A SPECTACULAR FEAST: *SILVAE* 4.2[1]

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Thanks to the testimony of Dio and Pliny, Domitian has taken his place in the annals of dining as an eccentric, if not actually deviant, host. Dio describes Domitian's notorious "black banquet" in painstaking detail (Dio 67.9), and part of Pliny's strategy in the *Panegyricus* is to praise Trajan's hospitality by constructing Domitian as the archetypal bad host, lurking in his palace like a monster in its den, surly and unapproachable (*Panegyricus* 48.4–6). Susanna Braund, however, notes that the poets of Domitian's own day praised him for his generous hospitality—certainly lavish feasting was part of his self-presentation as a beneficent ruler—and she cites Statius's *Silvae* as being "typical of the panegyrical sentiments surrounding this topic."[2] Carole Newlands recently deepened our understanding of how the *Silvae* operate, demonstrating through her careful analysis how much we lose when we read Statius's panegyric and epideictic poems as uncomplicated

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1 Like most of the other papers in this volume, this was first presented at the workshop "New Directions in Statius's *Silvae*," organized by Carole Newlands and held at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. I am grateful to the workshop participants and audience for their criticism and discussion, and to Carole Newlands and Antony Augoustakis for their helpful comments. A revised version was presented to the Bryn Mawr Classics Colloquium, and benefited from the comments of that audience. This study grew out of an earlier work (Malamud 2001); since then, Fredrick 2003 and Newlands 2002, Chapter 8, "Dining with the Emperor," have re-cast the terms of the discussion. I am also indebted to Braund 1996.

2 See Braund 1996.44. She cites Pliny (*Pan*. 49.4–6; see below pp. 243–44), who condemns Domitian's *crudelitas* and *superbia*, as well as his table manners (his unappealing traits include menacingly observing his guests, refraining from sharing food with them, eating beforehand, and belching while they are still unfed).

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paeans of praise to his patrons and emperor.[3] In the analysis that follows of *Silvae* 4.2, then, I do not begin with the assumption that the purpose of the *Silvae* is praise, flattery, or even necessarily self-advancement. Instead, I examine how Statius sets up his portrait of Domitian as host through a series of related allusions, mostly to epic; the pattern of these allusions affects my reading of the poem. The portrait of Domitian that emerges in this panegyric poem is surprisingly consistent with the negative portrayal of Domitian's hospitality sketched by writers under later emperors.

The poem describes a feast hosted by Domitian and apparently attended by Statius himself.[4] As it opens, Statius situates himself firmly in the tradition of Homer and Vergil, and he is quite precise about what that tradition entails. Homer and Vergil are invoked as authors of poetic feasts first, and only secondarily as the chroniclers of heroic deeds (4.2.1–4):[5]

> Regia Sidoniae convivia laudat Elissae,
> qui magnum Aenean Laurentibus intulit arvis,
> Alcinoique dapes mansuro carmine monstrat,
> aequore qui multo reducem consumpsit Ulixem:
>
> He praises the royal feast of Sidonian Dido,
> that one who brought great Aeneas to the Latin shores,
> and the banquets of Alcinous are set forth in everlasting song
> by the one who exhausted Ulysses as he returned over the endless ocean.[6]

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3 For different approaches to how to read the literature of praise in antiquity, see especially Ahl 1984a, Bartsch 1994.148–87, Braund 1998, Damon 2002, Nixon and Rogers 1994, and Newlands 2002, especially 18–27.

4 Coleman 1988.82–84 sums up the evidence regarding the circumstances of the poem's composition. There is no reason to think it was commissioned in advance; Coleman notes that there is no detail in the poem that Statius "could not have acquired by hearsay," so it could have been written in advance and delivered immediately after the banquet. However, it could also have been delivered during the course of the banquet or have been composed after the event.

5 Coleman 1988 ad loc. notes: "There is a *double entendre* here whereby *aequore multo* both refers to Odysseus' *nostos* and evokes the comparison of epic to the sea." Newlands 2002.279 draws attention to the range of meanings, including gastronomical, of the verb *consumpsit*. I have used Coleman's 1988 text for *Silvae* 4 and Hill's Teubner edition (1996) for quotations from the *Thebaid*.

6 I have used Robert Fitzgerald's translation for all *Aeneid* passages and Richmond Lattimore's translation of the *Odyssey*; otherwise, unless noted, translations are my own. The text of the *Aeneid* is from Mynors' OCT edition (1977).

The epic feasts that Statius recalls share the same basic plot structure: a shipwrecked hero is taken in by a generous monarch, who offers hospitality and holds a splendid banquet to honor the guest. During the course of the banquet, a respected bard gives a performance, followed by the hero's recital of his adventures. The monarch rewards him with gifts and help on his journey. There are, of course, differences in emphasis, tone, and detail, but certain elements are similar. In Homer, for example, all the senses are engaged in the scene at Alcinous's palace. Odysseus is bathed in hot water and anointed with oil; he shares wine and pork rich with shining fat with the bard Demodokos and listens to his song. Vergil's feast is less detailed—he doesn't evoke the smell and taste of roast pork or the fragrance of olive oil—but he mentions soft napkins, bread, wine, incense, the din of the guests at table, and the song of Iopas, along with his description of the visual splendor of Dido's banquet hall and table, ablaze with light and gold.

There is a parallel banquet scene in Statius's own epic poem. The banquet ordered by Adrastus to welcome his prospective sons-in-law, Tydeus and Polynices, in *Thebaid* 1 is modeled on the feasts of the Phaeacians and Carthaginians, and shares many of the details: gold and purple embroideries cover the couches, tables of polished wood are brought in, golden lamps conquer the darkness, meat is roasted on spits, and bread piled in baskets (*Thebaid* 1.515–26):

> dictis parere ministri
> certatim adcelerant; uario strepit icta tumultu
> regia: pars ostro tenues auroque sonantes
> emunire toros alteque inferre tapetas,
> pars teretis levare manu ac disponere mensas.
> ast alii tenebras et opacam vincere noctem
> adgressi tendunt auratis vincula lychnis.
> his labor inserto torrere exsanguia ferro
> viscera caesarum pecudum, his cumulare canistris
> perdomitam saxo Cererem. laetatur Adrastus
> obsequio fervere domum, iamque ipse superbis
> fulgebat stratis solioque effultus eburno.
>
> The servants rush to obey his orders; a busy din clatters and echoes through the royal hall. Some spread out the couches, rustling with delicate purple and gold, and pile them high with embroidered covers; some polish the

> smooth tables by hand and arrange them in order; but others set forth to conquer the darkness and shadowy night, and hang golden lamps from chains. Some have the task of roasting the bloodless meat of slain animals on spits, while others crush Ceres with a stone and fill the bread-baskets. Adrastus rejoices at the energy humming through his house. And now he himself took his seat upon an ivory throne, gleaming amid the splendid tapestries.

Statius draws attention to the sound produced by the preparations for the meal ("vario strepit icta tumultu / regia," 1.516–17) and the rustling sounds of the costly fabrics. No bard appears in this scene, however. Instead, after toasting his guests from a golden goblet embossed with the tales of Ganymede and the slaying of Medusa, Adrastus himself provides the performance, regaling his guests with the grim story of Coroebus.[7]

The banquets Statius evokes at the beginning of 4.2 show certain constant features. Wine and food appeal to the sense of taste; luxury fabrics to the sense of touch; gold and lamps bring brilliance; and spoken arts—song and speech—rival with the visual arts for the attention of the guests. Allusions to Dido and Alcinous, as Newlands observes (2002.278–79), set up certain expectations. The generous hospitality of these rulers serves as a model for the relationship between ruler and poet, host and guest: our expectation is that Domitian will treat Statius just as Alcinous treated Odysseus and Dido treated Aeneas; perhaps even as Augustus treated Vergil. We feel assured from this strongly marked double allusion that a familiar pattern will follow: our poet/hero will be royally feasted by his generous host and then rise to the occasion, as did the epic bards Iopas and Demodokos, and the epic heroes Odysseus and Aeneas, by delivering a brilliant poetic performance.[8]

Great expectations . . . but what actually happens? Domitian's feast is, indeed, memorable, but not for the qualities one would expect given the models evoked at the beginning. Statius stage-manages the presentation of the banquet in a way that makes it contrast with, not conform to, the model banquets he cites at the opening of the poem. In one respect, however, it

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7 Lovatt 2002.81–82 has a brief discussion of the thematic importance of Statius's Ganymede ekphrasis.

8 For analysis of actual performances of epic in Flavian Rome, see Markus 2000 and 2003.

does conform: an element of visual splendor marks the epic feasts, and in Statius's poem, it is clear that no expense has been spared to make the dining hall a spectacular setting. David Fredrick, in his "Architecture and Surveillance in Flavian Rome" (2003.218–19), comments on the way that the architecture of the dining room makes visual spectacle the predominant aspect of the dinner described in 4.2. (Fredrick assumes the banquet took place in the dining room, but there is no conclusive proof that it did; see note 9 below):

> The emperor's presence in and possession of the space visually is indicated by the apse at the rear wall, the focus of the entire room . . . despite the huge space, the various marbles, the citrus wood, ivory and slaves arranged in ranks, [the poet] has leisure to gaze only at *ipsum, ipsum* . . . Rather than sharing a hierarchically structured view out of the triclinium, in Domitian's Iovis Cenatio the guests are subordinated to a view with the emperor at its apex. As it displays the majesty and authority of the emperor, this reorientation also subjects the guests to a supervisory gaze, not just that of the emperor before them, but one arising from the very awareness that their behavior has become "a performance to be staged."

Domitian, splendidly ensconced in his apse, plays the role of Jupiter (Statius intimates as much in a simile I will return to later). Others act out roles as well. Statius's mention of receiving wine from the hand of Ganymede, and his description of Ceres with her skirts tucked up and Bacchus serving the guests, suggests that the servants are costumed as divinities (also a feature of Domitian's Saturnalian entertainment in 1.6). The dinner itself is a sort of mime performance, complete with costumed actors. Statius's description gives the impression that the sense of sight is overwhelmed. The architecture and the visual splendor of the marbles, columns, and tables are more than the poet can take in. Size and opulence are the dominant features, and indeed the hall must have been impressive on both fronts.[9] The scale

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9 James Packer describes Domitian's banqueting hall (the Iovis Cenatio) in a recent discussion of Flavian architecture (2003.193–94):

> The interior dimensions (28.97 x 31.66 m.) were nearly as impressive as those of the Aula Regia. An order of engaged grey granite Corinthian columns . . .

of the dining hall defeats the viewer who attempts to penetrate it with his gaze. Fredrick, commenting on the use of the phrase *fessis . . . visibus* in 4.2.30–41, says (2003.220):

> Statius situates the feeling of exhaustion in the eye of his reader, whose most powerful sense, the sense that extends the furthest away from his own body, is still barely adequate to take in the limits of the architecture. This makes a pointed contrast with the inexhaustible eye of the emperor.

But while the eye is exhausted at Domitian's banquet, the other senses are starved—at least in Statius's description. Food, for instance, as Coleman notes,[10] is mentioned only generically—*vina, mensa,* nothing as specific as roast pork, nothing remotely like the list of foodstuffs provided in *Silvae* 1.6. There is no appeal to the senses of smell, taste, or touch. Most strikingly, there is neither song nor conversation. Whereas the feasts of Dido and Alcinous featured speeches of welcome from the host, poetic performances from the bard, and long and riveting first-person narratives from Aeneas and Odysseus, no words are exchanged at Domitian's banquet. *Only* the eye is engaged: sight displaces all the other senses.

> divided the lateral walls into five bays. High windows in the central ones brought in light, air and (when open in the summer) cooling breezes generated by water sprays from fountains in the neighboring open courts. On the back wall, opposite the columned entrance (which extended across the front of the whole room) a wide shallow niche framed by columns marked the emperor's positon of honour among his guests. On the front and lateral walls of the second story, engaged Corinthian columns on high pedestals, positioned above the lower columns, framed bays with windows aligned with those on the first floor. Since, like the Aula Regia, the room was probably designed as a square as high as it was wide, the gilded coffered ceiling . . . was about twenty-nine meters above the floor. As elsewhere in the palace, the walls and floors were revetted with multicoloured marbles; the designs on the walls were probably geometric; those of the pavements, both geometric and curvilinear.

It is unclear whether Statius was describing the triclinium or the larger Aula Regia, which would have held many more people, so though Packer's description conveys the splendor of Domitian's banquet halls, it might not correspond to the actual structure Statius is describing in 4.2.

10 Coleman 1988.83: "circumstantial evidence (e.g., the menu) is omitted."

DATUR ORA TUERI?

Lacking such essential features of hospitality as commensality and shared pleasure in conversation and performance, Domitian's feast is marked more by divergence from its Homeric and Vergilian counterparts than by similarity. And indeed, after the emphatic evocation of these famous scenes of hospitality and poetic performance, the allusive pattern of the poem shifts, providing some alternative models for interpreting this text. We get our first clue that the model feasts of the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid* may not actually set the pattern for the poem in lines 5–10, when the poet moves from Dido and Alcinous to a *recusatio*, a statement of poetic inability (4.2.5–10):

> ast ego cui sacrae Caesar nova gaudia cenae
> nunc primum dominamque dedit contingere mensam,
> qua celebrem mea vota lyra, quas solvere gratis
> sufficiam? non si pariter mihi vertice laeto
> nectat adoratas et Smyrna et Mantua lauros,
> digna loquar.
>
> Now for the first time Caesar has granted me the strange delights
> of his sacred feast, and allowed me to reach the royal table—
> what lyre can I use to celebrate, what thanks can I give in return?
> Even if both Smyrna and Mantua together were to crown my joyful
> head with holy laurel, I still would not find worthy words.

As is so often the case when he addresses the emperor, Statius's language is less than transparent. The phrase *nova gaudia* offers several possibilities for interpretation. It could be straightforward hyperbolic praise of the feast—its delights are new in the sense that they go beyond typical dinner fare. Or *nova* could be intended to recall the poet's personal situation—the food and the décor are new to him because he himself is a newcomer to the imperial table. He tells us in the next line, after all, that this is the first time he's managed to obtain an invitation (*nunc primum*, 4.2.7). Newlands suggests that *nova* implies the poet's own innovation in the genre of epideictic. If we read *nova* closely with the preceding lines,

we might conclude that the delights Domitian has to offer are "strange" in comparison to the hospitality offered by Dido and Alcinous—that they break rather than follow the pattern of epic hospitality Statius has set up. No one interpretation rules out the others; Statius's language is often deliberately ambiguous, particularly when he is addressing the emperor. Whatever it is that makes the delights of the banquet *nova*, the result is the same: the poet feels unable take on the topic. Even if he were Homer and Vergil rolled into one, he would still not be able to do justice to the occasion.[11]

These protestations of insufficiency give way to an apostrophe to the emperor (4.2.12–17):

> steriles transmisimus annos:
> haec aevi mihi prima dies, hic limina vitae!
> tene ego, regnator terrarum orbisque subacti
> magne parens, te, spes hominum, te, cura deorum
> cerno iacens? datur haec iuxta, datur ora tueri
> vina inter mensasque, et non assurgere fas est?
>
> I've put the barren years behind me: this is the first day,
> the threshold of my life! Is it you, ruler of nations,
> great father
> of the subject world, is it you, hope of mankind and
> concern of the gods,
> whom I behold as I recline? Am I allowed to look upon
> this face
> next to me amid the drinking and feasting, and is it no
> sacrilege not to rise to my feet?

In hyperbolic language, Statius evokes imagery of birth and paternity. This is no mere dinner, it is the threshold of a new life (*limina vitae*). Domitian is not just the hope of mankind and care of the gods, he is also a father figure—*magne parens*. The conceit culminates in line 16, when Statius expresses his amazement at being able to look at the emperor *without having to stand at attention*. This is, on one level, praise of Domitian's magnanimous relaxation of imperial etiquette, but a Vergilian allusion in

11 Damon 2002 takes a more straightforward view of the incongruities in Statius's panegyrical poems.

line 16 casts this apparently enthusiastic exclamation in a slightly different light. It reinforces the language of paternity by quoting from one of the most poignant scenes in the *Aeneid*: Aeneas's reunion with his father Anchises in the underworld in *Aeneid* 6.[12] Anchises greets his son with tears of joy, asking in amazement whether they are actually allowed to look at each other's faces and exchange words with one another (*Aeneid* 6.687–89):

> venisti tandem, tuaque exspectata parenti
> vicit iter durum pietas? datur ora tueri,
> nate, tua et notas audire et reddere voces?
>
> Have you at last come, has that loyalty
> Your father counted on conquered the journey?
> Am I to see your face, my son, and hear
> Our voices in communion as before?

Anchises is delighted by this chance to gaze at his beloved son's face, to hear his familiar voice and exchange words with him. Aeneas's reaction is more complex. In the confusing, dream-like, alternate reality of the underworld, he seems unable to comprehend that his father is dead (*Aeneid* 6.695–702):

> ille autem: "tua me, genitor, tua tristis imago
> saepius occurrens haec limina tendere adegit;
> stant sale Tyrrheno classes. da iungere dextram,
> da, genitor, teque amplexu ne subtrahe nostro."
> sic memorans largo fletu simul ora rigabat.
> ter conatus ibi collo dare bracchia circum;
> ter frustra comprensa manus effugit imago,
> par leuibus uentis uolucrique simillima somno.
>
> Aeneas said: "Your ghost,
> Your sad ghost, father, often before my mind,
> Impelled me to the threshold of this place.
> My ships ride anchored in the Tuscan sea.

12 There is, in fact, a double allusion to Anchises in this passage—*cura deorum* echoes Helenus's speech to Anchises in *Aeneid* 3.475–76: "coniugio, Anchisa, Veneris dignate superbo, / cura deum."

> But let me have your hand, let me embrace you,
> Do not draw back."
> At this his tears brimmed over
> And down his cheeks. And there he tried three times
> To throw his arms around his father's neck,
> Three times the shade untouched slipped through his hands,
> Weightless as wind and fugitive as dream.

His father's ghost has driven him to cross the threshold of death, but from his words it is clear that he does not fully comprehend that the Anchises he is addressing is also an *imago*. For all the beauty and emotion of the Vergilian scene, Anchises ultimately disappoints Aeneas. The two can gaze at each other and converse, but the intense longing Aeneas has for his parent's physical self cannot be satisfied: the tone of the whole passage is summed up by the desolate *frustra* in line 701. Like the earlier allusions to Dido and Alcinous's banquets, this evocation of Aeneas's meeting with Anchises plays with thwarted expectations.

This allusion, unlike the others I examine in this paper, has nothing to do with banquets, but it is relevant nonetheless. It casts light on Statius's prioritization of the visual over the other senses in his description of the banquet, and shows us what is missing from the splendid feast. Anchises' ultimate distance, his absence from the world of the living, is made evident by Aeneas's vain attempts to embrace him. This is bitterly frustrating for Aeneas, but though father and son cannot embrace, they have the consolation not only of looks but of words—they gaze at one another, hearing and exchanging familiar voices. It is precisely this mutuality of exchanged words and looks that is absent in *Silvae* 4.2. Speech, whether conversation or poetic performance, is entirely absent; all that is left is sight. And where Aeneas and Anchises were clearly gazing *at one another*, in 4.2, the looking is of a different order. The poet gazes from a distance on the emperor; there is no suggestion that the emperor looks back unless, as Fredrick argues, we think of his gaze as a sort of omnipresent surveillance as he monitors the crowd.

TECTUM AUGUSTUM INGENS

Statius can, at least, look, whether or not Domitian returns his gaze. What he actually *sees* is less clear. Domitian is, in one sense, highly visible—the whole dining hall is arranged to make sure that he is the object of every gaze. Indeed, compared to him, nothing else is worth looking at. But despite the poet's eagerness, Domitian is not so easy to see. In the dining room that Statius describes, how close could one come to the man on whom all gazes converge? Newlands notes (2002.273) that Statius describes neither Domitian's person nor his dress. Lost in the vastness of the imperial dining hall, the exhausted eye of the poet seems to have trouble taking in the imperial countenance.

The vast size of Domitian's banquet hall is emphasized by an allusion to another important figure in the *Aeneid,* Latinus. Latinus fits well with the pattern established by Dido and Alcinous: like them, he is a kindly ruler who receives his guest with generosity, though his hospitality proves fatal to him. As others have noted, the allusion here links Domitian's dining hall, described by Statius as "tectum augustum, ingens, non centum insigne columnis" ("a royal building, massive and majestic, distinguished not by a hundred columns," 4.2.18) to Latinus's palace (*Aeneid* 7.170–72):

> tectum augustum, ingens, centum sublime columnis,
> urbe fuit summa, Laurentis regia Pici,
> horrendum silvis et religione parentum . . .
>
> The royal building, massive and majestic,
> Raised on a hundred columns, occupied
> The city's height. It had been Picus' palace,
> Shadowed by trees and history, held in awe.

The quotation is almost exact, except that Domitian's dining room is assigned even more columns than the 100 that support Latinus's palace.[13] Both are huge, but it seems Latinus's whole palace would fit into Domitian's dining room. Though it shares size and an Augustan quality with its model, Domitian's palace differs from it as well. The most striking feature

13 Newlands 2002.270 sees this as an architectural instantiation of the topos of "one hundred voices." Coleman 1988 ad loc. sees *non si* in line 8 as a reworking of the same topos.

of Latinus's palace is the series of ancient cedar statues of the ancestors, each with an identifying attribute. One cannot argue that this detail escaped Statius's notice, because he has an elaborate imitation of the palace of Latinus in *Thebaid* 2, in a scene depicting the wedding of Adrastus's daughters to Polynices and Tydeus. There he describes the *imagines* of the different generations of Theban ancestors, starting with Inachus and ending with Danaus. The Vergilian allusion suggests that Statius wishes to call attention to the absence of such *imagines* in Domitian's palace. Newlands, too, notes this absence, and ties it to contemporary uncertainties (justified by history) over the stability of the Flavian dynasty.[14]

The absence of images fits the pattern we have been observing. Domitian's hall, as described by Statius, lacks not only *imagines* of the ancestors, but *any* form of representational artwork. No elaborately engraved cup, as we see Dido use to toast her guests; no marvelous golden statues, such as grace the halls of the Phaeacian palace; no ancestral statues, as we see in Vergil's description of Latinus's palace and Statius's reworking of that passage. Indeed, the features of the hall Statius does describe—the tables and the marble of the walls and columns—draw attention not to artistry or craftsmanship, but to its raw materials. The different colored marbles, for example, are described as if the actual mountains from which they were mined were present in the hall: "the mountains of Libya and Troy glitter there in rivalry, with dark Syene and Chios and the rock that vies with the grey-green sea . . ." (4.2.27–28). Similarly, the citron-wood tables, highly prized in Rome for their elaborate workmanship, are called *robora Maurorum*, "Moorish tree trunks" (4.2.39). At Adrastus's banquet in *Thebaid* 1, in contrast, when tables are mentioned, it is not their expensive material but their polish, their workmanship, that is emphasized ("pars teretes levare manu ac disponere mensas," "Some polish the smooth tables by hand and arrange them in order," *Thebaid* 1.521).[15]

The allusion to the palace of Latinus is an example of a "window" allusion—Statius alludes in his poem to a passage from Vergil, which, in turn, alludes to a common source text; the interplay between the two allu-

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14 Newlands 2002.271: "There are no divine ancestors in Domitian's hall to act as advisory, stabilising models . . . The palace is new and wonderful, yet lacking a historical or dynastic foundation."

15 Wray (see above pp. 130ff.) argues that the emphasis on raw materials reflects Statius's emphasis on the generic differences between the *Silvae* and epic.

sions is significant.[16] In this case, Statius alludes to Vergil alluding to himself. Latinus's lofty hall, located deep in the woods, is an incongruous doublet of the equally lofty, shady, but far more sinister abode of the Cyclops in *Aeneid* 3. In both passages, *ingens* occupies the same metrical *sedes*, which has the effect of drawing attention to the adjective and to the link between the passages (*Aeneid* 3.618–21):

> domus sanie dapibusque cruentis,
> intus opaca, *ingens*. ipse arduus, altaque pulsat
> sidera—di, talem terris avertite pestem!—
> nec visu facilis nec dictu adfabilis ulli.

> That is a blood-soaked hall of brutal feasts,
> All gloom inside, and huge. The giant rears
> His head against the stars. Oh heaven, spare earth
> A scourge like this—unbearable to see,
> Unreachable by anything you say.

At first glance, nothing could be more different from the dark, primitive squalor of Polyphemus's cave than the brilliant, crowded, opulence of Domitian's dining hall, but there are some telling similarities. As is the case in 4.2, the dining hall and the house stand in a metonymic relationship: just as Statius treats the dining hall as if it were Domitian's palace, so Polyphemus's cave functions as his dining room. The Cyclops's cave, like Latinus's palace and Domitian's hall, is *ingens,* which might best be translated here as "inhumanly huge."[17] The master and his abode are equally oversized in the case of Domitian and the Cyclops: Polyphemus is so enormous that he strikes the stars, and later he, like his *domus*, is characterized as *ingens* in the highly spondaic line *monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens . . . .*[18] In

16 The phenomenon of allusion through an intermediary text to a common source is discussed by Thomas 1986. Hinds 1998 offers an excellent entrée into the scholarship on allusivity in Roman poetry.

17 *Ingens* is a key adjective in the Polyphemus passage (3.619, modifying the *domus*; 636, modifying his eye; and modifying Polyphemus himself, 658), each time in a different metrical *sedes*. Statius, too, repeats it, using it once to describe the *tectum* and once to describe Domitian himself.

18 *Aeneid* 3.655–58: "vix ea fatus erat, summo cum monte videmus / ipsum inter pecudes vasta se mole moventem / pastorem Polyphemum et litora nota petentem, / monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lumen ademptum."

lines 23ff., Domitian's dining room is so huge that it encloses parts of the sky . . . but, as huge as the room might be, Domitian himself is even larger. He fills the house and weighs it down with his *ingenti genio*, his inhumanly huge—*ingens* again—*genius,* or spirit.

Though Vergil's Cyclops is modeled upon Homer's Polyphemus, he differs from his Homeric counterpart in ways that are significant to *Silvae* 4.2. The Odyssean Cyclops, though a man-eater, is a tidy sort in his way; he keeps his cave in splendid order, as Odysseus notes (*Odyssey* 9.217–23):

> ἐλθόντες δ' εἰς ἄντρον ἐθηεύμεσθα ἕκαστα·
> ταρσοὶ μὲν τυρῶν βρῖθον, στείνοντο δὲ σηκοὶ
> ἀρνῶν ἠδ' ἐρίφων· διακεκριμέναι δὲ ἕκασται
> ἔρχατο, χωρὶς μὲν πρόγονοι, χωρὶς δὲ μέτασσαι,
> χωρὶς δ' αὖθ' ἕρσαι· ναῖον δ' ὀρῷ ἄγγεα πάντα,
> γαυλοί τε σκαφίδες τε, τετυγμένα, τοῖς ἐνάμελγεν.
>
> We went inside the cave and admired everything inside it.
> Baskets were there, heavy with cheeses, and the pens crowded
> with lambs and kids. They had all been divided into separate
> groups, the firstlings in one place, and then the middle ones,
> the babies again by themselves. And all his vessels, milk pails
> and pans, that he used for milking into, were running over with whey.

Polyphemus is also a conversationalist. He talks to his unexpected guests, he talks to his fellow Cyclopes, and he even talks to his sheep, though he is no match in verbal skill for the punster Odysseus.[19]

Vergil's Cyclops is quite different. His cave is a bloody mess, nothing like the tidy, rustic cave of Homer's Cyclops, with its orderly sheep-pens

19 Braund 1996.40. She stresses the uncivilized nature of the Homeric Cyclops, but does not contrast him with his Vergilian counterpart, nor does she comment on the social interactions that are described among the Cyclopes in the *Odyssey*. What sets the Homeric Cyclopes apart from humanity more than anything, she says, is that they are "lone eaters."

and baskets for pressing cheese. Most important, Vergil's Cyclops never speaks—the verbal duel, all important in the *Odyssey*, is glaringly absent; in fact, in Achaemenides' account of the ordeal, there is no reported speech at all, not even any mention of speech. The only utterance of Polyphemus is the *clamorem immensum* he raises when he realizes his foes have escaped. Indeed, Vergil draws attention to the speechlessness of the Cyclops when he describes him as neither easy to look at nor easy to address: "nec visu facilis nec dictu adfabilis ulli." The lack of hospitality, the lack of any sign of craft in the dwelling, the absence of food, the inhumanly large scale of both the hall and the host, the impossibility of speaking to and difficulty of seeing the master of the house: all these characteristics of the Cyclops episode are echoed in *Silvae* 4.2.

SHALL I COMPARE THEE?

As Statius constructs it, the immensity—the enormity—of Domitian poses a logistical problem. The emperor is hard to get in focus, but one can try to approach him by analogy, like the team of blind men who attempt to describe an elephant, and that is what Statius does. As he struggles to convey the splendor of Domitian's serene majesty, he moves from metaphor to a multiple simile (4.2.40–56). First, we see Domitian "modestly lowering the banners of his fortune," an odd metaphor that Newlands takes as indicating that he is keeping a relatively low profile as he condescends to his guests at the banquet.[20] He is then compared in a complex simile to a series of heroes and gods who celebrate after conquering an enemy: Mars relaxing in Thrace, Pollux resting after a boxing match, Bacchus lying by the Ganges surrounded by ululating Indians, and Hercules resting on his lionskin. This multiple simile puts Domitian in august company: in *Aeneid* 6.801–05, the culmination and centerpiece of the parade of Roman heroes Anchises presents to Aeneas in the underworld, Octavian, fresh from his victory at Actium, is compared to Hercules and Bacchus.[21] Similarly, in *Odes*

20 Newlands 2002.275. As she points out, the use of military imagery to describe a convivial setting creates an ambivalent atmosphere.

21 I thank Elizabeth Klaassen for pointing out this set of allusions; she also notes Silius Italicus's use of the motif linking Domitian to triumphant gods: *Punica* 3.615 (Domitian compared to Bacchus triumphing); *Punica* 15.77–83 (Scipio compared to Hercules, Bacchus, the Dioscuri, and Quirinus); and, the final image of the epic, Scipio in triumph, compared to Bacchus, Hercules, and Quirinus at *Punica* 17.647–51. The *Aeneid* passage is as follows

3.3, Horace puts Augustus in the company of Pollux, Hercules, Bacchus, and Quirinus, and, in this passage, the setting is clearly sympotic: Augustus is reclining and drinking nectar with red-stained lips (*Odes* 3.3.9–16):

> Hac arte Pollux et uagus Hercules
> enisus arces attigit igneas,
> quos inter Augustus recumbens
> purpureo bibet ore nectar;
> hac te merentem, Bacche pater, tuae
> uexere tigres indocili iugum
> collo trahentes; hac Quirinus
> Martis equis Acheronta fugit . . .
>
> Through such skill, Pollux and wandering Hercules
> struggled and attained the fiery heights;
> reclining in their company, Augustus
> will drink nectar with a crimson mouth.
> For such skill, Father Bacchus, you
> deserve to be carried by tigers
> who pull at their harnesses
> with untamed necks; by such skill Quirinus,
> carried by the steeds of Mars, escaped Acheron.

The emperor Domitian relaxed at table is compared explicitly to the gods and implicitly to Augustus at his moment of greatest triumph. Statius's poem was composed two years after Domitian accepted an *ovatio* (not a triumph) for his victory in the Second Pannonian war; there is reason to believe, however, that the Danube region remained unsettled through the end of his reign.[22] Given Domitian's own preoccupation with his military image and the continuing Roman concern about the stability of the Danube region, it is not as surprising as it might seem at first to find the language of triumph attached to Domitian even in a poem about a convivial social occasion. Nevertheless, though militaristic language may well

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(6.801–05): "nec uero Alcides tantum telluris obiuit, / fixerit aeripedem ceruam licet, aut Erymanthi / pacarit nemora et Lernam tremefecerit arcu; / nec qui pampineis uictor iuga flectit habenis / Liber, agens celso Nysae de uertice tigris."

22 See Dusanic and Vasic 1977, Jones 1992.153–55.

be in keeping with Domitian's own self-image and imperial propaganda, an incongruity remains. As Newlands remarks: "Although Statius describes Domitian's expression as initially 'tranquil' (41), his appearance is such that barbarians would recognize him—hardly a relaxed demeanour for a banquet" (2002.275).

A parallel passage from the *Thebaid* offers another perspective on the multiple simile of 4.2. In *Thebaid* 8, in a wonderful example of the importance of point of view, Statius presents divergent reactions to the fate of the blameless Argive seer Amphiaraus, who meets an unexpected end when the earth gapes open and swallows him. The Argives react with Iliadic funeral rites and lamentations; his death undermines their belief in the justice of the gods. The Thebans, on the other hand, celebrate the death with a night of feasting and drinking. Wild music of cymbals, drums, and flutes fills the night, as rival groups of singers at different tables relate various aspects of the legend of Thebes (8.218–39):

> at non Sidoniam diversa in parte per urbem
> nox eadem: vario producunt sidera ludo
> ante domos intraque, ipsaeque ad moenia marcent
> excubiae; gemina aera sonant Idaeaque terga
> et moderata sonum vario spiramine buxus.
> tunc dulces superos atque omne ex ordine alumnum
> numen ubique sacri resonant paeanes, ubique
> serta coronatumque merum. nunc funera rident
> auguris ignari, contraque in tempore certant
> Tiresian laudare suum; nunc facta revolvunt
> maiorum veteresque canunt ab origine Thebas:
> hi mare Sidonium manibusque adtrita Tonantis
> cornua et ingenti sulcatum Nerea tauro,
> hi Cadmum lassamque bovem fetosque cruenti
> Martis agros, alii Tyriam reptantia saxa
> ad chelyn et duras animantem Amphiona cautes,
> hi gravidam Semelen, illi Cythereia laudant
> conubia et multa deductam lampade fratrum
> Harmoniam: nullis deest sua fabula mensis.
> *ceu modo gemmiferum thyrso populatus Hydaspen*
> *Eoasque domos nigri uexilla triumphi*
> *Liber et ignotos populis ostenderet Indos.*

> But in the Sidonian city, the night was not the same in different parts: they draw out the stars with different kinds of sport inside and outside their houses, and the very guards on the walls are drunk. Twin trumpets sound and the skin drums of Ida, and flutes that change their tune as the player varies his breathing. Then sacred hymns make every place resound with the sweet gods and every nurturing divinity, according to rank, and everywhere there were garlands and wreathed wine. Now they mock the death of the ignorant prophet, and respond in time with praise of their own Tiresias; now they go over again the deeds of their ancestors and sing of ancient Thebes from its origin. Some tell of the Sidonian sea and thundering Jupiter's horns worn away by the girl's hands, and Nereus furrowed by the huge bull, others of Cadmus and the exhausted cow and bloody Mars's fertile fields; others of stones that crawled at the sound of the Tyrian lyre and Amphion bringing hard rocks to life; some praise pregnant Semele, others the Cytherian wedding and Harmonia led home by many a brother's torch: no table is without a story, *as if Liber, having just devastated the gem-bearing Hydaspes and the houses of the East with his thyrsus, were displaying the banners of his black triumph and the unknown Indians to the peoples*.

At first glance, this wild scene looks nothing like Domitian's hierarchically structured feast, but a clear verbal echo suggests a link between the two passages. At 8.237–39, the feasting Thebans are compared to Bacchus subduing the Hydaspes—a river in India—and displaying to his people "the banners of his black triumph—*nigri vexilla triumphi*—and the unknown Indians." The language and imagery of this simile are repeated in 4.2: Domitian first modestly "lowers the banners of his fortune" *fortunae vexilla suae*, and then, buried in the analogy to multiple divinities, he is compared to Bacchus lounging by another famous Indian river, the Ganges, amid the "howling Indians."

Immediately following the simile comparing the Thebans to Bacchus feasting with the Indians, the feast is interrupted by the emergence of an unexpected figure (*Thebaid* 8.240–47):

> tunc primum ad coetus sociaeque ad foedera mensae
> semper inaspectum diraque in sede latentem
> Oedipoden exisse ferunt vultuque sereno
> canitiem nigram squalore et sordida fusis
> ora comis laxasse manu sociumque benignos
> adfatus et abacta prius solacia passum,
> quin hausisse dapes insiccatumque cruorem
> deiecisse genis. cunctos auditque refertque . . .
>
> Then they say that for the first time Oedipus, who always lurked unseen in his grim abode, came out into the crowds and entered the bond of a friendly banquet; with a serene countenance, he loosened the black muck from his white head and brushed his straggling hair from his dirty face, and tolerated his friends' kind words and their attempts to comfort him, which he had previously spurned. Indeed, they say he even devoured the feast and scraped the dried gore from his cheeks. He listens to and answers everyone . . .

Oedipus appears and takes on the duties of host despite his long absence from human company. It is clear from the language of the two passages that Oedipus and the Domitian of 4.2 have something in common. Statius echoes the line in which Oedipus is re-introduced to human society, "*tunc primum* ad coetus sociaeque ad foedera *mensae*," in his description of Domitian's allowing him to attend the imperial feast: "*nunc primum* dominamque dedit contingere *mensam* . . ." (4.2.6). Further, Domitian receives his guests "tranquillum *vultus* et maiestate *serena*," while Oedipus greets his companions *vultu* . . . *sereno*, "with a serene countenance." Up until this point, the blind king has been invisible as he lurked in his *dira sedes*, avoiding human company like the Cyclops of the *Aeneid*, but the sounds of the feast and the poetic performances draw him from his lair. Carried away by the festive occasion, he washes the filth from his hair, scrapes the dried gore from his cheeks, and joins in the conversation.

Before we learn who has emerged to play host, we have experienced the feast as Oedipus would have: through darkness, the noise of different instruments, and the competing songs whose subject is always the one he hears inside his head: the twists and turns of his family history, the vexed matter of Thebes. Other than a brief mention of wine crowned with

garlands, in fact, Statius describes *only* the music and the songs of the night-long revels. There is no mention of the servants, the linens, the lighting, the food, or the artwork. It is not even clear where the feast takes place. There is no single, gleaming, Domitian-like figure to draw all eyes; instead, in darkness, anonymous groups rival each other in song until the blinded king emerges from his self-imposed isolation. Statius's description focuses on a single sense rather than conjuring up the varied pleasures typical of feast scenes: the Theban feast evokes sound alone, its central figure the blind Oedipus, while Domitian's banquet privileges sight, its central figure the speechless but radiant emperor. Domitian's feast in *Silvae* 4.2, in short, is a peculiar inversion of the Theban revels of *Thebaid* 8.

HE'S . . . LIKE . . .

Statius concludes his list of analogies with a comparison of the emperor to Jupiter feasting among the Aethiopians (4.2.51–55):

> parva loquor, necdum aequo tuos, Germanice, †vultus:
> talis, ubi Oceani finem mensasque revisit
> Aethiopum sacro diffusus nectare vultus,
> dux superum secreta iubet dare carmina Musas
> et Pallenaeos Phoebumqe laudare triumphos.
>
> I speak of small things, and cannot do justice to your face, Germanicus:
> it is like when the leader of the gods, his face flushed
> with sacred nectar, visits once more the ends of the Ocean
> and the tables of the Aethiopians, and orders the Muses to sing their secret
> songs and Phoebus to celebrate the triumph of Pallene.

Hercules, Mars, Pollux, and Bacchus are minor gods, insufficient to Statius's needs in describing the majesty of the emperor. The list culminates with Jupiter. At last we have a fitting comparison, one that will help us—the audience not among the fortunate invited to the banquet—to "see" Domitian through Statius's eyes.

Or do we? What does it mean to compare Domitian to Jupiter feasting among the Ethiopians? In *Iliad* 1.423, the point of mentioning Zeus's

Ethiopian banquet is to make it clear that he is absent and unreachable: Thetis must wait twelve days for his return to make her plea on behalf of her son. Similarly, in *Odyssey* 1.22, Poseidon is off at the feast of the Ethiopians; it is his prolonged absence that gives Zeus and Athena the opportunity to plan the escape of Odysseus from Calypso's island and set the plot of the *Odyssey* in motion. To say that Domitian is like Jupiter dining with the Ethiopians is, certainly, to compare him to the king of the gods, but it is also to say that he is unavailable to describe. Statius's excited exclamations, his avowed delight at his proximity to the emperor, raise expectations of a close encounter with Domitian, but, as is the pattern of this poem, these expectations are never fulfilled. Instead of a close-up of Domitian, Statius provides an analogy to an icon of inaccessibility.

4.2 opens by evoking the world of epic hospitality in which exiled strangers are welcomed by a gracious monarch into a royal house filled with servants, food, artworks, wine, conversation, and song. But no sooner is this pattern of generous feasting evoked than it is undermined. As the poem progresses, the pattern of allusion suggests that it is not the poet who is insufficient but the occasion and, perhaps, the host. Domitian's feast is notable not for what it shares with the feasts of Dido and Alcinous, but for what it lacks: appeal to the senses, art, human interaction, music, conversation, and above all, poetic performance. At what seems to be a moment of epiphany—Statius's chance to gaze on the majestic figure of Domitian—the evocation of Aeneas's underworld encounter with his father suggests that the ultimate theme of this poem is frustration: like Aeneas and Statius, we readers find our expectations thwarted. Allusions to Dido and Alcinous at the opening of 4.2 set up a hopeful paradigm of abundance, hospitality, and freely exchanged speech, But the pattern of allusion in the rest of the poem—to Anchises, the Cyclops, and Oedipus—constructs a different set of expectations and offers a negative paradigm of sensory deprivation, absence, and silence.

The Domitian that emerges is quite in keeping with the Domitian described by Pliny—isolated, lurking in the shadows, and unapproachable (*Panegyricus* 48.3–6):

> Nec salutationes tuas fuga et vastitas sequitur. Remoramur, resistimus, ut in communi domo, quam nuper illa immanissima belua plurimo terrore munierat, cum velut quodam specu inclusa, nunc propinquorum sanguinem lamberet, nunc se ad clarissimorum civium strages caedesque

> proferret. Obversabantur foribus horror et minae et par metus admissis et exclusis: ad hoc ipse occursu quoque visuque terribilis: superbia in fronte, ira in oculis, femineus pallor in corpore, in ore impudentia multo rubore suffusa. Non adire quisquam, non adloqui audebat tenebras semper secretumque captantem,nec umquam ex solitudine sua prodeuntem, nisi ut solitudinem faceret.
>
> Nor do your greetings evoke flight and an empty room. We linger, we stay on as if the house belonged to us—the house which, only recently, that inhuman beast had fortified with every kind of terror, when, hidden away inside as if in a cave, he would now lick up the blood of his relatives, and then emerge to butcher and slaughter the best men of the state. Terror and threats kept watch at his door, and fear, which affected those who were admitted to his presence as much as those who were excluded. As if this weren't enough, he himself was dreadful to encounter and even to see: there was arrogance in his brow, wrath in his eyes; his body was as white as a woman's, but his scarlet face revealed his shamelessness. No one dared approach him or speak to him as he forever sought shadows and hiding, and he never came forth from his solitude unless it was to recreate it.

Indeed, the details Pliny adduces (the cave-like palace, cannibalism, the monster who lurks in the shadows, and the difficulty of either approaching or speaking to Domitian) are strikingly similar to the pattern of allusion and imagery Statius has crafted in *Silvae* 4.2—similar enough to raise the possibility that Pliny's description of Domitian as monstrous host in the *Panegyricus* took its particular shape as a result of his appreciation of the complex pattern of allusion that underlies Statius's ostensibly panegyrical praise of Domitian's hospitality in *Silvae* 4.2.

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