

The idea is that the husband has cut off the adulterer's nose and ears, but the mouth is still left to be befouled (possibly recalling *foedasti* in line 1). This emendation is in line with the poem's concentration on punishment and mentions a possible penalty for adultery, keeping the focus on the head of the adulterer; as if the cuckold, in the act of slicing off nose and ears, were tapped on the shoulder by Martial and the further humiliation suggested.

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ATEDIUS MELIOR'S TREE: STATIUS *SILVAE* 2. 3

The second book of Statius' *Silvae* was dedicated to the wealthy and elegant Atedius Melior.¹ The first poem in the collection is an epicedion composed in memory of his *puer delicatus* Glaucias, whose physical beauty and intellectual precocity were a subject of wonder in his life and of regret after his premature death.² In the third and fourth poems Statius turned to lighter themes, of which he remarks in his prose preface to Book 2: "in arborem certe tuam, Melior, et psittacum scis a me leves libellos quasi epigrammatis loco scriptos." In them, then, we find the poet claiming to handle subjects that required above all deftness of touch and a playful tone; indeed, they would have been fitting material for epigram, but Statius did not essay the specialty of Martial, who also enjoyed Melior's patronage.³ Statius' words in the preface—which have the usual self-deprecatory tone⁴—need not imply that the poems are no more than *jeux d'esprit*, though clearly they could be quite properly classified and appreciated as such; they are not necessarily devoid of deeper significance and a wider reference than first reading may suggest. When publishing 2. 3 and 4, Statius perhaps wished them to be regarded as simply *leves libellos*; but when they were written they may have had purposes other than merely to amuse. This paper will examine the *arbor*-poem to test this hypothesis.

2. 3 was written as a birthday offering for Melior (62). Its basic form is that of an aition, which permits Statius to use his favorite device of inventing a myth to act as the structural core of a poem.⁵ It has, too, relationships with ecphrasis and laudatio, respectively at its beginning (1–5) and its end (64–77). The myth (8–61) is strongly reminiscent of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, especially of the tale of Arethusa at 5. 572–642.⁶ The three sections, as will be shown, form a unity, from

1. For Atedius Melior, see P. White, "The Friends of Martial, Statius, and Pliny and the Dispersal of Patronage," *HSCP* 79 (1975): 270–75.

2. Cf. *Silv.* 2. 1. 36–55 (beauty), 113–19 (precocity); D. Vessey, *Statius and the "Thebaid"* (Cambridge, 1973), p. 21.

3. Cf. White, "The Friends of Martial, Statius, and Pliny," pp. 273–74, on Melior's relations with Martial.

4. On the apologetic and deprecatory nature of Statius' prefaces, see Vessey, *Statius and the "Thebaid"*, pp. 36–40.

5. Cf. S. Newmyer, *The "Silvae" of Statius: Structure and Theme*, Mnemosyne Suppl. 53 (Leyden, 1979), p. 62; also D. Vessey, "Aspects of Statius' Epithalamion," *Mnemosyne*, ser. 4, 25 (1972): 183–84 on Statius' use of invented myths.

6. Cf. F. Vollmer, *P. Papinii Statii "Silvarum" libri* (Leipzig, 1898), p. 356; L. Håkanson, *Statius' "Silvae": Critical and Exegetical Remarks with Some Notes on the "Thebaid"* (Lund, 1969), pp. 70–71.

which Atedius Melior might well draw conclusions applicable to himself and those like him: the tree that shades his pool has truths to tell.

An aition presupposes a question and supplies an answer to it. But the question that has ostensibly prompted a poem may easily raise others; a trivial particularity may give rise to more general speculations and impart permanent lessons. Readers must be alert to nuance and reverberation in words and images, in structure and in sense. The world of nature, the actions of mythic deities, the deeds and creations of men: all may serve their turn in figuring forth, under the veils of parallel, similitude, and allegory, verities worth pondering. Indeed, as Renaissance poets knew well, the advantage of allegory—especially in a politically closed society—is that it enables man both to speak and to keep silent. It may be as clear as crystal or as obscure as a maze; it may be simple or ambiguous; its presence may be affirmed or denied depending on circumstances. The aition provides a useful vehicle for such an approach.

Plane trees, sometimes deliberately trained to grow in grotesque shapes, were features of the gardens of rich men in Rome; they had no other use than to provide shade.⁷ Melior's tree was no doubt exhibited to his guests as an object of curiosity and as a stimulus for conversation. That it should be celebrated in verse by a fashionable poet would have pleased him. A birthday is, however, not merely an occasion for heedless levity; contemplation of past and future is also appropriate, if not inevitable. In first-century Rome, the opulent had special reason for mingling introspection with festivity. The dangers that threatened them under the watchful eye of successive autocrats may be at times exaggerated by hostile sources; but by the closing years of Domitian's principate there was sufficient evidence past and contemporary to show that no sea is so calm as to be immune from storms. The birthday for which this poem was written in fact occurred during a decidedly squally period.⁸ When one ship founders, others may follow.

Before turning to the tree and its supposed history, what of Melior himself? The conclusion of the poem is revealing. Introducing a prayer for his patron (72–77), Statius eulogizes him (64–71):

tu, cuius placido posuere in pectore sedem
blandus honos hilarisque tamen cum pondere virtus,
cui nec pigra quies nec iniqua potentia nec spes
improba, sed medius per honesta et dulcia limes,
incorrupte fidem nullosque experte tumultus
et secrete, palam quod digeris ordine vitam,
idem auri facilis contemptor et optimus idem
comere divitias opibusque immittere lucem. . . .

The words and concepts that are combined in this passage manifest the ambiguities that are never absent from flattery. That they embody the vision (or, in modern jargon, "image") which Melior wished to project about himself is obvious. The

7. For a discussion of plane trees, see Pliny *NH* 12. 3–6. They are designated *steriles* by Virgil, *G.* 2. 70; Horace applies the epithet *caelebs* to them, *Odes* 2. 15. 4. In fact, we may say that the *platanus* was regarded as an example of those Oriental luxuries so widely deplored by Roman moralists, as is plain from Pliny's opening remark on the subject: "sed quis non iure miretur arborem umbrae gratior tantum ex alieno petitum orbe? *platanus* haec est. . . ."

8. Cf. White, "The Friends of Martial, Statius, and Pliny," pp. 272–73.

dominant ideas are tranquillity and order. Melior stands apart from political ambitions and the pursuit of power, using his wealth to maintain a life of urbane ease. His peaceful breast is the home of *honor* and *virtus*: but not in the sense in which those who desired or held high office in the state understood them. Courtesy and affability that did not exclude weightier interests were the essence of his reputation. These qualities were supplemented by others complementary to and flowing from them. The first three are suggested by naming their opposites (66–67). Melior's *quies* was not *pigra*: it was not to be equated with indolence. There is no real paradox in the notion of an *impigra quies*, an "energetic repose": the noun is more or less a technical term for the avoidance of political involvements—but this did not preclude an enthusiasm for culture or, for example, the encouragement of humane studies, including literature; although Melior seems not to have been a poet himself,⁹ Statius terms him in his dedicatory preface "nec minus in iudicio litterarum quam in omni vitae colore tersissime": his benevolence toward letters seems to have been shared by his intimate friend Blaesus, now dead.¹⁰ Melior's lack of *iniqua potentia* and *spes improba* acquits him of those vices that so easily corrupt men who seek glory in public life; he eschewed them both—power unfairly gained and unjustly used, the ceaseless craving for ascendancy he was glad to resign to others; for him rather a middle way, honorable and pleasant (67–68). Immaculate in his loyalty (*fides*) and unacquainted with turmoil, he passed his life in seclusion and had nothing to hide (68–69). Gold had no dominion over him. No one surpassed him in the estimable use of wealth or in sharing its benefits with others (70–71).

The portrait is in part a familiar one, for several of Statius' patrons had chosen a similar course.¹¹ It shows a skillful economy in its brush strokes. It is in a sense the Epicurean way of life, but there is nothing in Statius' words to prove that Melior had chosen *quies* for philosophical reasons.¹² The renunciation of political aspirations and a policy of withdrawal showed a practical wisdom, quite apart from personal inclination or any theoretical impetus. Not all peril was, however, necessarily eliminated by such a style of life. To be rich, to be in Rome, to know—as was hardly avoidable—some of those to whom ambition was by no means foreign, were sufficient grounds to arouse suspicion, resentment, undeserved retribution. Statius' proclamation of Melior's devotion to tranquillity might have been intended to counter accusations that he was engaged in surreptitious intrigue. The poet mentions Melior's unshakeable *fides*: a broad term that embraced personal obligations, but assuredly did not exclude fidelity to the emperor. In the course of the myth, the poet alluded to his patron's dwelling in a parallel manner. The nymph Pholoe, in her flight from Pan, reaches the pool now in Melior's estate: "qua nunc placidi Melioris aperti / stant sine fraude lares." Slater translated the

9. Ibid., p. 274.

10. See Mart. 8. 38 on Melior's generous gift to the "turba scribarum" in honor of the dead Blaesus, a gift which we may suppose reflected his interests in life. Blaesus is mentioned at *Silv.* 2. 1. 191, 201.

11. Cf. the remarks of Vessey, *Statius and the "Thebaid"*, pp. 24–25, 27–28, and White, "The Friends of Martial, Statius, and Pliny," p. 293.

12. The Epicureanism of Manilius Vopiscus (*Silv.* 1. 3. 90–94) and of Pollius Felix (2. 2. 112–14) is expressly stated. It may be plausibly inferred also of, e.g., Septimius Severus; see D. Vessey, "Non solitis fidibus: Some Aspects of Statius, *Silvae* IV. 5," *AC* 39 (1970): 507–18.

words: "just where today stands wide the trusty home of tranquil Melior"¹³—but *sine fraude* is forceful and unexpected and deserves emphasis. "Criminal deceit" is not to be found in the house of *placidus* Melior. A similar point is stressed in the conclusion (69): Melior lives apart but there is no concealment in the ordering of his life. The statements are important: would they have been made at all if there had not been some who suggested the opposite to be the case? History has many times revealed that those who present a facade like Melior's to the outside world may not be averse from conspiracy or lack a desire for change. Their homes could provide useful centers for the disaffected. In any case, whether this were true or not, the possibility of its truth would not have been overlooked: guilt by association ranges far and indiscriminately, men may be destroyed by whispers. We cannot know Melior's real opinions or where his interests lay; fear, the desire for self-preservation may lead even the *placidi* to connive at hazardous courses or at least not actively to oppose them: for such opposition would in itself be inimical to *quies*. Melior may, or may not, have been simply a "fashionable host,"¹⁴ as Statius and Martial presented him. He certainly wished to be so regarded. If he had had grounds for disquiet, had "experienced a scare" of some kind,¹⁵ statements such as those we have examined were expedient. For it is likely that Statius' poem was read by Domitian or those close to him, if not at the time of composition, at least when it was published.

These considerations must be borne in mind when we turn to the aition. The poem begins with a short description of the tree and what made it unusual (1–5):

Stat, quae perspicuas nitidi Melioris opacet
arbor aquas complexa lacus, quae robore ab imo
incurvata vadis redit inde cacumine recto
ardua, ceu mediis iterum nascatur ab undis
atque habitat vitreum tacitis radicibus amnem.

The tree has a double existence, on the bank and in the water; it is one but appears to be two. The duality is an illusion, a facet of the deformation that has caused a branch to dip into the pool and reemerge like a separate tree. The phenomenon is vividly captured in Statius' lines. There is no difficulty in envisaging the interplay of brightness and shadow, of height and depth, of the visible and the hidden, antitheses evoked by a contemplation of tree and pool. As customarily in Latin poetry, the arrangement of the words in relation to each other and to the shape of the verses enhances the visual clarity of this miniature ecphrasis.¹⁶ The myth

13. D. A. Slater, *The "Silvae" of Statius Translated with Introduction and Notes* (Oxford, 1908), p. 93. J. H. Mozley in his Loeb edition (1928) rendered the words: "where today stands the quiet home of hospitable Melior."

14. White, "The Friends of Martial, Statius, and Pliny," p. 274.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 272.

16. The complex and subtle relationships between words are perhaps more readily appreciated by sensitive reading than by an attempt at formal explication. The nexus *perspicuas . . . lacus* (1–2), for instance, has an "illusionistic" quality typical of Statian mannerism (see Vessey, *Statius and the "Thebaid,"* pp. 10–11), evocative of the physical and symbolic liaison among the tree, the pool, and Melior himself. Note, too, how "robore ab imo" at the end of line 2 leads neatly into 3, which, commencing with a spondee (*incurv-*), passes into dactyls with a feminine caesura in the second and fourth feet leading on to the sense-break after *ardua* (4)—suggestive of the tree's upward growth from firm roots in the pool. Simpler is the arrangement of "vitreum tacitis radicibus amnem."

must serve to explain the reason why the *arbor* has developed in this singular fashion. The question seems trivial in itself (6); using a dismissal formula quite common in the *Silvae*,¹⁷ Statius invokes the Naiads and Fauns, deities of water and of woodland, rather than Phoebus (6-7):

quid Phoebum tam parva rogem? vos dicite causas
Naiades, et faciles, satis est, date carmina Fauni.

The myth is simple in outline. Pan is pursuing the nymph Pholoe; she flees from him through the terrain on which Rome will one day be built and eventually reaches the pool (later Melior's), where she sinks down exhausted on the bank. Pan soon catches up with her. He is on the point of raping her, when Diana sees them. She intervenes by throwing—rather than shooting—an arrow at the unconscious Pholoe; its touch wakens the nymph, who plunges into the pool, there hiding among the weeds. Pan's hopes are frustrated, for he cannot enter the water. He sees a young plane tree and plants it, ordaining that it should long shade the pool in memory of Pholoe's escape. Filled with his divine power, the tree obeys his command (53-61):

illa dei veteres animata calores
uberibus stagnis obliquo pendula trunco
incubat atque umbris scrutatur amantibus undas.
sperat et amplexus, sed aquarum spiritus arcet
nec patitur tactus. tandem eluctata sub auras
libratur fundo rursusque enode cacumen
ingeniosa levat, veluti descendat in imos
stirpe lacus alia. nec iam Phoebeia Nais
odit et exclusos invitat gurgite ramos.

This little story is on the surface merely a neat and amusing whimsy. An innocent nymph is threatened by the lustful woodland god and saved by the virgin huntress. The tree stands by and over the pool as a continuing witness to her salvation. In this way, Melior's *lacus* and plane tree are traced back to an unreal and magical world before Rome existed. But just as established myths were regularly used to illustrate truths not immediately evident in them, so it may be that Statius' invention serves similar purposes. Allegorical interpretations must not be pressed too far: but it is not improper to consider them, even though they must remain in some measure obscure.

A starting point for analysis may be found in the fact that Pholoe avoids Pan's hateful advances by submerging herself in the pool, where, since he cannot swim (35-36)—being a denizen of the earth—he is prevented from following her. The nymph remains in the pool thereafter as its tutelary spirit. The mode of her rescue by Diana evokes certain parallels with what we have surmised might have been Melior's situation at the time when the poem was written. Water in all its aspects is an ancient and polysemous symbol in poetry. The calm, bright pool, with its unseen but numinous depths, is suggestive of the quiet and undisturbed mind of a man like Melior, who dwelt far from strife and turmoil (68-69). The pool becomes

17. Cf. 1. 4. 19-21, 1. 5. 1-5, 1. 6. 1-3.

Pholoe's refuge from imminent violation: Melior—and others like him—found happiness and security through their choice of tranquil retirement. Pan is a violent god, representing primitive forces of barbarism; he intrudes into Pholoe's world, intent on her destruction. *Quies* is always in danger from outside attack: it may at any time be overwhelmed by the congenital savagery that dominates human society. Depth and serenity of mind (submersion in the pool), unruffled by extraneous cares and excessive desires, is the only possible protection; there must be no abandonment of it once adopted. Pan, whose nature is symbolized by his horns and hairy limbs (11, 36), has no power over the pool; human violence, deep-seated though it is, cannot vanquish those who are truly *placidi*, so long as they hold fast to their resolve and remain apart.

And yet Pholoe is preserved only by an external agency, at a moment when exhaustion has made her vulnerable to assault. Diana is hunting a deer on the Aventine hill when she sees the nymph; she angrily exclaims to her companions (24–26):

nunquamne avidis arcebo rapinis
hoc petulans foedumque pecus, semperque pudici
decrescet mihi turba chori?

There is, then, an analogy between the deities as well as an antinomy: both Diana and Pan are hunting the prey fitting to their respective natures. They are both part of the world from which the pool is (for Pholoe at least) the only hope of safety. Diana's arrows are normally instruments of death. On this occasion, however, she chooses one that is shorter than the rest and instead of shooting it at Pholoe (and so killing her), she merely tosses it gently at her (27–30). This slight blow is sufficient to arouse the nymph from slumber so that, in the nick of time, she becomes aware of the pool as a sanctuary. She has to abandon the world of Diana and Pan for a new abode, which is solitary and from which there can be no return; it is henceforward her domain and the tree provides shade to her in her retreat. Here too we may detect a broad allegory. In Rome, men like Melior, however careful they were to avoid entanglements and whatever precautions they may have taken to shun them, could still be at risk. Lack of caution or the enmity of others might lead to their downfall. Mere flight is not enough: a surer asylum is essential, Statius suggests, and that is complete withdrawal into privacy and a renunciation of all connexions likely to imperil them (the pool). Furthermore, at a critical moment before such a withdrawal has been made, a warning or slight shock (the touch of the arrow) may be required to awaken them from complacency or ignorance of their impending doom. In real life, this might perhaps be interpreted as a timely word from a friend or a narrow escape from accusations of complicity in treason. Indeed, there may well be a hint here—unclear in any detail to us, but not to Melior with the facts at his command—that Melior's practice of *quies* may not have been his permanent habit and that at one time he was more active in the world of politics and had had cause to regret it after an alarming experience. Diana can then be seen as standing for whoever advised Melior that he was imperilled at a moment when he was unaware of it. Pan, by contrast, may represent those who were seeking his destruction for reasons of

profit or malice. We must not press analogies too far;¹⁸ it suffices to see the broad outline. If our initial premises are correct, then Pholoe's escape may be viewed both as a specific reflection of Melior's personal experience at some period before the composition of the poem and as a universal parallel for those in a position akin to his. That the path of *quies* was the safest is the central idea. The myth is an allegorical validation of Melior's chosen way of life.

The reason for the invention of the myth of Pholoe was contemplation of his plane tree; the *platanus* may in itself be seen as a symbol of the *vita umbratilis* devoted to hospitality and the arts. As noted above, the plane was notable for having no practical use save the provision of shade from the sun. Its bizarre pattern of growth is attributed to Pan's final action: the tree is said to be a lasting memorial of events long ago, when tragedy was averted at the critical moment. But it may also be interpreted as a visible reminder of the life of a man who, after coming close to destruction, was saved and found peace in seclusion. After his retreat into *quies*, his "new life," springing from it, provided peace, protection and tranquillity also to his friends and associates like Statius. From this, it is easy to see the unity that underlies the three sections of the poem. The tree inspires an aetiology. This is given in the myth, which, under the veil of allegory, serves to illustrate graver themes. Finally, the owner of the pool and the tree is presented as a living example of the truth of the allegory in the myth and the course of his life given visible objectification in the shape of the tree: tree, pool, and Melior are intimately bound together in a complex but interlocking nexus of responsions. The *jeu d'esprit* has, like the pool itself, a hidden depth, a cautionary moral for the wise. History denies us the chance to unravel subtler facets of the secondary level of meaning in the poem. But enough remains for us to detect its presence. It is a telling instance of Statius' ability in the *Silvae* not to regard the immediate purpose of his compositions as a limitation on their scope and his refusal to be trammelled by the restraints imposed by individual circumstances. Writing for *placidus* Melior on his birthday, Statius uses a plane tree and a fantasy in the tradition of Ovid to demonstrate the dangers of involvement in the world and the contrasting blessings of *quies*.

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18. At 8-10, Statius lays stress on the fact that on this occasion it is Pholoe in particular, out of the "Nympharum tenerae catervae," that Pan wishes to make his prey. Allegorically, this may suggest that Melior was but one of many men of his type in Rome but that the recent threat had been directed solely at him for reasons that we of course cannot divine. But there were other *nymphae* left to serve Pan's lusts.

A SUGGESTED READING OF THE WORD *FORTAX*

The word *fortax* occurs only once in the whole of surviving Latin literature. Its usage in that chapter of Cato's farming manual describing the construction and operation of the lime kiln shows it to have had a technical meaning: "...fornacemque bene struito; facito fortax totam fornacem infimam complectatur" (*Agr.* 38).