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INTRODUCTION: STATIUS'S *SILVAE* AND THE POETICS OF INTIMACY

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The *Silvae*, Statius's occasional poems, suffer from having been written under the emperor Domitian, long regarded as a tyrannical and paranoid ruler. Yet recent revisionary approaches to his reign have now opened the way to a fresh consideration of the *Silvae*.¹ In the past twenty years, critics with different methodological backgrounds have produced exciting new readings of some of the poems within the five books of the corpus.² Major commentaries on Books 2, 4, and 5, and on a single poem 1.1 have aided the readers of Statius's intricately structured and densely allusive compositions (and a commentary on the posthumously published Book 5 was published last year).³ Yet the *Silvae* still remain relatively unknown outside a specialist group of Flavian devotees. The present collection of essays is based on the premise that the *Silvae* are to be taken seriously as poetry as well as for their rich and deep range of cultural information.⁴ Indeed, a major impetus behind the poetics of the *Silvae* is self-conscious innovation. As a new

1 See Jones 1992, Saller 1990, Boyle and Dominik 2003, Flower 2006.

2 For instance, Hardie 1983, Ahl 1984b, Malamud 1995 and 2001, Henderson 1998, Coleman 1999, Newlands 2002 and 2003, Zeiner 2005, in addition to several articles in collective volumes on Flavian Poetry, such as Delarue, Georgacopoulou, Laurens, and Taisne 1996; Boyle and Dominik 2003; Nauta, Van Dam, and Smolenaars 2006.

3 Van Dam 1984, Coleman 1988, Pederzani 1995, Geyssen 1996, Gibson 2006a, Newlands (forthcoming: on *Silvae* 2). In addition to these commentaries, two new translations of the *Silvae* into English have been published in the last few years: Nagle in 2004 and the revision of the Loeb translation by Shackleton Bailey in 2003.

4 Most of the essays in this collection were presented in a colloquium organized by Carole Newlands in February 2004 at the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

form of poetry in Statius's day—indeed, they are unique in Roman literary history—the *Silvae* invite new critical approaches in ours.

The purpose of this special issue of *Arethusa* is two-fold: first, to introduce the *Silvae* to a broader critical readership. This journal is well known for revolutionizing classical studies. In 1992, the journal lent its pages to a special issue on Ovid's *Fasti*, at that time a rather neglected poem when compared to Ovid's more famous epic enterprise. A similar fate has plagued the *Silvae*: these poems have been rather obscured by Statius's epic *Thebaid*, a poem to which (and to whose completion) the lyric verses of the *Silvae* frequently allude. Thus, like the *Fasti*, the *Silvae* are mature works written at the same time as an epic and engaged in fruitful interchange with that epic's social and literary themes; they serve as a significant Roman counterpart to the mythological text. The second goal of this collection is to reveal the multifaceted world of the *Silvae* by exploring their relationship to Flavian society through a variety of critical approaches. The proclaimed occasionality of the *Silvae* often cloaks their cultured complexity.

The title given this collection connects the *Silvae* to their origins as gifts between poet and patron/friend in a social economy consolidated by gift exchange. In an attempt to redress the emphasis upon imperial politics in previous scholarship on the *Silvae*, many of the articles collected here concern social events and relationships involving friends and family, while the emperor Domitian features in cultural events such as a day at the games and an imperial banquet. Intimacy is thus a key to the self-fashioning of the poet of the *Silvae*, much as "learned madness" (*Pierius calor*) is to his persona in the *Thebaid*. Intimacy, however, is also a political strategy allowing Statius, an outsider from Naples, to claim a privileged place in Rome and advance his literary career through his social connections.

Through a variety of critical approaches, yet all cognizant of the important interaction between literary and social contexts, the writers in this collection explore the politics of the personal by examining a range of the *Silvae*; poems from all five books are discussed. One drawback of the variety of critical perspectives to be found in this volume is that the coherence of each book of the *Silvae* is necessarily overlooked; nonetheless, certain common preoccupations will be seen to run throughout all five books, and there are clear advantages to promoting the rich thematic eclecticism of this body of poetry. The flexibility of these new readings compares to the flexibility of the poet's stated intentions in the various prose prefaces that precede each book in which epigrammatic brevity and "heated fluency" alternate with epic gravity. Moreover, these prefaces not only announce the order in

which the poems are to be read but also fashion an ideal reader, one whose attention can be deflected from the apparent artificiality and “occasional” lightness of the poems under discussion towards a deeper consciousness, promoted by the poet, of socio-cultural concerns.

To be sure, the *Silvae* have always attracted some attention as historical or social documents. Yet the articles in this volume also treat the *Silvae* seriously as poetry. In general, the rich intertextuality of Statius’s poetry has not been sufficiently appreciated, for the poet is often dismissed as a rather unreflective follower of Vergil. Several of the articles that follow demonstrate the sophisticated engagement of the *Silvae* with the broad sweep of Roman literature, including Cicero, Horace, Ovid, and Lucan, as well as Vergil. The poetry consciously innovates with theme, approach, and genre, while looking back in a creative, innovative engagement with the past. Through a diversity of topics: marriage, family relations, the politics of the amphitheater, and imperial dining, these essays explore the cultural poetics of the *Silvae*. As John Henderson comments, Statius is the poet of “interface,” inasmuch as Statius negotiates both with Roman literary history and with the complex Flavian world of personal and public politics.

Many of the articles here examine the relationship between the writing of poetry and contemporary patronage. David Wray takes his stance from Statius’s title, arguing that the enigmatic *Silvae* should not be understood to suggest a rough and somewhat trivial collection of poetry; for one thing, such an interpretation does not fit with the poems’ function as special gifts to patrons. He explores the various meanings and assumptions attached to this provocative title, and argues that the full semantic range of “woods” points us to a more robust notion of poetic value than has been generally accepted. Drawing on the poems and prefaces of the *Silvae*, he argues that, while the “painterly” constitutes one important aspect of Statius’s aesthetic theory, another fundamental aspect, subsumed under the concept of *ingenium*, is the absence of a sharply drawn division between art and nature. *Ingenium* is a favorite word of Statius in the *Silvae*, meaning both innate aptness to be worked and innate aptitude. No less than “woods,” *ingenium* defines the collection as works of genius, written with brilliant speed. The concepts of *silvae* and *ingenium* come together in *Silvae* 2.3, which Wray reads as an allegory of the virtuosity of Statius’s poetics—of the craft of writing poetry and of the genius that makes it endure. The *Silvae* were valuable artifacts circulating within a gift economy of friendship and patronage; they were destined to shed renown on the recipient as well as upon the poet. Wray’s interpretation of the semantic richness of Statius’s

title makes an important cultural-historical claim that challenges critical depreciation of its meaning.

Three articles, those of Henderson, Malamud, and Augoustakis, turn their attention to the issue of imperial patronage. The emperor Domitian was an active patron of the arts (see Coleman 1986); his institution of two great festivals of Greek-style games and literary competitions, the Capitoline and Albine, provided major venues for poets to gain imperial recognition writing on panegyric themes. Yet failure to win the top prize was bitter: Statius was awarded the Albine crown only once and was never awarded the Capitoline (*Silvae* 3.5.28–33, 4.2.62–67, 5.3.225–33). In a sense, these competitions institutionalized literary achievement, making it much more difficult to succeed without imperial approval. And apart from these competitions, Domitian, the ultimate source of literary patronage, was often absent from Rome on military campaigns. Statius has sometimes been wrongly seen as a poet firmly in Domitian's pocket. Although a few of the *Silvae* address Domitian (*Silvae* 1.1, 1.6, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3), the majority of the poems address private friends and patrons, and all the poetry books are dedicated to them, not to the emperor. The men and women addressed in the *Silvae* were wealthy, many of them elderly, but few held important political positions at court.⁵ Statius had no Maecenas giving him direct access to official channels of power (and protection from them). Thus the *Silvae* express a complex relationship both with the emperor and with the very endeavor of writing poetry in an age when opportunities for the poet to assume a meaningful public role were few.

The distance between Statius and the emperor is reflected in the structure of the *Silvae*. The *Silvae* begin with a poem praising Domitian through his equestrian statue. Yet, as Henderson argues in his paper, the final poem of Book 3 (and of the first published collection of the *Silvae*), an epistle to Statius's wife, forms a pointed conclusion to the narrative progression of the *Silvae* by returning Statius from Rome to the quiet of his homeland of Naples and his Epicurean patron Pollius Felix. Themes involving Naples, retirement, marriage, and children frame Book 3, dedicated to Pollius. Henderson explores the fruitful ground of *Silvae* 3.5 in search of Statius's engagement with and against Flavian propaganda on family and

5 On Statius's addressees, see White 1975. Statius's two most important patrons, Atedius Melior, the dedicatee of Book 2 and recipient of three poems, and Pollius Felix, the dedicatee of Book 3 and recipient of two poems, were both elderly and retired.

marriage. By tracing back to Cicero, Ovid, and Lucan what Henderson calls “Statian uxoriousness,” the essay looks at how Statius seizes the moment to present a picture of the complicated composition of his domestic ménage. It is Statius’s wife Claudia who provides the main focus for Statius’s justification for leaving Rome, though he is still in search of legitimacy as a poet. Statius shows his mastery of “the encomiastic control mechanism.” As a mother seeking a husband for her daughter at Rome and as the wife of a literary exile, Claudia is endowed with challenging literary legacies, that of Cicero’s Terentia and Ovid’s wife, while the literary models of Lucan’s wives also come into play. The physical distance between husband and wife, between Rome and Naples, in 3.5 is projected onto sociological and political differences; moreover, the uncertain situation of Statius’s wife—will she, won’t she, join me in Naples?—positions Statius and his poetry on the cusp of withdrawal or engagement, in partial anticipation of the incandescent imperial panegyrics of Book 4. Despite its epistolary form, *Silvae* 3.5 seems not to represent a genuine personal exchange between husband and wife; rather, the poem is pivotal in the shaping of Statius’s aesthetic self.

In her investigation of one of these panegyrics, Martha Malamud refuses to start from the all-too-common premise that the purpose of the imperial *Silvae* is praise, flattery, or even self-advancement. Rather, she shows how a series of related allusions to epic poetry cast an ambivalent light upon Domitian as host and, by extension, patron. The description of the imperial banquet to which Statius was invited after a long period of imperial neglect is modeled on the famous epic feasts of Alcinous and Dido. Yet, in contrast to these feasts, at Domitian’s court there is no exchange of words, no storytelling, no songs; only the power of sight is engaged, and the eye of the poet (who is one among a thousand invited and thus hardly a guest of honor) strains to absorb the grandeur of its surroundings even as the poem reveals the challenge of writing imperial panegyric. The resort to analogy between man and god proves slippery ground; far from revealing any intimacy between Statius and Domitian, 4.2 constructs the emperor as a disturbing icon of inaccessibility. Allusions to his own *Thebaid* and past success at the Alban festival (but not the more important Capitoline) remind the reader of Statius’s literary pre-eminence; although Statius is back in Rome for the imperial banquet, the invitation is represented as cosmetic diplomacy. Whether the poet is in Rome or in Naples, the symbolic distance between him and the emperor remains.

In a similar fashion, Antony Augoustakis considers how Statius’s poem on the death of a tame lion in the amphitheater and in the presence of

the emperor uses encomium as a flexible and critical medium. The poem is presented as a consolation to Domitian for the loss of a favorite lion mortally wounded by a fellow performing animal that acted out of turn. Yet, though a mere thirty lines long, the poem uses the accident to reflect uneasily on the domesticated and acculturated natural world and that of the imperial court. Here again the *Thebaid* proves an important parallel. In a rewriting of and commentary on his own epic, Statius identifies the conflict between nature and humans with civil war and suggests the ease with which civilization can slip into unscripted violence. The power of anger within the “domesticated” lion fortifies the animal with the strength to strike back against its attacker and display its brutality in full form, thus laying bare both its innate violence and the ultimate futility of its acculturation. Augoustakis locates the bitter undertone in this short, epigrammatic poem that asserts the poet’s own leonine authority by hinting at the thinness of the imperial veneer of power and “civilization.”

A different, more positive view of Domitian and his times is suggested by Noelle Zeiner-Carmichael, Karen Hersch, and Neil Bernstein, who explore how certain of the *Silvae* investigate and promote cultural norms. In her essay, Zeiner-Carmichael turns her attention to the women who occupy a prominent position in Statius’s *Silvae*, as well as in the *Thebaid*. These women serve ultimately to reinforce “distinction”—that is, symbolic capital—for Statius’s male addressees. At the same time, they are not mere ciphers. In her discussion of *Silvae* 1.2 and 5.1, the first a poem celebrating a marriage, the second a poem consoling a husband for his wife’s death, Zeiner-Carmichael shows how Statius creates individualized portraits of women that are shaped by literary as well as social necessities. Thus, in 1.2, a poem addressed to the elegiac poet Stella, Violentilla is both idealized wife and idealized *domina*. Praise of female virtues such as chastity and *pietas* conforms to the new morality of imperial legislation, underlining its value. Domitian, after all, remained married to his wife despite charges of her infidelity and despite her childlessness. The virtues of the women of the *Silvae* thus add luster to their men. Yet Zeiner-Carmichael’s essay is also an important reminder of how incomplete our knowledge remains of the social, political, and literary circumstances of Statius’s poetic composition. The husband of Priscilla praised in 5.1 very possibly was in danger of losing his position as imperial secretary at the time of composition; the tantalizing question therefore remains as to whether the poem served a political purpose, its reinforcement of cultural norms such as enduring marriage a device to protect Abascantus as much as console him.

In her examination of *Silvae* 1.2, Karen Hersch discusses the “costumes” that the bride Violentilla wears in the epithalamium, as Statius reinvents her chiefly as a young Medea, the virgin who has not yet yielded to the yoke of love. The poem, perhaps the most influential of all the *Silvae* in terms of the future development of the epithalamium, reflects both actual Roman social practice and the literary preoccupations of Statius and his poet friend Stella. While elegiac parallels are commonly adduced for this poem, Hersch reveals how Statius provided an important precedent for later epithalamia by expanding the genre’s rhetoric with epic *topoi*, creating a novel epithalamium of epic scope. In particular, Apollonius’s *Argonautica* is an important intertext for 1.2. Hersch argues that Violentilla is bound to be tamed under the yoke of Rome, just as the power of Aphrodite brings Medea to live among civilized Greeks in Apollonius’s epic. Hersch shows how Statius encourages a selective reading of mythical narrative. While the poet avoids the pitfalls and dangerous turns of the Greek myth, such as the end of Jason and Medea’s marriage, what we see by the last lines of the poem is Violentilla’s transformation from recalcitrant widow to subdued and virginal, Romanized, bride. A culture of intimacy, moreover, endorses such a bold rewriting of myth. As friend and fellow poet, the poem’s recipient Stella, so Hersch surmises, would appreciate the wit of his association with one of myth’s most glamorous if dangerous couples. As Bernstein also comments, Statius often rewrites myth in the *Silvae* in a way that redirects the narrative towards more positive conclusions—a strategy that can, depending on context, reinforce or undermine cultural norms.

In his paper, Neil Bernstein also shows how the *Silvae* are profoundly shaped by epic precedent, including Statius’s own *Thebaid*. In *Silvae* 5.2, one of Statius’s most difficult poems in that a family crime lies at its center (the young man praised, Crispinus, was the victim of an attempted poisoning by his mother), epic models underline the *pietas* of the young Crispinus and his ancestors, as well as that of Domitian. Indeed, recollection of the failure of Pietas in the *Thebaid* emphasizes by contrast the success of Crispinus and his emperor in containing and rightly punishing family crime. Here portrayed outside the frustrating realm of literary patronage, Domitian appears as a severe but just judge—a cautionary reminder that each poem should be approached on its own terms, without the prior assumption that Statius was a flatterer or Domitian a paranoid tyrant. A common theme of the *Silvae*, however, remains the importance of the *Thebaid*, which emerges in the *Silvae* as Statius’s continuing inspiration and the measure of his literary success. The *Silvae*, after all, begin by reminding the reader that Statius

is the author of the *Thebaid* (*praef.* 1.6–7). As Augoustakis mentions, the *Silvae* are involved in a constant rewriting and re-examination of the *Thebaid*. The evocation of the epic throughout the *Silvae* arguably serves as a troubling reminder of other possible directions and outcomes for civil societies that fail to sustain the bonds of social and political intimacy.

Despite the diversity of their approaches to the representation of Flavian society in Statius's poetry, all these articles reveal how crucial epic is to Statius's shaping of his aesthetic self in the *Silvae*. The politics of intimacy require a deference, even a self-depreciation, that the epic voice belies. Helen Lovatt's article examines this tension within the poetics of the *Silvae* by focusing on the recurrent image of the poet Orpheus and the accompanying iteration of the term *vates*. Lovatt challenges J. K. Newman's coda to his 1967 study of the *vates* that declared that the concept of the poet/prophet was devoid of any serious meaning for poets after the Augustan age. On the contrary, Statius, who uses *uates* six times of himself in the *Silvae*, sought to articulate a public role for contemporary poetry and, at the same time, to show how such a role was necessarily limited and compromised by altered political circumstances. The figure of the archetypal poet Orpheus, who appears throughout the *Silvae*, provides a key focus for the complex definition of the post-Augustan poet in Flavian culture. Statius's Orpheus is characterized not only by inspired song but also by loss and by silence; bereaved husband as well as brilliant musician, he straddles both the public and private worlds and thus is an appropriate figure for the Statius of the *Silvae*, an ambitious poet of both lament and political comment. And, as Lovatt argues, Orpheus as he appears in the *Silvae* is also a highly ambivalent figure, an emblem of both the power of poetry and its powerlessness in an age of restricted patronage and limited political expression.

Flavian poetry has already found partial redemption in many new studies of various authors, from Martial to Pliny and from Silius Italicus to Valerius Flaccus and Statius.⁶ The densely allusive, highly stylized texture of the *Silvae*, which made them precious artifacts in an economy of gift exchange, has, however, deterred many modern readers. Yet, in the *Silvae*, Statius offers his audience the privileges of intimacy, allowing them access to a social world often unfamiliar to students of Roman poetry: a world of marriages, births and deaths, and of literary failures and successes—trivial

6 For instance, see Hershkowitz 1998, Lovatt 2005, Marks 2005, McNelis 2007, Ganiban 2007, Augoustakis (forthcoming).

events to some, perhaps, but to others the stuff of life itself. The intimate second-person address urges the reader to enter the text, while the richly allusive character of the poetry offers the possibility of multiple readings. But the ultimate goal of the papers in this volume is not to bring Statius's *Silvae* back to a canonical curriculum of Latin literature—desirable though that may be—but rather to renegotiate the ways we look at these poems: not so much as sources to be mined for their learned and elaborate tropes of allusion, as a richly articulated reflection of his cultural anxieties and preoccupations. Therefore, as the Afterword by Charles McNelis suggests, the present collection represents the beginnings of a conversation on the diachronic value of Statius's *Silvae* and their *Nachleben*, as we gaze upon the *Silvae* with eyes intent upon the various modes of allusion but also turned to the transformation of Rome from a Julio-Claudian city into a Flavian cosmopolis.⁷

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