Prudentius at Large: Quantifying the Influence of Latin Epic on the *Psychomachia*

Prudentius' *Psychomachia* is one of the more puzzling literary artifacts left to us from antiquity. One author calls his work "a lonely and cryptic monument at the crossroads of history," distinctly Christian, but entirely unlike the trends that would prevail in Christian literature (Malamud, 1989). Scholars have examined contemporaneous sources for the *Psychomachia*, but none offer a satisfactory explanation of the poem (Hanna, 1977). Unlike so many church fathers, Prudentius suffered no qualms about appropriating classical Latin poetic forms (Thompson, 1949); the Psychomachia is steeped in complex allusions to Vergil, Lucan, and Statius.

The influence of Statius' *Thebaid* on the *Psychomachia* has been argued often in scholarship, but never quantitatively shown. This paper provides a new analysis of ancient influence on the *Psychomachia* by using an advanced feature of the Tesserae Project called "batch-multi," developed during the summer of 2016 by the author of this paper and James Gawley. This feature measures not just of how much Prudentius reuses Statius' language, but how much he reuses language unique to Statius. This allows for a more accurate measurement of authorial engagement by eliminated shared language that may originate in earlier sources. Previous work has demonstrated the efficacy of using unique intertextual connections as a measurement of relative literary engagement and the ability of Tesserae to scale from small textual comparisons to big data.

My results indicate that the *Psychomachia* engages with the *Thebaid* significantly more than with other works of Latin epic, and more than twice as much as with the *Aeneid*. This trend demonstrates the arguments of scholars that Prudentius utilizes Statius' technique of personifying abstractions, carrying it to the extreme of sustained allegory where only personified

abstractions remain as characters (Burton, 1989). Quantitative data also allows for a more comprehensive analysis of how classical patterns of Latin epic shape Prudentius' narratives. I argue that Prudentius' attention to the development of the Latin epic tradition, rather than to its roots, testifies to an age where pagan literature was considered the inheritance of Christian Rome, and a new faith uncomfortably wed classical form.

Bibliography

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