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## UNIUS AMISSI LEONIS: TAMING THE LION AND CAESAR'S TEARS (*SILVAE* 2.5)

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He doesn't like being tied down . . . Only you mustn't  
press him. He is wild, you know. Not like a tame lion.

C. S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia*

Of all seven poems in the second book of Statius's *Silvae*, as the poet admits in a preface to his addressee Atedius Melior, the fifth poem is the only piece that he claims to have composed on the spot, hastily at the arena, and presented to the emperor himself (cf. *Silvae praef.* 2.16–18). The occasion for the poem is the pathetic death of a wild and yet domesticated animal, the circumstance of the sorrowful event, and Domitian's immediate reaction. As has been observed, the poem's consolatory content befits the general tone of the second book, in which *consolationes*, *epicedia*, and even a *genethliacon*, are prominent (Bright 1980.48). More specifically, the death of the lion follows the pattern of the preceding poem, 2.4, on the death of Melior's parrot, and is accompanied by a consolation on the death of Flavius Ursus's *puer delicatus*.<sup>1</sup> In many respects this composition is unique in Book 2, not only because of its theme, the death of a tame lion, but also because of its direct connection with the emperor. In addition, beyond expectation, Statius

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1 Cancik 1965.19 and 1971.78 observes the tight connection between the three central poems of the book (2.3, 2.4, 2.5). Vessey evades any discussion of what he calls the “tragicall historie” of the *leo mansuetus* (1986.2784), following a tradition that had begun with Nisard's negative assessment of the poem (cf. Slater 1908.21: “Puisque César ne veut pas que tu le flattes, eh bien! flatte son lion”). It is interesting that the lion poem is surrounded by a poem on a dead parrot and a consolation to Flavius Ursus, whose name points to the animal kingdom as well.

unconventionally addresses his *consolatio* not to the living but to the dead, the conquered lion, who can at least be satisfied with his virtuous finale in the arena (Newmyer 1979.74).

Recent readings of the second book and the *Silvae* in general have focused on the interaction between nature and culture, poetics and empire. In her analysis of poem 2.2 on Pollius's villa, Carole Newlands discusses the role of human control over nature and concludes that "domination of nature is a trope that provides different perspectives upon the nature of power—the power of a friend to fashion his own territorial and spiritual boundaries, the power of an emperor to transgress human and natural boundaries, and the power of the poet to shape and contain both within the reflective limits of his own verse" (Newlands 2002.198). Building on Newlands' idea of a new, Flavian cultural identity that renegotiates issues such as the power of humans over nature and the power of nature in response,<sup>2</sup> I examine various cultural aspects of *Silvae* 2.5. The following analysis showcases how Statius's poem on the death of the tame lion addresses the problematic aspects of the domesticated and acculturated natural world and, by extension, the impact of imperial politics on various social strata. The scene of the lion's death reveals a human-like society of lions who form a group within the amphitheater. The hidden power of the ostensibly domesticated lion gives to the animal an impetus to strike back and display its brutality, laying bare the futility of its acculturation.<sup>3</sup> The poem's tension between the wild and the domesticated, the barbarian and the civilized, can be associated with contemporary issues involving the behavior of the German tribes recently conquered by Domitian.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, allusions direct the reader to the mythological world of the poet's own epic endeavor and its preoccupation with the problematics of civil war. Thus the conflict between nature and humans is transformed into a reflection on civil war, as the *Silvae* become implicated in a continuous rewriting of the *Thebaid*.

Let us turn our attention to 2.5. Despite the lion's apparent domesticity, its unexpected and sorrowful death displays a courage and *virtus* uncharacteristic of tame "pets."<sup>5</sup> The lion resists the artificiality of his own

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2 Cf. Newlands 2002.191: "Statius offers here [in *Silvae* 2.2] a new vision of cultural identity that is shaped by the uncertainty of political life in the Flavian era . . ."

3 Pace Pavlovskis 1973.9, who maintains: "Like some Stoic, the lion in life and death fulfills his duty toward man."

4 For the Chattan wars, see Jones 1992.128–31 and 150.

5 On the role of animals in the circus and the amphitheater in general and in literature contemporary to the *Silvae*, see Vollmer 1898.362–63, Van Dam 1984.369–71, and Toynbee

domesticity and fights back against the fleeing enemy. It is precisely this behavior that touches Caesar's heart—and that makes the poem's message ambiguous for the informed reader. Statius's apostrophe to the lion at the beginning of the poem points to the futility of enforced domestication. The poet poignantly addresses the lion with questions that set the composition into motion but, at the same time, disrupt the expected order of a *consolatio* (2.5.1–7):<sup>6</sup>

Quid tibi constrata<sup>7</sup> mansuescere profuit ira,  
quid scelus humanasque animo dediscere caedes  
imperiumque pati et domino parere minori?  
quid, quod abire domo rursusque in claustra reverti  
suetus et a capta iam sponte recedere praeda  
insertasque manus laxo dimittere morsu?  
occidis, altorum uastator docte ferarum.

What has it availed you to smooth your rage and grow tame? To unlearn crime and human slaughter, to suffer command and obey a lesser master? To have grown used to leave your home and return again to prison, to retire of your own will from prey already captured, to loosen your jaws and let go the hand inside? You are slain, educated ravager of tall beasts.

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1996.61–69. The reader may also consult Cicero's description of a spectacle with elephants and their sorrowful death in the arena (*Fam.* 7.1.3; also suggested as a parallel by Poliziano [Cesarini Martinelli 1978.483]). In particular, in Martial, we find several poems with the same theme (e.g., 1.14, 1.22, 1.104; see Howell's commentary *ad locos*). For an examination of the similarities between *Silvae* 2.5 and *Ep.* 1.104, see Cabrilla Leal 1995.162–64.

6 I have used Courtney's OCT edition of the *Silvae* and Shackleton Bailey's recent Loeb translation. All quotations and translations of the *Thebaid* and the *Achilleid* come from Shackleton Bailey's Loeb edition; for Seneca's *Ep.* I have used Reynolds' OCT edition (and my translation), whereas Tacitus's text and translation come from Benario's edition. For Lucan I have used Shackleton Bailey's Teubner text and Braund's translation.

7 Courtney and Shackleton Bailey read *constrata* instead of the commonly accepted *monstrata* (i.e., *naturā*) (cf. Vollmer 1898, Frère 2003, Marastoni 1970, Cancik 1971); Frassinetti 1988.45–46 reads *monstratam*; Delz 1992.245–46, unsatisfied by either suggestion, submits *mutata*. Van Dam 1984.372–74 recognizes the difficulty of the passage and the unsatisfactory attempts to explain *monstrata*. I believe *constrata* (OLD s.v. *consterno* 3) suits the context of the lion's submissiveness and efforts towards tameness, all of which are cancelled in the death scene.

This poem's opening surprises the reader with a mixed *laudatio* and *lamentatio* that, in turn, gives way to the *descriptio mortis* (Van Dam 1984.369). The domestication of wild beasts (not an uncommon phenomenon in the first century C.E.) was involved in broader literary discourses with philosophical underpinnings. Seneca, in his discussion of the search for an inner god (*Ep.* 41), maintains that external traits, *praeter naturam*, add nothing to one's true self. According to this premise, the taming of lions is viewed as a plain violation of nature itself (Seneca *Ep.* 41.6):

non faciunt meliorem equum aurei freni. Aliter leo aurata  
iuba mittitur, dum contractatur et ad patientiam recipiendi  
ornamenti cogitur fatigatus, aliter incultus, integri spiritus:  
hic scilicet impetu acer, qualem illum natura esse voluit,  
speciosus ex horrido, cuius hic decor est, non sine timore  
aspici, praefertur illi languido et breatheato.

Golden reins do not make a better horse. The lion with a gilded mane, while it is being trained and forced by fatigue to endure the decoration, is sent [into the arena] in a different way from the wild lion whose spirit is sound; the latter, of course, bold in his attack as nature wished him to be, impressive on account of his savage appearance, whose glory it is not to be looked at without fear, is favored over the other lion, languid and gilded.

In *Silvae* 2.5, but in a different manner, Statius explores the same question of imposing human culture on nature when he ironically examines the advantages of the lion's submissiveness, as the line "imperium patique et domino parere minori" reveals (2.5.3).<sup>8</sup> The lion's human skills and gentleness apparently have not helped at all when he is exposed to the merciless sand of the arena. How profitable is it to *pati imperium*, when the lion is ultimately killed by another *fera* (*victus fugiente fera*, 2.5.11)?

As Statius questions the benefits of the lion's *mansuetudo* ("docility")—as opposed to the hypothetical outcome had he remained in his natural

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8 David Bright considers (1980.48) the fifth poem in conjunction with poems 2.3 and 2.4 to point out that Melior's tree and dead parrot point to a process of anthropomorphism, since human characteristics are assigned to a lower order of nature, in a sense exposing an inversion of the natural order.

savage state—the reader’s attention is called to the infinitive *mansuescere* in the opening line, a verb repeated from the *praefatio* of the book (*leo mansuetus*).<sup>9</sup> The lion’s tameness and submissiveness to the rules of *imperium* come in sharp contrast to the expected behavior of such wild animals. The verb *mansuescere* is often used to describe a Roman character trait and denotes mildness and clemency (*OLD* s.v. *mansuesco* 2 and s.v. *mansuetudo* 2).<sup>10</sup> By becoming tame, the lion is also transformed from non-Roman into Roman. What is more, the occasional correlation of the word *mansuetudo* with *clementia* closely associates the lion’s submissiveness and tameness with the ideal royal virtue of *clementia*, claimed by Roman leaders and Domitian himself.<sup>11</sup>

The lion’s apparent *mansuetudo* moves Caesar and turns its death into an occasion worthy to be commemorated in verse. It is also useful, however, to compare the lion’s tolerance of *mansuetudo* with the recalcitrance of the German tribe of the Chatti, as recounted by Tacitus in his *Germania*, a text almost contemporary with Statius’s *Silvae* 2. Having described the daring nature of this ethnic group, Tacitus correlates their rough, animal-like appearance (*squalor*) with their successful killing of their enemies. They are wont to cutting their hair only at the very moment they have slain the enemy: *revelant frontem*. Then Tacitus adds the following (*Germania* 31):

fortissimus quisque ferreum insuper anulum (ignominiosum id genti) velut vinculum gestat, donec se caede hostis absolvat. plurimis Chattorum hic placet habitus, iamque canent insignes et hostibus simul suisque monstrati.

9 See *Silvae praef.* 2.16–18. The *titulus* of the poem is probably not Statius’s own; cf. Coleman 1988.xxviii–xxxii.

10 Caesar uses the phrase *sua clementia ac mansuetudine* twice in the *de bello Gallico* (2.14.5 and 2.31.4), whereby *mansuetudo* constitutes the trait of a good Roman leader. Similarly, Tacitus uses the noun to describe one of Germanicus’s qualities when dealing with enemies (*mansuetudo in hostis*, 2.72). Likewise, Cicero refers to Marcellus’s behavior in Syracuse as a *monumentum mansuetudinis*, “a token of his mildness” (in *Verrem* 2.2.4). In Silius’s *Punica*, during the battle at Zama, Hannibal declines to let his *corda mansuescere*, “his heart grow soft” (17.463). Finally, the only other occurrence of the word in Statius’s *Silvae* concerns nature’s yielding to Pollius’s enterprises in his new villa (“... hic uicta colenti / cessit et ignotos docilis mansuevit in usus,” “. . . in others she has been overcome and yielded to the developer, letting herself be taught new and gentler ways,” 2.2.52–53).

11 Cf. Martial *Ep.* 1.104.21–22, where the tameness of animals, more specifically of lions, is called *clementia*: “haec clementia non paratur arte, / sed norunt cui servant leones.” For Domitian’s claims of *clementia* and *lenitas*, see Suetonius *Dom.* 11.

omnium penes hos initia pugnarum; haec prima semper acies, visu nova; nam ne in pace quidem vultu mitiore *mansuescunt*. nulli domus aut ager aut aliqua cura; prout ad quemque venere aluntur, prodigi alieni, contemptores sui, donec exsanguis senectus tam durae virtuti impares faciat.

In addition, all the bravest men wear an iron ring (which is a mark of disgrace for the race) as a bond until they may release themselves from it by the slaughter of an enemy. This fashion pleases very many of the Chatti, and they grow old marked out in this way, conspicuous both to the enemy and their own people. The beginning of all battles rests with them; they are always the first line of battle and make a startling sight; for not even in peace do they relax with a gentler face. No one has a home or field or any occupation: they are fed by whomever they visit, and they are extravagant with another's property, scornful of their own, until feeble old age renders them unequal to such hardy bravery.

The Chatti had always been a dangerous enemy for the Romans. Most interestingly, because of Domitian's attempt to defeat the Chatti on two occasions, in 83 (for which he gained the title *Germanicus*) and in 89 C.E., the allusion to the Chatti here must have resonated with the audience of *Silvae* 2.5.<sup>12</sup> Tacitus uses the word *mansuescere* in the context of *imperium pati* with regard to revealing one's face only after defeating the enemy (to be sure, there is something to be said about Tacitus's perception of such a lifestyle as *virtus*).<sup>13</sup> In relation to our passage in the *Silvae*, however, we may discern a parallel between the lion's behavior and that of the human warriors. Statius uses a dramatic incident in the amphitheater to touch on issues similar to those that concern the *Germania*, and with similar language. It is not coincidental that the lion is personified as and assimilated

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12 See also Van Dam 1984.371–72 for the possibility that this poem is part of Domitian's celebratory triumph of 89 C.E. In *Silvae* 3.3, the poet will talk about the terms of mercy offered by the emperor to the fierce German tribe (3.3.168).

13 See Rives 1999.250–51 for the meaning of *virtus* in this passage of the *Germania*.

to a soldier throughout the poem (e.g., *sicut . . . miles*, 2.5.19–20; *ceu . . . gladiator*, 2.5.26) and displays human qualities of *animi* and *virtus* (17). The emphasis on the eyes and the face of the lion when avenging his own death (“*firmat hians oculos animamque hostemque requirit*,” “He steadies his eye open-mouthed, seeking courage and the enemy,” 23) is analogous to the behavior of the Chatti when facing their enemies. The Chattans openly refuse “civilization” (as perceived by outsiders), while the lion’s tameness is superficial, since, in reality, humans are deceived when they think they can tame a wild beast. Both the Chattan men and the lion find themselves in bondage, as the reference to the German ring (*anulus*) explains, a state from which there is only one way to escape, namely, the display of *virtus* by annihilating one’s enemies.

A further examination of the *virtus* that connects the lion to a human being, barbarian or Roman, leads us to the problem of civil war and the poet’s constant “rewriting” of his own epic, the *Thebaid*. *Silvae* 2.5 contains gaps in what it tells us, caused by its occasional character and the audience’s familiarity with the event: the *fera fugiens* remains unspecified, as is also the nature of the spectacle in the arena (2.5.8–23):<sup>14</sup>

non grege Massylo curuaque indagine clausus,  
 non formidato supra uenabula saltu  
 incitus aut caeco foueae deceptus hiatu,  
 sed uictus fugiente fera. stat cardine aperto  
 infelix cauea, et clausas circum undique portas  
 hoc licuisse nefas placidi tumuere leones.  
 tum cunctis cecidere iubae, puduitque relatum  
 aspicere, et totas duxere in lumina frontes.  
 at non te primo fusum nouus obruit ictu  
 ille pudor: mansere animi, uirtusque cadenti  
 a media iam morte redit, nec protinus omnes  
 terga dedere minae. sicut sibi conscius alti  
 uulneris aduersum moriens it miles in hostem  
 attollitque manum et ferro labente minatur,  
 sic piger ille gradu solitoque exutus honore  
 firmat hians oculos animamque hostemque requirit.

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14 Cancik 1971.79 suggests that this is a real fight, not just a performance gone wrong. Van Dam 1984.371 agrees, adding that the act combines tricks and training with a *venatio*.



You were not hemmed in by a Massylian band and a cunning net nor plunging over hunting spears in a fearsome lap nor deceived by a pit's hidden cavity, but vanquished by a fleeing beast. The luckless cage stands open on its hinges, and all around behind their closed doors the placid lions are angry that such an outrage has been permitted. Then all drooped their manes to see him brought back and drew all their brows down upon their eyes. As for you, that sudden shame did not overwhelm you, laid low though you were at first blow. Your courage held, valour returned from the midst of death as you fell, nor did all your menace at once turn tail. As a dying soldier aware of his deep wound attacks the facing foe, lifting his hand and threatening with sagging sword: so he with sluggish step, stripped of his wonted dignity, steadies his eyes open-mouthed, seeking courage and the enemy.

The identification of the lion's killer as an antelope, leopard, tiger, snake, elephant, or even another lion remains intentionally elusive.<sup>15</sup> What the poet emphasizes is the vividness of the spectacle and its audience, but, most importantly, the nature of the lion's death.<sup>16</sup> Statius carefully chooses

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15 Van Dam 1984.379–80 gives a full list of suggestions.

16 Notice the connection between the tame lion and the rest of the lions through the use of *pudor* (*puduit*, 14; *pudor*, 17). In *Achilleid* 1, Statius uses a simile of a tame lion to describe Achilles' reaction to the weapons given to him as a gift by Diomedes, a gesture that discloses his identity as a cross-dresser (cf. Dilke's commentary 2005.137–38; on Thetis as a lioness, see Heslin 2005.188–91). *Achilleid* 1.858–63: "ut leo, materno cum raptus ab ubere mores / accepit pectique iubas hominemque vereri / edidicit nullasque rapi nisi iussus in iras, / si semel adverso radiavit lumine ferrum, / eiurata fides domitorque inimicus, in illum / prima fames, timidoque *pudet servisse* magistro," "As a lion snatched from his mother's dugs *learns* manners, taught to let his mane be combed, to respect man, and never to fly into rage unless ordered; but if once steel flashes out in front of him, he forswears his faith and his *tamer* becomes his foe, his first hunger is for him, and he is *ashamed to have obeyed* a timid master."

There are also other unmistakable echoes from *Silvae* 2.5 (provided it predates the composition of *Achilleid* 1): *ira* (2.5.1), *dediscere* (2.5.2), "imperiumque pati et domino parere minori" (2.5.3). One can find a similar simile of tamed beasts fighting back in Lucan 4.237–42: "sic, ubi desuetae silvis in carcere clauso / mansuevere ferae et vultus posuere minaces / atque hominem didicere pati, si torrida parvus / venit in ora cruor, redeunt rabiesque furorque / admonitaeque tument gustato sanguine fauces; fervet et a trepido vix abstinet *ira* magistro," "Just so, the wild beasts unlearn the ways of the

the audience: the *cavea* (12) points both to the natural space of a cage (*OLD* s.v. *cavea* 1) and to the spectators' area (*OLD* s.v. *cavea* 4). What is more, we have an animal audience alongside the human audience of the arena: the other lions.<sup>17</sup> The poet shifts the focus completely from human beings to the animal kingdom. And yet the reaction of the lions reveals human concerns, and their immediate response to the unspecified animal's attack on their friend is what would be expected of people: the placid lions are amazed at the *nefas* (13).<sup>18</sup> From their perspective, what finally prevails is savagery and, as we will see, a situation reminiscent of civil war. Statius seems to have transferred the problematics of his own world to the world of animals.

Let us look closely at the *descriptio mortis* and its underlying context of civil war. As we have seen, the poet draws out the parallel between the lion's natural response to the attack of the *fera* and the barbarians' counterattack to the mechanisms of *mansuetudo*. At the same time, however, by means of allusions to the *Thebaid*, Statius presents the lion's reaction to the anonymous beast in terms of the duel between the two brothers, Eteocles and Polynices. Statius's preoccupation with civil war themes in the *Silvae* should not come as a surprise because of the simultaneous composition of the *Thebaid*.<sup>19</sup> In lines 7–11, the poet recounts the circumstances of the lion's death by means of an array of negatives: the lion, the *vastator ferarum*, is not killed within its natural environment at the hands of men equipped with nets and spears;<sup>20</sup> in other words, this is not a *venatio*, but a spectacle

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woods and grow tame in the locked prison, dropping their *threatening* looks and *learning to submit to man*, but if their parched mouths find a little gore, their rabid frenzy returns and their throats swell at the memory of the taste of blood; their *anger* seethes, hardly sparing the trembling keeper."

17 The *cavea* of lions is also imprisoned, like the "captivated" people in the human audience of the amphitheater. As Newlands sees it (2005.165): "The amphitheater forms the physical and symbolic space in which the drama of courtly service is played out."

18 As Newmyer observes (1984.3): "The reader is cleverly made to forget that the participants in the poem are animals and not human beings." In addition, there is a reversal in the standard form of the epic simile, where one expects to see a wounded soldier compared to an animal but not the opposite.

19 See Dietrich 2002, Myers 2002, and Hardie 2006, who have most recently explored *Silvae* 2.4 and its relationship with Ovid and Statius's own epic enterprise. On epic echoes in the *Silvae* from Homer, Virgil, or Statius's own epics, see Taisne 1996, Van Dam 2004 and 2006, and Gibson 2006b (who do not discuss *Silvae* 2.5). See also Lovatt, Bernstein, and Malamud in this volume for multi-layered allusions to Statius's *Thebaid* in the *Silvae*.

20 Garvey 1989.629 notes the irony in the use of *vastator*.

where beasts forget their training and, instead of performing tricks, act out of turn.<sup>21</sup> The spectacle, therefore, becomes an in-house conflict.<sup>22</sup>

What is more, the lion's death reminds the reader of the twin brothers' fratricide in the *Thebaid*. The last phrase of the description of the lion's death (*animamque hostemque requirit*, 2.5.23)<sup>23</sup> recalls Eteocles' anger after his dream of Laius in *Thebaid* 2.127: *horret avum fratremque requirit* (*Thebaid* 2.125–33):

illi rupta quies; attollit membra toroque  
erigitur plenus monstribus, vanumque cruorem  
excitans simul horret avum fratremque requirit.  
qualis ubi audito venantum murmure tigris  
horruit in maculas somnosque excussit inertes,  
bella cupit laxatque genas et temperat ungues,  
mox ruit in turmas natisque alimenta cruentis  
spirantem fert ore virum: sic excitus ira  
ductor in absentem consumit proelia fratrem.

The king's slumber was broken. He raises his body and  
wrenches from the bed, full of horrors. As he shakes off

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21 Newlands discerns a metaphorical "backbiting of court society" lurking behind the malicious killing of the lion (2005.171–72). Henderson in this volume successfully discusses how Statius stands against Flavian propaganda through an exploration of family and marriage.

22 In *Thebaid* 5, Hypsipyle describes similarly the slaughter of the Lemnian men by their wives. The utter destruction of Lemnos is not caused by an external enemy but by internal strife (*Thebaid* 5.305–09):

insula dives agris opibusque armis virisque,  
nota situ et Getico nuper ditata triumpho,  
non maris incursu, non hoste, nec aethere laeво  
perdidit una omnes orbata excisaque mundo  
indigenas.

The island, prosperous in land and wealth, in arms and men, known of its site and lately enriched by a Getic triumph, at one blow, not by invasion of the sea or enemy or hostile atmosphere, lost all its people, orphaned and cut out from the world.

23 Here Statius employs a powerful syllepsis for *animam* and *hostem*.

the phantom blood, he shudders at his grandfather and in the same motion seeks his brother. As when a tigress hears the noise of hunters, she bristles into her stripes and shakes off the sloth of sleep; athirst for battle she loosens her jaws and flexes her claws, then rushes upon the troop and carries in her mouth a breathing man, food for her bloody young; so in fury does the chieftain fight it out against his absent brother.

The dream spurs on the current ruler of Thebes to pursue war against his absent brother, while Statius inserts a telling simile that describes the distraught king: he is like a tiger, ready to fight back against the attacking *venantes*. Laius's ghost mobilizes Eteocles' futile search for his absent brother, the object of his hatred.

Even while dying, the animal is willing to strike back and kill its enemy (2.5.16–23), an act that recalls Eteocles' last desperate act in the *Thebaid* (11.552–57):

sic pugnant miseri; restabat lassa nefando  
vita duci summusque cruor, poterantque parumper  
stare gradus; sed sponte ruit fraudemque supremam  
in media iam morte parat. clamore Cithaeron  
erigitur, fraterque ratus vicisse levavit  
ad caelum palmas . . .

So the wretches fight. Life yet remained, though weary, in the wicked king and a residue of blood, his feet could bear him for a little while. But he collapses on purpose and in his death throes prepares a final trick. Cithaeron starts up with the clamour and his brother, thinking himself victorious, raises hands to heaven . . .

The lion strives to raise himself *a media iam morte* (18) and fight back, just as Eteocles does before the surreptitious murder of Polynices. After pretending to have fallen down and given up, *in media iam morte*, Eteocles revives, this time with the sole purpose of killing his brother.

In the *Silvae*, the rest of the caged lions, a chorus of spectators of this finale and deeply moved by the *nefas*, intentionally cover their eyes

with their manes (15).<sup>24</sup> Similarly, in *Thebaid* 11, Pietas covers her eyes with her cloak when she leaves the battlefield after being pursued by Tisiphone (11.492–96):<sup>25</sup>

sic urguet, et ultro  
vitantem aspectus etiam pudibundaque longe  
ora reducentem premit astridentibus hydrys  
intentatque faces; deiectam in lumina pallam  
diva trahit magnoque fugit questura Tonanti.

So she urges, and as the other shrinks from her very aspect and draws her own modest countenance far back, presses her with hissing serpents and brandishes her torch. The goddess draws her cloak down over her eyes and flees to complain to the great Thunderer.

The expression *in lumina* occurs both in the *Thebaid* and the *Silvae*, where it underscores the modesty of the act of covering one's face, strangely applied to lions. The Fury chases away the goddess because the latter has just undertaken the task of intervening and soothing the hearts of the two combatants. As soon as Pietas had arrived, all mortal hearts had become “domesticated,” and the impending *nefas* was all the more visible (*Thebaid* 11.474–76):

vix steterat campo, subita mansuescere pace  
agmina sentiriue nefas; tunc ora madescunt  
pectoraque, et tacitus subrepsit fratribus horror.

Scarce had she set foot on the plain when the armies turned gentle in a sudden peace and the wickedness was perceived. Then faces and breasts are moistened and silent horror steals upon the brothers.

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24 I think there is a touch of humor in this scene, unlike the commentator on *Silvae* 2 who noted that, in *Silvae* 2.5, every trace of humor is absent precisely because of the reference to Domitian (Van Dam 1984.368). See also the approach of Newlands 2005.

25 Vollmer 1898.364 notes that the gesture is Homeric (*Il.* 17.136): πάν δέ τ' ἐπισκύνιον κάτω ἔλκεται ὅσσε καλύπτων, “and draws down all his brows, covering his eyes.”

And yet Tisiphone hinders Pietas's efforts immediately after she senses that her destructive and nefarious plans are directly threatened.

The concerns raised here by the rich contextual and intertextual imagery of Roman imperialist politics and civil war are not intended to be read *in vacuo*, but seem rather addressed to the emperor himself, the agent of internal and external power. The poem concludes with the description of Caesar's sadness, the reason for the poem's spontaneous composition, as explained in the preface (2.16–18) to the book (*Silvae* 2.5.24–30):

magna tamen subiti tecum solacia leti,  
uicte, feres, quod te maestis populisque patresque,  
ceu notus caderes tristi gladiator harena,  
ingemuere mori, magni quod Caesaris ora  
inter tot Scythicas Libycasque et litore Rheni  
et Pharia de gente feras, quas perdere uile est,  
unius amissi tetigit iactura leonis.

Yet in defeat you will bear with you great comfort for your sudden death. For people and Fathers groaned at your fate, as though you were a famous gladiator falling on the cruel sand. And among so many beasts whose sacrifice is cheap, from Scythia and Libya and banks of the Rhine and the people of Pharos, the loss of one lion touched Caesar's countenance.

There is more than just a simple *Herrscherpanegyrik* here.<sup>26</sup> The sorrow for the death of the lion is transformed into a discussion of politics, on the one hand, and of the problematics of culture imposed *praeter naturam* on the other. It is not coincidental that the last lines point to the conquered nations—or at least the nations that the emperor would like to subdue. Scythia, the *litus Rheni*, and Libya allude to Domitian's German and Dacian wars and African expeditions. Ruurd Nauta points to the relevance of all these regions and foreign lands to the poem: the places whence the animals come have been pacified, and the brute forces of a threatening nature seemingly brought under control (2002.403).<sup>27</sup>

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26 Leberl 2004.198–99 correctly notices that Statius emphasizes his interest in poetics rather than in promoting the *imago* of the emperor.

27 Nauta, however, supports the idea that the poem celebrates the emperor's reaction as entirely appropriate and extraordinarily merciful (2002.404).

As we have seen from the comparison with other texts, however, *Silvae* 2.5 invites different directions of interpretation and thus bears witness to the elusive nature of the composition. While the Romans and, especially, the emperor himself may transgress human and natural boundaries, the poet's task is to question the advantages of such achievements. The poem ponders the problematics of enforced domestication; human nature can be very close to the savage instincts of animals, and, ultimately, the flaws of human beings are readily identifiable with the harsh predispositions of animals, as we have seen from the underlying context of civil crisis.<sup>28</sup> The lion's *mansuetudo* has been to no avail, as is confirmed by his last action. His natural instincts have taken over, which comes as no surprise, especially if we accept the reading *constrata ira* instead of *monstrata ira* in the first line of the poem: the savage predisposition has always been there, and, with the right incentive, it comes back to the surface (see note 7 above). Statius leaves the reader guessing about the implications of a possible end to the *imperium pati*.

What is, therefore, the role of poetry and the poet himself? As Statius explains in his dedicatory preface to Melior, the poem's success lies in the fact that it was presented to the emperor *statim*, a circumstance that ensures the composition's triumph (*praef.* 2.16–18):

eandem exigebat stili facilitatem leo mansuetus, quem in  
amphitheatro prostratum frigidum erat sacratissimo impera-  
tori ni statim tradere.

The same facility of pen was required by the Tame Lion;  
if I had not presented him to our most sacred Emperor  
as he lay prostrate in the amphitheatre, the piece would  
have fallen flat.

Statius's piece would have fallen flat (*frigidum* or ψυχρόν in technical terms), had he delayed (Van Dam 1984.60); the expression *frigidum erat* plays off against the lion's current state, lying dead in the arena, a condition for which the adjective is most appropriate.<sup>29</sup> Thus the poet equates the lifeless corpus

28 Cancik 1971.78–81 suggests that the emphasis of the poem lies in the descriptions of loss and death, rather than on the spectacle itself.

29 The adjective *frigidum* also plays off against the use of the phrase *subito calore* in *Silvae praef.* 1.3. On *calor* and the poetics of the *Silvae*, see Wray in this volume.

of the lion with the poetic corpus. The contrary-to-fact hypothesis, however, testifies to this poem's vitality and success.<sup>30</sup> The poet's wonder regarding the ineffectuality of enforced domestication masks an uncertainty concerning the imperial politics of conquest and provincial Romanization. By reminding the reader of the *Thebaid*'s mythological fratricide, the imagery of the lion's death and the emperor's reaction vividly conveys Statius's own anxiety concerning not only man's power over nature but also the nature of the empire's power over its citizens. As Carole Newlands fittingly observes: "At the end of the poem, we are invited to look at the emperor from the lion's point of view, from the center of the arena and the nadir of the social scale, where the imperial face is distant and hard to read" (Newlands 2005.169). *Silvae* 2.5 becomes not only a celebration of someone's brave death but also, and most importantly, an opportunity to look at nature, *imperium*, and culture from an oppositional, poetic, perspective—even under the disturbed countenance, or perhaps tearful eyes, of Caesar.<sup>31</sup>

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30 As Aricò observes (1972.48), the composition of the poem on the spot is the recipe for its success: *composti a caldo*. See Markus 2004 for the cathartic role of *consolationes* in the *Silvae* and the *Thebaid*. Lovatt in this volume correctly argues for the transformation of private grief into public consolation in the *Silvae*.

31 I would like to direct the reader to the picture of the tame lion next to Orpheus on the cover of this collection of essays, where the *mansuetudo* of the lion and the poetics of the empire artfully coexist.