, 390. [↑](#footnote-ref-390)
391. Heitland 1896. Goold 1956 provides a plausible explanation. [↑](#footnote-ref-391)
392. Delz 1987 lxiv–lxvii; Reeve 1989, 216. See also Dominik 2010, 427. [↑](#footnote-ref-392)
393. Butler 1909, 236. [↑](#footnote-ref-393)
394. Delz 1987, v. [↑](#footnote-ref-394)
395. A similar point could be made about translations into French, German, and Italian. Dominik 2009, 428 includes a survey, noting “in French those of Nisard (1878) and Devallet, Martin, Miniconi, and Volpilhac-Lenthéric (1979–92); in Italian that of Occione (1889) and Vinchesi (2001), and in German that of Bothe (1855–57).” [↑](#footnote-ref-395)
396. Dominik 2010, 431–440 contains a thorough survey, notable not only for its comprehensive bibliography but also for its embodiment of the approach deploring the lack of positive interest in and judgments of the *Punica*. [↑](#footnote-ref-396)
397. Feeney 1991, 251. [↑](#footnote-ref-397)
398. Tipping 2010, 1 (emphasis in original). [↑](#footnote-ref-398)
399. Conte 1994, 495; Feeney 1991, 251; Bassett 1953, 155; Tipping 2010, 1; Dominik 2010, 426; Bernstein 2017, xiv. [↑](#footnote-ref-399)
400. Farrell 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-400)
401. Muecke 2010, 402–403. [↑](#footnote-ref-401)
402. Dominik 2010, 436. [↑](#footnote-ref-402)
403. Klaassen 2010; Cowan 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-403)