WOOD: STATIUS'S *SILVAE* AND THE POETICS OF GENIUS

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Why did he call them "woods"? If any question about Statius's *Silvae* can be called hotly debated, it is this one, the meaning of their title. David Bright devoted the longest chapter of a monograph on the poems to a compendious trawl through the semantic range of the Latin word *silva* "to pick up connotations applicable to Statius' usage" (Bright 1980.22). Successors to the problem have striven for less polysemy and more precision and, in so doing, have kept the question open.[1] One reason for its continued airing, of course, is that commentators and translators generally feel obliged to mention an interpretative problem about their text's title.[2] But others have offered contributions to the discussion as well, and among these an essay of Fernand Delarue stands out for more reasons than its erudition. In his opening paragraph, Delarue confidently asserts that, given the character of Statius's poetry and the things he tells us about his own poetics, "un fait est sûr: il ne peut s'agir d'un titre banal et prosaïque" (Delarue 1996.283).

This is a stronger claim than it might first seem, and a more important one. It presupposes a robust notion of poetic value that some classicists may want to resist, if not in the name of a doctrinaire mistrust of the aesthetic as an elitist category per se, then as a reflex of an older model of philological training that bracketed and ignored all merely "belletristic" questions. In what follows, I will be arguing against Delarue, in the sense

1 Van Dam 1986.2748 complains of Bright's too catholic approach.

2 Recent examples include Coleman 1988.xxii–iv, Shackleton Bailey 2003.5–6, and Nagle 2004.4–5.

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that I make a case for reading Statius's title in a way that he rejects. But I wish to affirm at the outset my agreement with his implicit axiom: taking Statius's *Silvae* seriously involves taking them seriously as poetry, and not exclusively as historical, cultural, or political documents. The interpretation offered here is in some measure speculative—by necessity, since Statius never explains his title—but it can claim the merit of making a plausible fit not only with external linguistic and literary considerations but also with Statius's own practice, and inferable theories, of poetry.[3]

I begin with some word study. The semantic nexus of Latin *silva* includes figured meanings as well as simple, literal ones. It can mean wood, or woods, in the literal sense of "forest." And it can mean wood in the figural sense of "matter" or "material," like the extended sense of Greek ὕλη. Definitional distinctions of this kind cry out for deconstruction if kept hard and fast, but a permeable version of this one allows us to frame an opening pair of questions. Question One: does the title *Silvae* attribute to Statius's poetic collections a quality of literal *woodsiness* that makes them somehow qualitatively comparable to forests, groves, or (Delarue's choice) the kind of pleasure garden or park called παράδεισος in Greek? Question Two: does their title attribute to the *Silvae* a quality of figurative *woodiness*, that is, something of the materiality or "stuffness" instanced by the building materials ("wood" in this extended sense can stand for marble, gold, clay, and so on) out of which artisans make artifacts?

Clearly the two interpretations envisaged by this pair of questions are not mutually exclusive, and most readers will agree with Delarue that the answer to Question One more or less has to be yes. Just as a French poem book titled *Sources* (Delarue's example) would make me think at once of literal fountains or springs of running water, even if it turned out to be, say, a poetic meditation on the kinds of literary sources now regularly called intertexts, so likewise the inscription *Silvae* or *Silvarum liber* on a bookroll's *titulus* will have made an ancient reader think at once of literal groups of trees, doubtless also of the long Greco-Roman poetic tradition of depicting them, and, perhaps especially, of the tradition of depicting them in pastoral poems.[4] If we next ask just how a poem book can be like a forest

3 Statius does, however, guarantee his title by referring in a preface to *tertius hic Silvarum nostrarum liber* ("this third book of my *Silvae*," *praef.* 3.7).

4 More could be said on this point if we knew anything about the *Silvae* of Lucan, Statius's predecessor and friend. In any case, a poem book called *Silvarum liber* will have put at least some ancient readers instantly in mind of Virgil's first and fourth *Bucolics*, where

(in some more interesting way than by having lots of silvan imagery in it), then the suggestion of "variety-in-unity" entertained by Alex Hardie 1983.76 among others—in the sense of a poetry collection characterized by thematic diversity as well as an overarching structural or formal unity—seems fair enough, poetically suggestive enough, and as good a suggestion as any, and so much for Question One.[5]

Question Two, about material woodiness as opposed to silvan woodsiness, is more complicated. Statian scholars have for the most part accepted "material," on the model of Greek ὕλη, as at least one of the meanings conveyed by the title *Silvae*, but only in the specialized sense of a rhetorical term of art for an unpolished rough draft. Among the Latin prose usages most often cited for this technical usage are Cicero's mention (*de Inv.* 1.34) of a "*silva*, i.e., *materia*, of all types of argument" ("silvam atque materiam . . . omnium argumentationum"), and the following passage from Quintilian (10.3.17):

> diversum est eorum vitium, qui primum decurrere per materiam stilo quam *velocissimo* volunt, et sequentes *calorem* atque impetum extempore scribunt: hanc *silvam* vocant; repetunt deinde et componunt quae *effuderant*.
>
> A different mistake is made by those who choose first to run through their material with the *hastiest* of pens and, following their own *heat* and impetus, write extempore: this they call a *silva*; they then go back and structure what they have *effused*.

The evidence seems on its face decisive. Quintilian's thermodynamic and hydraulic metaphors of rapidly dashed-off verbal production so closely resemble Statius's prefatory characterization of his own poetic practice in the *Silvae* (*praef.* 1.1–5)—

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silvae feature programmatically as subjects of song in two separate ways: first, by being "singing" (i.e., echoing) trees (at *Ecl.* 1.5: "formosam resonare doces Amaryllida silvas"), and later by being what the poet sings (at *Ecl*. 4.3: "si canimus silvas, silvae sint consule dignae"). On the *Silvae* and pastoral poetry, see Newlands 2002.36–38.

5 For a discussion of structural unity (through artful arrangement) in Books 1 and 3, see Newlands 2002.222–26.

> Diu multumque dubitavi, Stella, iuvenis optime et in studiis nostris eminentissime, qua parte [et] voluisti, an hos libellos, qui mihi subito *calore* et quadam *festinandi* voluptate *fluxerunt*, cum singuli de sinu meo prodi<erint>, congregatos ipse dimitterem.
>
> Much and long have I hesitated, my excellent Stella, distinguished as you are in your chosen area of our pursuits, whether I should assemble these little pieces, which *streamed* from my pen in the *heat* of the moment, a sort of pleasurable *haste*, emerging from my bosom one by one, and send them out myself.[6]

—that any attempt to insulate Statius's title entirely from the hyletic sense of the Latin word *silva* risks having to answer the charge of special pleading.

Delarue clearly recognizes the risk but is willing to take it, and with reason. Proponents of *silva* as "material" have managed to make Statius's use of it sound like a poetaster's glum admission of utter artistic incompetence, as though he already knew what all those nineteenth- and twentieth-century handbooks were going to say about him. Stephen Newmyer offers an extreme example of this view, glossing *silva* as "a raw type of composition, unpolished in manner and disordered in content" (1979.5) and taking Statius's use of it as a self-deprecating swipe at his own poems.[7] Newmyer does, however, admit, alongside the hyletic meaning of "raw material of composition," the silvan connotation of "variety of subject matter."

In fact, Newmyer turns out to be a warmly sympathetic reader of the *Silvae*. Finding genuine artistry in both the structure of whole poem books and the verbal texture of individual poems, he even notes that "in the *Silvae*, poetry is regularly seen as a labor, difficult but rewarding, a *dulce periculum* (*Silvae* 4.5.25), the successful pursuit of which requires the advice and active involvement of friends" (Newmyer 1979.81). All the more cause for discomfort at taking *Silvae* to mean something like "formal disasters,"

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6 All text and, except where noted, all translations of the *Silvae* are from D. R. Shackleton Bailey's 2003 Loeb edition. Translations of other authors are my own.

7 Newmyer 1979.3: "The characterization which Statius attached to his work by that title has led to the common estimation of his *Silvae* as compositions of slight inspiration, slipshod workmanship, and hackneyed content."

even after Newmyer has invoked "a commonplace prevalent in Roman poetry whereby an author makes light of the effort which he has put into his compositions and accordingly minimizes their value."[8] And while I remain unconvinced by Delarue's hardworking philological arguments against the evidence of Quintilian (brushed aside as merely an instance of prosy rhetorical jargon) and Cicero (whose metaphorical uses of *silva* as "material" are successfully shown always to contain some "présence des idées d'étendue et de complexité, liées à l'image latente de la forêt"—but this only shows that Cicero, here as usual, still feels vividly the literal force of a word when he uses it figuratively), I think Delarue puts his finger on the place where the discomfort becomes simply unbearable. Graver considerations are at stake than those of a poet's real or feigned personal modesty.

Statius, like Martial, first presented individual completed poems to individual dedicatee-recipients and only subsequently collected them into volumes for publication (White 1974). Poetic artifacts circulated as items of exchange in a gift economy of patronage, and the publicly perceived excellence of a dedicated poem thus redounded to the prestige of the recipient it addressed by name. This significant cultural historical point presses very hard on the notion that Statius could have publicly so discounted the value of his poems—gifts by which he had privately honored a set of actual or potential friends, including the emperor himself—as to name them raw and unpolished.[9]

But if this consideration successfully convinces us that taking *silva* as unpolished "raw material" makes Statius an intolerably harsh depreciator of his own poems, it leaves us worse off than ever. For it still remains that Statius's description of his own poetic process as rapid, hot, and flowing (possibly a metallurgical complex of images, and one that a reader of the first book of the *Silvae* very soon re-encounters, now literalized, in the first poem's opening verses on the manufacture of Domitian's equestrian statue) is altogether too close to Quintilian's description of the rhetorician's *silva* to

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8 Newmyer 1979.8. As Delarue 1996.288 remarks, the comparison is not entirely on point. Catullus, for example, does call his poems *nugae* ("trifles") in poem 1, but only a very superficial reader of that poem comes away thinking that Catullus has minimized the value of his own poetic productions.

9 Delarue 1996.288, for all his arch irony on this point, hardly overstates the case: "On se demande . . . comment celui qui a déjà reçu un poème réagirait en le voyant publié sous un titre qui en minimise à ce point la valeur. Stella, *poeta doctus*, apprécierait-il de voir ainsi rabaissé son épithalame? Et Domitien lui-même, le *sacratissimus imperator*, se satisferait-il de pièces au rabais?"

be easily explained away. The interpretation Delarue wants to exclude thus looks not only unacceptable but also, and in equal measure, unavoidable.

The way out of this squeeze, I think, lies in a fuller understanding of the semantic and connotative range that the Greek word ὕλη could possess for a fully bilingual and bicultural Greco-Roman poet like the Neapolitan Statius. I want to suggest that reading a hyletic sense into the title *Silvae*, so far from banalizing or devaluing Statius's poems, can actually open a window into his poetics.

The Latin word *silva*, when it means "material," stands in an interesting relation to the Greek language on more counts than one. First, it is a semantic calque on a Greek philosophical technical term that seems to owe its coinage to Aristotle.[10] By "semantic calque" I mean a four-corner process by which an ordinary native word gets endowed with an extended technical or otherwise figured sense borrowed from a foreign language. The calquing process starts with (1) the foreign figural sense, drops down to (2) the foreign simple sense, translates that simple sense into (3) its native equivalent, and thereby expands the native word's semantic range out into (4) a newly acquired figural sense.[11] Among the subsequent overall linguistic effects of semantic calque is a certain loss of lexical innocence with regard to the native word in its primary sense. Sophisticated speakers of the target language will now make and listen out for wordplay on the disjunctive semantic gap between an inherited simple sense and an acquired technical sense.

The process by which Latin *silva* comes to mean "material" is actually more complex than that, and more interesting. *Silva* represents an alternative or "doublet" calque, one that owes its existence to the happy accident that Greek ὕλη, like French *bois* and English "wood," possesses two distinguishable (albeit related) primary meanings, both of them old enough to be attested in Homer. ὕλη is "wood" in the sense of timber, as when the Trojans "gathered measureless store of wood" (ἀγίνεον ἄσπετον ὕλην, *Il.* 24.784) for Hector's funeral pyre. Obviously it was this sense that enabled Aristotle's cooption of ὕλη into his hylomorphist physics as a technical

10 In the general sense of "stuff," the word is already Homeric (e.g., *Od.* 5.257), but as a philosophical term of art meaning "matter," as opposed to "form," ὕλη is first attested in Aristotle (*LSJ* s.v. III 2), whose definitions of it include "that from which something comes into being" (τὸ δ' ἐξ οὗ γίγνεται, *Metaph.* 1032a17).

11 I use the term "calque" in an extended sense. Most linguists would call the process described here an instance of "code-shifting."

term for what English calls "matter." No less obviously, the most natural choice in the Latin lexicon for calquing on that technical sense was *materia* ("[fire]wood"), by a version of the four-corner calquing process that passed from (1) ὕλη-"matter," down to (2) ὕλη-"wood," across to (3) *materia*-"wood," and back up to (4) *materia*-"matter." But ὕλη has another simple meaning as well, namely that of "wood" (singular, like Bois de Boulogne and Birnham wood) in the sense of forest, as when Eumaeus remembers how the young Odysseus hunted so well that no beast "could escape him in the depths of the deep wood" (φύγεσκε βαθείης βένθεσιν ὕλης, *Od.* 17.316). Latin, unlike French and English, evidently had no single word whose primary meaning encompassed both primary senses of Greek ὕλη. And Latin speakers at some point evidently took advantage of that fact in order to promote the word *silva* into a (logically if not temporally) secondary calque on the hyletic technical sense of the Greek word, by a four-corner process exactly parallel to the one that produced *materia*.

What motivated the doublet calque that endowed the Latin word *silva* with a figurative meaning already adequately covered by the word *materia*? Mere exuberant linguistic play?[12] If so, then one wants to point out, very sensibly and a little impatiently, that wooden artifacts are so called in Aristotle's hylomorphism because they are made from wood of the woody not the woodsy variety. Tables and chairs are made from cut timber, not from trees standing in a forest. But does this apparently sensible view really do justice to ancient hylomorphism as theorized by Aristotle and as vernacularized in Greco-Roman culture? More to the present point, is this view adequate to the ancient poetic theories that, beginning in the fifth century B.C.E. when composers of songs first began to be called "makers" (ποιηταί) and continuing through Hellenistic and Roman times, conceptualized and described the poetic process as a species of artisanal manufacture (Ford 2002.131–57)?

As a first line of response, we may note that Statius's predecessors in Latin poetry, at least, did, in fact, sometimes implicitly take the forest, not just the felled timber, as the "material cause" and "proximate matter" of a wooden artifact. Catullus's *phaselus* (poem 4.11) had started out life as a *comata silva* (probably a single "tree tressed with leaves"). More significantly, when Cybele in the ninth book of the *Aeneid* comes before Jupiter to plead for immortality on behalf of Aeneas's ships, she betters their cause

12 The earliest attested use of *silva* in the hyletic sense appears in Plautus (*Mil.* 1154).

by describing them figuratively as a "pine forest" (*pinea silva*, 9.85), thus referencing the prior state (or is it the presently underlying state?) of their origin in matter. Virgil's Jupiter does ultimately grant Cybele's request, but not before he has demonstrated in argument that he knows his hylomorphist physics too well to be taken in by the kind of semantic slippage that attaches predicates (like, say, putting out leafy shoots or being the visible form of a nymph) to a thing merely on the grounds that they were predicates of the thing's material origin. He opens his response to Cybele by insisting on describing the ships literally as composite artifacts "made by mortal hand" (*mortali . . . manu factae*, 9.95). In a characteristic stroke of bilingual erudition, Virgil thus brings out the hyletic resonance of *silva* in the context of Cybele's utterance by making Jupiter draw something like the Aristotelian distinction between things that are "wood" (the artifacts of nature called "trees") and things that are "wooden" (artifacts of human manufacture like tables, beds, and ships).[13]

Second and more generally, I submit that what some modern ears have heard as unpoetic and therefore inappropriate or derogatory in a hyletic construction of the title *Silvae* lies chiefly in the "bruteness" and "rawness" of *matière brute*/"raw materials." And the attribution of those qualities to matter *simpliciter* belongs to a way of thinking and speaking that reflects industrialized modes of production (and aesthetic theories) specific to modernity. For ancient artists and thinkers, conversely, and for some modern ones as well, matter for the working is never formless and void before the artisan puts a hand to it, nor does a material's preexisting form ever get fully canceled or evacuated by the artistic process (more on this later).

Third and finally, the figurative range of Greek ὕλη broadened considerably after Aristotle's time to include the meaning "subject matter," especially (though not exclusively) in the context of poetry. Polybius, in a geographical excursus, for example, dismisses the complex of stories centered around the fall of Phaeton as "that entire tragic ὕλη (singular) and its ilk" (πάσαν δὴ τὴν τραγικὴν καὶ ταύτῃ προσεοικυῖαν ὕλην, 2.16.14). And the author of the treatise *On the Sublime*, roughly contemporary with Statius, enlivens an account of Plato's relation to Homer with a striking syllepsis on two senses of ὕλη, one literal, the other figured on a specifically poetic tenor ([Longinus] *Subl.* 13.4):

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13 For this distinction, see Arist. *Metaph.* 1048b18–24. On Virgil's pervasive bilingual etymological wordplay and its Hellenistic precedents, see O'Hara 1996.

> καὶ οὐδ' ἂν ἐπακμάσαι μοι δοκεῖ τηλικαῦτά τινα τοῖς τῆς φιλοσοφίας δόγμασι καὶ εἰς ποιητικὰς ὕλας πολλαχοῦ συνεμβῆναι καὶ φράσεις, εἰ μὴ περὶ πρωτείων νὴ Δία παντὶ θυμῷ πρὸς Ὅμηρον . . . .
>
> And [Plato] would never have reared up such tall burgeonings among his philosophy's doctrines, would never have gone so often with Homer into poetry's "woods" and features of diction, had he not been—with all his spirit, by Zeus—in hot contention with him.

The "woods" in question are at once "material(s)" (in the sense of thematic as opposed to dictional features of poetic language) and also "forests" (by the organic metaphor applied to Plato's style and the image of Plato entering the woods with Homer).[14] This passage provides sufficient evidence that Hellenophone literary criticism around Statius's time (1) used ὕλη in at least some senses of what early modernity called *materia poetica* and (2) could find interest and pleasure in fretting the potential analogies between poetic kinds of materiality and the substance of trees growing in the woods.[15] As a bicultural poet and the son of a bicultural poet-professor,

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14 This is, perhaps, the place to answer a question raised by both of *Arethusa*'s anonymous readers: is it cause for concern that Statius's title is in the plural—*Silvae* or *Silvarum libri*—while my arguments (like those of my predecessors) are almost exclusively focused on *silva*/ὕλη in the singular? I think the question aims at a misplaced precision. As the two passages quoted above make clear, Greek ὕλη in its figurative sense was subject to a slippage between singular and plural comparable to that of English "material." Polybius can call a plurality of stories a (singular) ὕλη, while the author of *On the Sublime* can refer to a multiplicity of poetic themes as (plural) ὕλαι, just as English can describe the same pile of building supplies as either the (singular) "raw material" or (plural) "raw materials" for making a house. Add to this the fact that both plural nouns *silvae* and ὕλαι in their unfigured senses can refer ambiguously either to a single collective forest or to a plurality of individual trees (see the first section under the respective headwords in *OLD* and *LSJ*). Add further the fact that a collective plural noun as the title of a poem book always leaves open the question as to whether each poem is characterizable as a singular instance of what that noun names. Some early editors took it for granted that an occasional poem by Statius is a *Silva* (singular); recent editors are cautious, with reason, and as Shackleton Bailey 2003.6 points out: "One fancies that Max Müller did not refer to an item in *Chips from a German Workshop* as a chip."

15 It deserves passing mention that in George Chapman's 1611 English *Iliad* (Chapman 1984.497), the Trojans preparing Hector's pyre "Went forth, *and an unmeasur'd pile of Sylvane matter* cut" (ἄσπετον ὕλην, *Il.* 24.784). "Silvan matter" for Homer's plain "wood" reads the (presumably later) poetological sense of *materia poetica* back into the *Iliad*,

Statius will have been keenly attuned to these resonances of the Greek word and richly capable, if he chose, of making its Latin counterpart resonate in nuanced sympathy.[16]

Still, it might be objected at this point that we are no closer to rescuing *silva*-"material" for Statius's poetics, and thereby saving the appearance of his title, precisely because *silva*, even when it means "silvan matter," seems to describe, in the first instance, not material being worked but rather material in a state of nature, still untouched by any tool of art. Answering this objection, or rather showing why it turns out to be no objection at all, brings the argument in closer to what the *Silvae* actually tell us, implicitly and explicitly, about Statius's own poetics.

Speaking very broadly, if I describe a composite artifact by referencing only the "proximate matter" of which it is made, I am effectively ignoring, or at least downplaying, the informing craftwork that has effected the change from material into artifact. This way of speaking may, of course, be an insult to the manufacturer, as when I call a particular car a "heap" (of metal). But it may be something else altogether. For example, if I describe a plainly-wrought but beautiful marble-topped table as a fine slab of marble, I am not blaming the table's artisan, but inviting the listener (by the same figure that emboldened Virgil's Cybele to call ships "woods") to admire the native gorgeousness of its material. And as modern Statian scholars since Pavlovskis 1973.1–21 have remarked, the natural beauty of building material(s) is something Statius very often describes with relish. What is more, unlike Ovid's description of the palace of the Sun, Statius seldom if ever seems to feel obliged to apologize for lingering over fine stuffs by conceding, as Ovid did, that "the craftwork surpassed the material" (*materiam superabat opus*, *Met.* 2.5). Borrowing a pair of terms from modern art criticism, we might say that Statius often favors the "painterly" aspects of an artistic composition—those elements that highlight the sensuous values of its medium—over the "linear" aspects that highlight its formal design (Wölfflin 1950).

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and thereby makes the woodcutters' funereal handiwork into an allegory of the poem's closure. In making this remarkable critical (over)translation, Chapman probably had an eye on pseudo-Longinus. But he also had access to a long early modern tradition of silvan poetological allegory that included, for example, Angelo Poliziano's *Silvae*, a collection of treatises on poetics in Latin hexameters by the fifteenth-century scholar-poet who also produced a commentary on the *Silvae* of Statius (Cesarini Martinelli 1978, Fantazzi 2004).

16 On Statius's father and his intellectual and cultural context(s), see McNelis 2002.

Painterly art, in Heinrich Wölfflin's framing of the binarism, belongs to the baroque: a style that reacted to an older period of classicizing linearity by representing things and thoughts in states of dynamic motion and straining against their linear form, "manneristically" stretching that form, even jutting or oozing out of it. At the most general level, this combination of belatedness and spirited exuberance, together with a focus on the perceptible stuffness of artistic media, seems to make the term an apt characterization of Statius's poetics, one that Statius himself might conceivably have accepted. But if the "painterly" is one important aspect of Statius's aesthetic theory (as derivable from the poems and prefaces of the *Silvae*), another aspect, as fundamental to his conception of art as it is foreign to most modern thinking, is the absence of a sharply drawn division between art and nature, with a corollary willingness to describe the productions of nature in art critical terms. Art imitates nature, on this broadly Aristotelian view, not chiefly because artists make imitative representations of things in nature, but because when human artists make artifacts, they are doing something nature does as well (Halliwell 2002). So, for example, in enumerating the gaudy wonders of Manilius Vopiscus's Tiburtine villa in 1.3.34–37, Statius speaks of *picturata lucentia marmora vena* ("marble lucent with 'painted' vein"), in a list that starts with *auratas trabes* ("gilded beams") and ends with *emissas per cuncta cubilia nymphas* ("water-nymphs discharged through all the bedrooms"). Statius thus picks out the "painterly" quality of a marble surface as a work of nature's "art," and simultaneously puts nature's production exactly on a par with that of the other artisans—goldsmiths, engineers, carpenters—employed in the work of construction.

There is a highly sophisticated, arguably decadent, kind of art that appropriates for itself the beauties produced by nature by virtuosically showcasing them. It is by this kind of art that Vopiscus's villa has been built. Stretched across the river Anio, its walls on one side of the river enclose an ancient tree, apostrophized by Statius: "You rise through ceilings and doorways to emerge in the open" ("tecta per et postes liquidas emergis in auras," 1.3.60). The builder's art here, we might say, has turned the natural gestures traced by a tree and a river into effects of stunning artifice. This characteristic bit of Statian "mannerism" almost certainly reflects the aesthetic values of contemporary Italian villa culture.[17] At various points in the

17 On the aesthetic (as well as cultural and political) values attached to the imperial Roman villa, see, e.g., Wallace-Hadrill 1998 and Myers 2005.

Silvae, Statius does describe personified Nature as explicitly or implicitly *victa* ("vanquished") by human ingenuity, and he does thematize a contest between humans and nature.[18] But on the whole, I find that Statius makes that contest sound less like a grim struggle for mastery and more like a flashy talent show in which nature, when beaten, is bested by having its artwork incorporated into the design of a human artist.[19]

Sometimes, as in the introduction to the villa poem for Vopiscus, the contest looks like a tie. Or rather, it looks more like a collaboration than a contest (1.3.13–19):

> O longum memorata dies! quae mente reporto
> gaudia, quam lassos per tot miracula visus!
> *ingenium* quam mite solo, quae *forma* beatis
> ante manus artemque locis! non largius usquam
> indulsit Natura sibi. nemora alta citatis
> incubuere vadis; fallax responsat imago
> frondibus et longas eadem fugit umbra per undas.
>
> Day long to be remembered! What joy does my mind bring back, what weariness of vision amid so many marvels! How gentle the *nature* of the ground! What *beauty* in the blessed spot before art's handiwork! Nowhere has Nature indulged herself more lavishly. Tall woods brooded over rapid waters. A deceptive image answers the foliage and the reflexion flows unchanging in the lengthening stream.

Alongside the broodingly chiaroscuro scene-painting in these verses, and the vaguely hinted allusions to poets like Catullus and Virgil, I think we can read a remarkably strong aesthetic statement in the subtly interlocked figures of speech and thought beginning with the word *ingenium*. Not a very poetic word, *ingenium* is favored by Statius with no fewer

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18 At 2.2.52–54, e.g., nature is vanquished where it has not yielded to Pollius Felix's developer. And again, at 1.2.156–57, the climate control system of Violentilla's house prevents nature from keeping its own seasonal times (*vices*).

19 Pavlovskis 1973.7 characterizes the locales praised by Statius as settings "in which nature is no longer natural but changed into something artificial and artistic." But nature, too, is an *artifex* for Statius, as the passage discussed in the next paragraph shows.

than twelve uses in the *Silvae*. Virgil has it thrice in the *Georgics*, and one of those instances (*Geo.* 2.177) gives Statius his precedent for applying it to the natural character of a stretch of ground. But with the next verse's *artem*, Statius urges us to recharacterize *ingenium* as belonging to the familiar Latin word-pair in which *ars* stands for artistic craft and *ingenium* for native wit or talent. By the time our eyes have reached *artem*, however, the soil's *ingenium* has also been characterized, remarkably, as *forma*. The word here means "beauty" in the first instance, certainly. But the words that follow it, "hand" and "art," strongly suggest that it also means "form" by a bold figure that invites us to admire the apparent paradox of *forma* residing in a natural spot still untouched by the informing hands of artisans. The paradox is, however, only apparent, if we take the Aristotelian view that "proximate matter and form are the same thing, one in potentiality, the other in actuality" (Arist. *Metaph.* 1045b17–19) and that every proximate matter, whether natural or crafted, is itself a composite artifact of form and matter, so that trees are literally artifacts and Nature a literal *artifex*. But there is a further apparent paradox: Statius has here portrayed Nature's intricate art as a kind of pleasurably self-indulgent giving way to her own *ingenium*, a process of making in which native wit takes the lead over artistic craft, and the deep beauties of underlying matter shimmer resplendently through from beneath a superimposed form.

How might the poetics of the *Silvae* look if we took this image as poetological allegory? If Statius is suggesting an analogy in which craft is to talent as form is to matter, he is also making *ingenium* do double duty for each of the second members of those analogous pairs. And if *ingenium* means not just native wit here but also native matter, then the word *ingenium* is being drawn into the semantic range covered by Latin *silva* when it calques on Greek ὕλη.

A comparable figure on *ingenium* is prominently featured in Statius's other great villa poem, *Silvae* 2.2 on Pollius Felix's house at Surrentum (2.2.42–45):

> vix ordine longo
> suffecere oculi, vix, dum per singula ducor
> suffecere gradus. quae rerum turba! locine
> *ingenium* an domini mirer prius?
>
> My eyes scarce held out in the long procession, scarce my steps, as I was led from item to item. What a multitude

> of objects! Should I marvel first at the place's *ingenuity* or its master's?

Ingenium is once again being made to stand both for the native aptness to be worked (and generative power) residing in a *locus amoenus* and, equally, for the native wit, talent, or genius residing in an artist: two elements whose competitive partnership has turned Pollius's estate into a "throng" (one might have said a *silva*) "of things." The artist in this case is Pollius himself, the lord of the manor described as its planner and master builder. And note that even the master's creative process, interestingly, has been figured as an exercise of *ingenium* in which *ars* has been entirely backgrounded.

And what of Statius's own craft? I want to suggest that certain of his self-reflexive, ostensibly self-deprecating remarks in the prose prefaces to the *Silvae* can be seen as implicitly drawing a link between the collection's title and *ingenium* in the sense of poetic talent or genius as *materia poetica*. In the first preface, already quoted here in part, Statius theatrically ventilates the question (*praef.* 1.2–10):

> an hos libellos, qui mihi subito calore et quadam festinandi voluptate fluxerunt, cum singuli de sinu meo prodi<erint>, congregatos ipse dimitterem. quid enim <opus eo tempore hos> quoque auctoritate editionis onerari, quo adhuc pro Thebaide mea, quamvis me reliquerit, timeo? sed et Culicem legimus et Batrachomachiam etiam agnoscimus, nec quisquam est illustrium poetarum qui non aliquod operibus suis stilo remissiore praeluserit.

> whether I should assemble these little pieces, which streamed from my pen in the heat of the moment, a sort of pleasurable haste, emerging from my bosom one by one, and send them out myself. For why <should they too> be burdened with the authority of publication <at a time> when I am still anxious for my *Thebaid*, although it has left my hands? But we read *The Gnat* and even recognize *The Battle of the Frogs*; and none of our illustrious poets but has preluded his works with something in a lighter vein.

The modern consignment of *Culex* and *Batrachomyomachia* to the dustbin of spuriousness has perhaps blinded us to the implications of these words. Statius is making a bold claim to poetic stature. If Virgil's and Homer's choice to write and disseminate lighter poems can justify by example Statius's decision to publish the *Silvae*, they can do so only if Statius, like them, is a genuine poet. And for Statius, a genuine poet is a poet of *ingenium*, one whose quick sketches, dashed off *intra moram cenae* ("in the time period of a dinner party," as he claims for 1.5 at *praef.* 1.31), are by no means throwaway pieces for having been dashed off at speed.

Again, the third book's preface opens by highlighting "the temerity of these collections" (*libellorum istorum temeritatem*) and "this audacity of my stylus" (*hanc audaciam stili nostri*) at which Pollius, the book's dedicatee, is said to have been "alarmed" (*expaveris*, *praef.* 3.2–5). As Statius makes clear in a later poem (5.3.133–36), the epicedion for his father, poetic haste is itself a kind of audacity—

> atque ibi dum profers annos vitamque salutas,
> protinus ad patrii raperis certamina lustri
> vix implenda viris, laudum festinus et audax
> *ingenii.*
>
> And while you there bear forward your years and greet life's morning, you are straightway hurried to the competitions of your native festival (scarcely can grown men sustain them), hasty for glory and daring of *wit*.

—and audacity, as manifested by his father's precociously youthful entry in poetic contests, is itself a mark of *ingenium*. Emphasized in the son's tribute by a striking enjambment, the term here looks very nearly equivalent to what Pindar had called his φυά (*Ol.* 2.86): the power and knowledge a poet claims to possess by inborn nature.

I think these considerations taken together allow us to answer Delarue's strongest objection to reading a hyletic sense in Statius's title. A prior recipient of one of Statius's *libelli* had no more cause for distress at seeing the published collection called by the Latin equivalent of ὕλαι than the owner of a Picasso line drawing would be distressed to see that drawing reproduced in a book with a note about the artist's astonishing speed of execution. When genius works at speed, we prize its works no less. And a poetics of genius is precisely what Statius's prefaces seem to me to be

theorizing. Read in this light, and taken as explicating their title, the prefaces seem to be saying something like this: If you want to see the painstaking, formally intricate *cura* of my poetic *ars*, then read my *Thebaid*, the work of twelve years. But if you want to see the underlying (silvan) matter of my native poetic *ingenium*, the fine woody pith of which my craft is hewn, read my *Silvae*.

To close, I point to the passage where the poet of the *Silvae* has most remarkably inscribed into his own poetic text, with a single word, a poetics of genius that is, at the same time, a poetics of wood. *Silvae* 2.3 is Statius's *hommage* to Ovid in the form of an framed aetiological narrative to explain why a plane tree on Atedius Melior's estate has bent itself by growing out over a pond. Three lines before the moment when the poem swerves out of its embedded narrative and reveals its true nature as a cunningly artful birthday poem to Melior, the amorous tree, after bending across the pond in the hope of seeing and embracing a nymph submerged in flight, swerves out of its odd (but for a plane tree quite natural) detour and returns to what a philosopher speaking Greek would call φύσις: the upward growing motion that constitutes what living ὕλη in the form of a tree does by its nature, its *ingenium* (2.3.57–61):

> tandem eluctata sub auras
> libratur fundo rursusque enode cacumen
> *ingeniosa* levat, veluti descendat in imos
> stirpe lacus alia.
>
> At last, after struggling out beneath the air, it balances on its base and, *cunningly*, once again lifts up its nodeless top, as though it went down into the bed of the pond by another root. (trans. Wray)[20]

20 *Veluti descendat* means, not that the tree now seemed to be turning downwards (so Shackleton Bailey 2003.389–90, who rightly calls the result of this construal "sheer nonsense"), but rather that it came out of its swerve and began to grow straight upwards, perpendicular to the surface of the pond. In other words, the tree has righted itself and reoriented the upward direction of its growth as surely as if it now stretched down (*descendat*) to a second root at the bottom of the pond (the surface of which it has, in fact, only skimmed). I owe my information about the habits of Mediterranean plane trees to Bettina Bergmann.

It is precisely at this moment that Statius bestows on the tree the epithet *ingeniosa*, a highly prosy word used only here by Statius, and used only by Ovid among the extant Augustan poets. I depart from Shackleton Bailey's translation of this passage and offer a new one that I think makes clear sense of its supposed muddle, but I follow him in rendering *ingeniosa* as "cunningly": the tree has fashioned itself into a cunningly mannerist work of art. And yet, at this moment in the poem when the tree's mannerist shape has come into full view as allegorizing the swerving indirection of the poem that describes it, the tree is cunningly called *ingeniosa* for the opposite reason as well. A tree can do nothing more straightforwardly natural than grow straight up toward the sky. Statius's tree, and Statius's poetics of wood, know what Arthur Danto knows: "Anyone can go to seed—but one cannot become a Mannerist as a matter of stylistic decision. One has to allow talents to show that have been held in check all along."[21]

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