

STATIUS AND INSOMNIA: ALLUSION AND MEANING IN *SILVAE* 5.4

Stattius' *Silvae* 5.4 is one of the best-known poems in the collection, although it is also one of the least representative. Its nineteen lines make it the shortest poem in the *Silvae*, and although there are other brief poems, such as those describing the parrot of Melior and the tame lion (*Silvae* 2.4 and 5), it is quite different from the many longer poems that deal with subjects and persons from contemporary society. Of course insomnia must always be a universal issue, but this is nevertheless a poem that does not draw the reader into the 'life and times' of Statius as do the poems which precede and follow it, the laments for his father and for a child (*Silvae* 5.3 and 5.5)¹.

One might attempt to link this poem to 'contemporary issues' on the basis of the suggestion that increasingly frequent attestations of sleeplessness can be detected in the early empire²; *Silvae* 5.4 might thus reflect the anxieties and malaise of the period. But the evidence for this claim is slight, and, with a subject as unusual as insomnia, an argument based on the silence of earlier periods is not convincing. Such readiness to deduce the moods of whole societies and eras can be ill-advised: the perception of the Hellenistic period as world-weary is a familiar and tiresome example³. Furthermore insomnia, though seldom given independent literary treatment, is a fairly routine part of existence, and one does not have to be despairing over lofty concerns, or perturbations of any kind, to suffer from it. Insomnia can be caused by something as mundane as indigestion; often its physical causes, to say nothing of spiritual ones, are impossible to discern.

This paper aims to examine Statius' treatment of sleep and sleeplessness. I will begin with a brief account of earlier handling of the theme, and will then consider how it is that Statius is able to produce an engaging poem from such an unpromising subject. In particular, I wish to concentrate on the poet's use and adoption of antecedent material. The concluding section will return to the simple yet difficult problem of what we are to make of this poem.

It is no surprise to find sleep playing an important rôle in the Homeric poems. At the beginning of *Iliad* 2 Zeus alone of gods and men is awake, pondering how to accomplish Thetis' prayers (*Il.* 2.1–6):

"Ἄλλοι μὲν ῥα θεοὶ τε καὶ ἄνδρες ἵπποκορυσταὶ
εὖδον παννύχιοι, Δία δ' οὐκ ἔχε νήδυμος ὕπνος,
ἀλλ' ὃ γε μερμήριζε κατὰ φρένα ὥς Ἀχιλλῆα
τιμήσει, δλέσαι δὲ πολέας ἐπὶ νηυσὶν Ἀχαιῶν.

¹ Note however that F. Vollmer, *P. Papinii Statii Silvarum Libri* (Leipzig, 1898), 432 (on *Silv.* 3.5.38) suggested a possible link between Statius' move to Naples and *Silvae* 5.4: 'Wahrscheinlich hatte die hier erwähnte Krankheit die V 4 beschriebene Schlaflosigkeit im Gefolge, die St. durch die Ortsveränderung zu beheben versuchte, s. IV 4.51 *somnum et geniale secutus litus*.' However, the lack of context in *Silv.* 5.4 and the self-consciously literary character of the poem make such biographical speculations dangerous.

² A. D. Nock, *JRS* 38 (1948), 158; *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World* (Oxford, 1972), 711 n. 36.

³ Note e.g. Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (second edition, London, 1961), 242, 258: 'The age of Epicurus was a weary age, and extinction could appeal as a welcome rest from travail of spirit.'

ἦδε δέ οἱ κατὰ θυμὸν ἀρίστη φαίετο βουλή,
πέμψαι ἐπ' Ἀτρεΐδῃ Ἀγαμέμνονι οὔλον Ὀνειρον·

Then the other gods and chariot-fighting men slept all night long, but sweet sleep did not take Zeus. Instead, he pondered in his heart how he might honour Achilles and destroy many of the Achaeans by their ships. And this was the counsel that seemed best in his heart, to send pernicious Dream to Agamemnon, Atreus' son.

In the ensuing passage (*Il.* 2.7–15), Zeus orders the dream to tell Agamemnon to arm the Achaeans. A number of points can be made. First, it is significant that only Zeus is awake, and the god's wakefulness isolates him from all others, god and mortal alike. Furthermore, the insomnia is the mechanism of the plot giving Zeus the opportunity to decide to send the dream to the Achaean monarch. It is an ironic touch to have a dream sent by one who is awake, and thus without dreams. An example from *Iliad* 24 further illustrates this technique. After Priam has dined with Achilles, he and his herald are put to rest in Achilles' quarters. He is placed here on the advice of Achilles himself, who is afraid of the complications which would arise if Priam were discovered in the Achaean camp (*Il.* 24.643–76). Thus one problem is solved for the poet, but there still remains the difficulty of how to return Priam to Troy without detection. To do this Hermes is required to see to Priam's safe conduct, just as when the king came to Achilles. Once again, we have a god lying awake pondering a solution to a difficulty (*Il.* 24.673–81):

οἱ μὲν ἄρ' ἐν προδόμῳ δόμον αὐτόθι κοιμήσαντο
κῆρυξ καὶ Πρίαμος, πυκινὰ φρεσὶ μήδε' ἔχοντες,
αὐτὰρ Ἀχιλλεύς εὔδε μυχῷ κλισίης εὐπήκτου·
τῷ δὲ Βρισηΐς παρελέξατο καλλιπάρῃος.
Ἄλλοι μὲν ῥα θεοὶ τε καὶ ἀνέρες ἵπποκορυσταὶ
εὐδον παννύχιοι, μαλακῷ δεδμημένοι ὕπνῳ·
ἀλλ' οὐκ Ἑρμείαν ἐριούνιον ὕπνος ἔμαρπτεν,
ὀρμαίνοντ' ἀνὰ θυμὸν ὅπως Πρίαμον βασιλῆα
νηῶν ἐκπέμψειε λαθὼν ἱεροῦς πυλααρούς.

The herald and Priam lay down to sleep there, in the vestibule of the house, with pensive thoughts in their hearts, but Achilles slept in the inner room of the well-made shelter, and by him lay beautiful-cheeked Briseis. The other gods and chariot-fighting men slept all night long, tamed by gentle sleep, but sleep did not come upon Hermes the helpful one, as he pondered in his heart how he might send Priam back from the ships without attracting the attention of the devoted guards.

Notice the progression from the particular mortals lying asleep (Priam, the herald, Achilles and Briseis) to the whole generality of gods and men, and then the return to an individual, Hermes. Here the nocturnal setting is more fully exploited than in *Iliad* 2; here, day will bring with it the likelihood of discovery, so that there is a greater need for urgent action.

We may further note that in both of these passages, sleeplessness is expressed in terms of sleep not taking or possessing an individual. This is similar to the presentation of sleep as a god in the scene of Hera's beguiling of Zeus at *Il.* 14.224–360, where the diffident and languid figure of Hypnos is able to overwhelm the might of Zeus for a second time, the first instance being when Hera was keen to vent her fury against Heracles. Indeed it is significant that Zeus took no vengeance on the earlier occasion, since he did not wish to displease Nyx (Night).⁴

Thus in the Homeric epics, sleep is externalized, with important consequences for sleeplessness. In the instances which we have considered, it is the gods who endure sleeplessness. But let it not be forgotten that the Homeric poems offer instances of

⁴ *Il.* 14.261.

mortals in a similar plight. Thus at the beginning of *Odyssey* 20 Odysseus lies awake reflecting on the seemingly insuperable problem of how to deal with the suitors; unlike Zeus and Hermes he is unable to reach an immediate decision. The upshot is that he is persuaded by Athena to yield to sleep (*Od.* 20.52–3):

“... ἄλλ’ ἐλέτω σε καὶ ὕπνος· ἀνὴρ καὶ τὸ φυλάσσειν
πάννυχον ἐγρήσσοντα, κακῶν δ’ ὑποδύσειαι ἤδη.”

But even let sleep take you. It is a burden to stay awake all night, and you will soon emerge from your woes.

This is an insomnia that arises from a situation which is beyond control, that does not admit of an easy solution. That sleeplessness is not desirable is made clear by Athena’s remarks. The same point is made at the beginning of *Iliad* 24. After the funeral games of the preceding book Achilles is still not wholly integrated into the society of the Achaeans. This is strikingly shown by his prolonged lack of sleep as he lies awake recalling Patroclus, a process repeated, as we are subsequently told, on eleven consecutive nights (*Il.* 24.1–13):

Λύτο δ’ ἀγών, λαοὶ δὲ θεῶς ἐπὶ νῆας ἕκαστοι
ἐσκίδναντ’ ἵεναι. τοὶ μὲν δόρποιο μέδοντο
ὕπνου τε γλυκεροῦ ταρπήμεναι· αὐτὰρ Ἀχιλλεὺς
κλαίει φίλου ἑτάρου μεμνημένος, οὐδέ μιν ὕπνος
ἥρει πανδαμάτωρ, ἀλλ’ ἐστρέφετ’ ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα,
Πατρόκλου ποθέων ἀνδροτήτα τε καὶ μένος ἧῦ,
ἥδ’ ὅποσα τολύπευσε σὺν αὐτῷ καὶ πάθεν ἄλγεα,
ἀνδρῶν τε πολλέμους ἀλεγεινά τε κύματα πείρων·
τῶν μιμνησκόμενος θαλερὸν κατὰ δάκρυον εἶβεν,
ἄλλοτ’ ἐπὶ πλευρᾷ κατακείμενος, ἄλλοτε δ’ αὐτε
ὕπτιος, ἄλλοτε δὲ πρηγνής· τότε δ’ ὀρθὸς ἀναστὰς
δινεύεσκ’ ἀλύων παρὰ θιν’ ἄλός· οὐδέ μιν ἦώς
φανομένη λήθεσκεν ὑπεῖρ ἅλα τ’ ἡϊόνας τε.

The contest was over, and the people dispersed, each going to his own swift ship. They thought of enjoying food and sweet sleep, but Achilles wept as he remembered his dear friend, and sleep, the tamer of all things, did not take him, but he turned this way and that, grieving for the courage and noble strength of Patroclus, thinking of the deeds and sorrows he had accomplished and endured with him, making his way through the wars of men and the bitter seas. As he remembered these things, he shed a full tear, turning now on his side, and now on his back, and now lying face-down. But then he stood up straight, and wandered in his grief along the seashore. But the dawn did not escape him, as she showed herself above the sea and the beaches.

Here we have more detailed treatment of both the physical and mental aspects of insomnia. Thus sleeplessness can be occasioned not only by the need to reach a decision, but also by more reflective thought, such as memory. The detail of the tossing and turning Achilles is tellingly observed, in that it suggests the desire to avoid the endless and repetitive circle of memory. There is thus an important contrast with the previous examples: whereas Zeus and Hermes and, to a lesser extent, Odysseus, lose sleep over their next course of action,⁵ Achilles loses sleep over a situation which it is impossible to change. Thus from the Homeric poems there seem to be two paradigms for insomnia: the kind induced by the simple desire to effect a desired course of events, and the more problematic dwelling of a person’s thoughts on a situation which does not admit of resolution; the instance from *Odyssey* 20 lies somewhere between these two.

The epithet πανδαμάτωρ, ‘tamer of all things’, which is applied to sleep at *Il.* 24.5 and at *Od.* 9.373 (when Polyphemos falls asleep), emphasizes the domination of sleep

⁵ Cf. the sleeplessness of Agamemnon at the opening of *Iliad* 10 (*Il.* 10.1–20).

over all gods and men, exemplified in *Iliad* 14 as has been seen. Even in the passage where Achilles resists sleep the adjective is still ironically apposite, since although Achilles is able to resist for eleven days, he will yield to sleep in the end.

In the Homeric poems we hear of the sway of sleep over gods and men. Thus Hera addresses the god with lofty tones (*Il.* 14.233): “Ὕπνε, ἀναξ πάντων τε θεῶν πάντων τ’ ἀνθρώπων...” (Sleep, lord of all gods and of all mortals). Later, sleep’s dominion extends over all things, animate and inanimate. In a celebrated fragment of Alcman natural features are described as sleeping (*fr.* 89 Page, 58 Diehl):

εὐδουσι δ’ ὀρέων κορυφαί τε καὶ φάραγγες
 πρῶνές τε καὶ χαράδραι
 φύλά τ’ ἑρπύτ’ ὅσα τρέφει μέλαινα γαῖα
 θήρες τ’ ὀρεσκῶιοι καὶ γένος μελισσάν
 καὶ κνώδαλ’ ἐν βένθεσσι πορφυρέας ἄλός·
 εὐδουσι δ’ οἰωνῶν φύλα τανυπτερύγων.

Asleep are the mountain-tops, ravines, headlands, gullies, the creeping tribes which the black earth nourishes, the beasts of the mountains, the race of bees, and the monsters in the depths of the dark sea. And the tribes of long-winged birds are asleep.

The context of the fragment is unknown; the passage may be the earliest example of the familiar contrast between a wakeful lover and a sleeping world.⁶ But such speculations on the lost context may be imprudent – it is possible that the tone of the poem was uniformly calm. However that may be, the domain of sleep now extends over a far wider area than in Homer, affecting even inanimate objects.

Whatever we make of Alcman, the contrast between an unresponsive world and a suffering individual is an important one. In *Aeneid* 4 Virgil memorably exploits the trope, contrasting the love-sick Dido with the sleeping world around her (*Aen.* 4.522–32):⁷

Nox erat et placidum carpebant fessa soporem
 corpora per terras, silvaeque et saeva quierant
 aequora, cum medio volvuntur sidera lapsu,
 cum tacet omnis ager, pecudes pictaeque volucres,
 quaeque lacus late liquidos quaeque aspera dumis
 rura tenent, somno positae sub nocte silenti.
 at non infelix animi Phoenissa, neque umquam
 solvitur in somnos oculisque aut pectore noctem
 accipit: ingeminant curae rursusque resurgens
 saevit amor magnoque irarum fluctuat aestu.

It was night, and weary frames enjoyed gentle sleep throughout the lands, and the woods and savage seas had become quiet, when the stars were rolling on in mid-course, and every field was still, and the herds and the painted birds, those who inhabit the wide crystal lakes and those who inhabit tracts of rough thickets, were settled in silent sleep beneath the night sky. But not Dido of Phoenicia, unhappy at heart; neither was she released by sleep, nor did she receive night in her eyes or in her heart; her cares redouble, and love welling up again rages, and wavers on a vast surge of anger.

This is one of several similar examples;⁸ as will become apparent, this is an important passage for Statius. Here the Homeric antithesis between the individual and the surrounding world is extended; even the *saeva aequora* are at rest, in contrast to the *aestus irarum* that is boiling inside Dido.

In *Silvae* 5.4, Statius’ description of the sleeping world is remarkably similar to that of Virgil. However, there are some important differences. In Virgil and in Homer it

⁶ See D. L. Page, *Alcman: the Partheneion* (Oxford, 1951), 159–61.

⁷ I have followed Mynors in deleting line 528.

⁸ For other parallels, see A. S. Pease’s edition (Cambridge, MA, 1935) of *Aeneid* 4, ad loc.

is the narrator with an overview of the whole world of the poem who is able to discern what is, or what is not happening; it is quite plausible for such a narrator to remark that all things are at rest. Statius, however, is in a different situation,⁹ for although the motif of nocturnal calm certainly has epic antecedents, we are closer here to the lyric voice. Statius' use of the epic device of an all-seeing epic narrator in his particular context has great potential for irony; if Statius is lying in bed awaiting the onset of sleep, his knowledge of the state of the external world can in fact only be limited. However, he asserts, with the confidence and certainty of an epic narrator, that there are silent herds, wild beasts, and birds, and describes the restful state of rivers, tree-tops,¹⁰ and the sea. Such personal omniscience seems implausible.

Instead it may be better to argue that literature is here determining experience. This may at first appear puzzling – why should Statius choose to invoke a literary echo which is not appropriate to the personal situation in which he represents himself? The answer lies in Virgil, where the description of a sleeping and indifferent world is used as a rhetoric of pity; the portrayal of indifference in others increases the sympathy of the audience. It may help to consider an example from English literature. W. H. Auden's poem, *Musée des Beaux Arts*,¹¹ deals with the context of indifference which frequently accompanies suffering,¹² and uses such indifference as the source of its pathos.¹³ Both Statius and Auden use the portrayal of indifference as a means of evoking sympathy.¹⁴ One might also compare the familiar trope of pastoral lament where nymphs and others are asked, in reproachful tones, why they were not present at the death of a figure such as Daphnis or Gallus; the effect of their absence is that the death seems more pitiable.¹⁵

Indeed, the pastoral topos of reproach to absent ones has some bearing on this poem. Statius begins by asking Somnus why he is not with him, which is followed by the request that he should come ('inde veni', 16). This is not the only link with pastoral. In bucolic lament, when the nymphs and others are asked why they have been absent, there is usually an inquiry as to whether they have been tarrying on the

⁹ In discussion of *Silvae* 5.4 I am using the word 'Statius' as a convenient shorthand for 'the speaker of the appeal to Somnus'. Contrast Vollmer's more biographical approaches to the poem (see n. 1 above, p. 467 below).

¹⁰ The *curvata cacumina* of line 4 must be tree-tops. Although *curvata* could be applied either to mountains or to trees, the point is that the sea and the rivers and the *cacumina* are said to be still and motionless, as a result of the general calm affecting the whole world. Whereas mountains are motionless at all times, the sea, rivers and trees can be either in motion, or calm, according to the prevailing conditions. The whole point of Statius' description is that he is describing the effects and changes brought about by Somnus. The visual image of line 4 is comparable to *Theb.* 10.144, 'demittunt extrema cacumina silvae', where Statius describes the effect on the natural world of the journey of Somnus.

¹¹ W. H. Auden, *Collected Poems* (London, 1976), 146–7.

¹² 'About suffering they were never wrong,
The Old Masters: how well they understood
Its human position; how it takes place

While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along...'

¹³ The parallel with Auden seems valid on another level, in that both Statius and Auden are recalling earlier artistic creations, for both poems derive part of their validity from this source, Auden referring to the works of the 'Old Masters', in particular Breughel's *Icarus* (e.g. 'In Breughel's *Icarus*, for instance: how everything turns away / Quite leisurely from the disaster ...'), whilst Statius alludes to Virgil and other texts.

¹⁴ Compare also Virgil, *Ecl.* 2.8–13, where Corydon contrasts his own suffering 'sole sub ardenti' with the various forms of respite obtained by animals and people.

¹⁵ Pastoral does, however, combine this figure with the opposite device of the pathetic fallacy; compare the juxtaposition of the two motifs at Theocritus, *Id.* 1.65–78 and Virgil, *Ecl.* 10.9–15.

slopes of Maenalus or some other appropriate place. We have something similar here with Statius' suggestion to Somnus that he should not tarry with the lovers who are, in any case, spurning him; instead, he should come to Statius.

But there are other motifs used by Statius to persuade sleep to come to him. One important genre is the hymn; *Silvae* 5.4 is, after all, a poem which aims to persuade a god to exercise his power favourably. The straightforward hymnic aspects include the ingratiating appellation 'iuvenis placidissime divum' (1), reminding the god of his gentle nature,¹⁶ and the flattering notion of the god as a kind of universal benefactor ('donis ut solus egerem / Somne, tuis', 2-3).¹⁷ Similarly, as often happens in hymns, there is a section which describes the power of the god (3-6); compare the opening of Hera's appeal to Hypnos (*Il.* 14.233, cited above). Thus we have the two aspects of the god, his gentleness and his power.

Whilst we should keep in mind Hera's appeal to the mighty sway of the god, there are two other appeals to Somnus which are also important, particularly because they emphasize his gentler aspect. These are the visits of Iris to Somnus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (11.593ff.) and in Statius' *Thebaid* (10.84ff.). The address to Somnus as 'iuvenis placidissime divum' in *Silvae* 5.4 is similar to 'mitissime divum / Somne' (*Theb.* 10.126-7) and 'Somne, quies rerum, placidissime, Somne, deorum' (*Met.* 11.623). The first point is a simple one; all three invocations are a *captatio benevolentiae*, with the speaker selecting an apposite feature of the god to praise. Thus Statius, the speaker of *Silvae* 5.4, imitates the language of epic appeals to the god and fuses both the Homeric qualities of gentleness and might, since the succeeding lines represent the undoubted sway of the god over the world. However, the parallels have more to tell than this. A consideration of the contexts in the *Metamorphoses* and the *Thebaid* is now required.

Iris is sent to visit the god. On both occasions she is acting on the instructions of Juno: in Ovid, the purpose is to have Somnus send an apparition of Morpheus to inform Alcyone of the death of her husband, Ceyx, while in the *Thebaid* it is Juno's wish for the Thebans to be overwhelmed by slumber, so as to present an opportunity to their enemies. But in *Silvae* 5.4 it is Statius who is addressing Somnus, not an intercessor; moreover the aim is not to precipitate an unusual intervention from Somnus, but merely to restore the natural process of sleep which has been interrupted.¹⁸

This may in part explain the complex nature of the opening invocation where not only are the two aspects of Sleep, gentleness and power, stressed, but also praise is mixed with a note of reproach; this too is unlike the epic examples, where the attempt to persuade is undertaken for the sake of divine plans in response to an external situation. For Statius, it is sleeplessness itself which is the issue and it is already longstanding (7-10). Thus the poem does not begin with the usual *captatio benevolentiae*, but instead with an abrupt complaint, 'Crimine quo merui'. Even less courteous is the opening half of the next line, 'quove errore miser...', which has an even stronger suggestion of indignation at an injustice perpetrated without reason. *Miser* in particular is a neat touch, being an ironic rejoinder to *placidissime*, used of Somnus in the previous line. The positive form of *miser* seems more effective than a

¹⁶ The gentleness of sleep in Homer is suggested by such epithets as *μαλακός*, *γλυκύς*, *γλυκερός*, *ἡδύς*, *ἀπῆμων*, *ἀμβρόσιος*, *μελίφρων*, *μελιγδής*. The epithet *νῆδυμος*, used only of sleep, is usually related to *ἡδυμος* and *ἡδύς* (though see *Σ Il.* 2.2).

¹⁷ Cf. the Homeric phrase *ὑπνον δῶρον* (*Il.* 7.482, 9.713, *Od.* 16.481, 19.427).

¹⁸ Perhaps compare Silius Italicus 10.343-50 where Juno reassures Somnus that she does not expect him to accomplish as great a task as overcoming Jove or Argus; all that is required is that he send a dream to Hannibal.

superlative; because Statius does not overstate his case, the simple form of the adjective is more arresting. And 'donis ut solus egerem / Somne, tuis' (2-3), though ingratiating in the suggestion that the god is a universal benefactor, is also deeply reproachful since Statius points out that he alone is deprived of the god's usual gifts. This is an appeal to the god to restore normal conditions; it is not a request for some extraordinary intervention. Thus the demonstration of the god's power in the description of the sleeping universe not only has a hymnic quality, winning over the god by pointing out the extent of his dominion, but also has an element of reproach; if Somnus has used his power over the whole world, why does Statius not benefit ('donis ut solus egerem')?

Moreover the description of the world at rest that follows is not wholly unambiguous as an account of Somnus' power. In line 5 there is the bizarre detail 'nec trucibus fluviis idem sonus' ('nor do the raging torrents roar as they were wont', as Mozley translates). This is an impossibility; rivers are unaffected by the change of day or night.¹⁹ Statius not only gives the impossible detail of the rivers running more quietly at night, but the idea of the sleeping world is also called into question with the remark that the *curvata cacumina* only feign (*simulant*) their weary slumbers; thus the sleep of the tree-tops and, by implication, of natural features is only imaginary. In effect the god has no power over them. Moreover the description of nocturnal calm is already undercut by Statius' personal involvement in the poem. Because Statius is not an epic narrator here, the details he gives of the sleeping world around him can be questioned by the reader; even the sleeping herds, flocks and birds are in question, since we cannot suppose such comprehensive omniscience from the insomniac Statius. This in turn undermines the praise given to Somnus in these lines; if Statius is not to be believed, then perhaps the god is not so powerful.

Another section of the poem where the god is shown in an ironic light occurs in lines 14 and 15. Here Statius suggests that Somnus should come to one who will be more welcoming than the lovers, who are repulsing him. Instead of being the tamer of all things, mortal and divine, the god is unable to deal with lovers.²⁰ There is something rather reminiscent of Ovid in this; one may compare the way in which Mars in particular and to a lesser extent Jove are treated in a belittling manner in *Fasti* 3.²¹ More relevant, however, is *Amores* 1.13, the address to Aurora.

Amores 1.13 exhibits some striking resemblances to this poem. In *Silvae* 5.4 we have seen some of the ways in which the address to a god is undercut, with implications of unjust treatment and the suggestions that the god is not quite all that he is made out to be. In *Amores* 1.13, there is the same note of reproach; Ovid also attempts both to elicit Aurora's goodwill (Ovid expresses the hope that Memnon, her son, will continue to receive his funerary offerings)²² and to bring her down to size with mocking references to her elderly husband and suggestions of Aurora's adultery.²³ The topos of describing the various powers of the divinity is also treated in a satirical vein, and in a more obvious fashion than in *Silvae* 5.4. Thus Aurora's dubious powers include sending boys off to school where they may be buffeted by their mentors,²⁴ and depriving lovers such as Ovid of the chance to lie abed with their mistresses during the morning.²⁵

¹⁹ One would, if anything, expect rivers to be more audible at night in the absence of other noise.

²⁰ Is 'te, Somne, repellit' (15) a parodic reversal of 'te, Palinure, petens' (Virgil, *Aen.* 5.840)?

²¹ E.g. *Fasti* 3.675-96 (Anna Perenna's deception of Mars) and 327ff. (Numa's encounter with Jove).

²² *Am.* 1.13.3-4

²³ *Am.* 1.13.35-6

²⁴ *Am.* 1.13.17-18

²⁵ *Am.* 1.13.5-6

But it is not merely technique that links these two poems. With his mention of the lovers, Statius evokes the genre of love poetry; moreover, the image of lovers trying to repel sleep is very similar to Ovid's image of dawn being unwelcome to the lover. Furthermore both poems have a nocturnal dramatic setting. Both poems also describe the arrival of dawn, although while Aurora ignores Statius' complaints ('Tithonia questus / praeterit', 9–10), she nevertheless pities him ('et gelido spargit miserata flagello', 10). Though Pomeroy argues, on the basis of the dew sprinkled by Aurora, that Statius is not in bed, but actually watching for the arrival of Somnus,²⁶ insomnia is usually described as affecting persons lying in bed.²⁷ It is perhaps preferable to view the dew of morning as a figurative expression of the temporary relief which comes with the dawn after a sleepless night;²⁸ at least one does not have to go on trying to fall asleep.²⁹ This interpretation is supported by Valerius Flaccus 7.23–5 where Medea's refreshment at the onset of dawn is compared to a light shower on corn or the wind assisting tired oars:³⁰

nec minus insomnem lux orta refecit amantem,
quam cum languentes levis erigit imber aristas
grataque iam fessis descendunt flamina remis.

And no less did the risen day refresh the sleepless lover than when light rain raises up wilting ears of corn or when pleasing winds descend on tired oarsmen.

Moreover we may recall that *Silvae* 5.4 is an attempt to persuade Somnus, so that we do not have to look for literal truth; in this case it is effective to tell Somnus that Aurora has taken pity on Statius and given him some relief by sprinkling him with dew, just as it is effective for Statius to tell the god of his all-embracing dominion, even if he is scarcely able to verify his own description. At the end of the poem, Statius wishes to be touched by the god's *cacumen virgae*, so that to tell the god that Aurora has shown pity on him with her whip is an effective means of eliciting sympathy; the paradox of *miserata flagello* is all part of this. Thus Aurora, whom one might expect to be an unsympathetic figure, particularly if we have *Amores* 1.13 in mind, is partially rehabilitated even though she passes by the poet's *questus* (which indeed recalls the last two lines of Ovid's poem).³¹ The pity of Aurora (*miserata*) echoes *miser* which

²⁶ A. J. Pomeroy, 'Somnus and Amor: the Play of *Silvae* 5.4', *QUCC*, n.s. 24 (1986), 91–7, at 95: 'But for Statius to view the rounds of the stars and actually feel the downfall of dew, he can hardly be lying in bed. Waiting outside or gazing from his window, he is clearly watching for the return of Somnus, like a wayward lover.'

²⁷ The most celebrated example of insomnia affecting one lying in bed is Achilles, grieving for Patroclus (*Il.* 24.1–13, cited above). The almost proverbial status which was later accorded to his insomnia is testified by Juvenal 3.279–80 'noctem patitur lugentis amicum / Pelidae, cubat in faciem, mox deinde supinus'. See also Catullus 50.10–15, Ovid *Am.* 1.2.1–4, Propertius 1.14.21, Valerius Flaccus 7.21, Juvenal 13.218 and Seneca, *De tranquillitate animi* 2.6, 2.12 (where the same comparison with Achilles occurs) for insomnia being characterized by tossing and turning in bed. An exception to this general tendency is Suetonius, *Caligula* 50.3, who notes that Caligula, growing weary of lying in bed would sometimes sit on his bed, and sometimes wander about among the porticoes, longing for the onset of dawn (see n. 29).

²⁸ For the cool of early morning compare Ovid, *Am.* 1.13.7 'nunc etiam somni pingues et frigidus aer'.

²⁹ For the desire to see the dawn after a sleepless night, compare Catullus 50.12 'cupiens videre lucem'. Note also *Iliad* 24.12–13 (quoted above).

³⁰ Note also the similarity between the openings of Medea's and Statius' complaint. Valerius Flaccus 7.9–10: 'nunc ego quo casu vel quo sic pervigil usque / ipsa volens errore trahor?' Statius, *Silv.* 5.4.1–3: 'crimine quo merui, iuuenis placidissime divum, / quove errore miser, donis ut solus egerem, / Somne, tuis?'

³¹ *Am.* 1.13.47–4: 'iurgia finieram. scires audisse; rubebat, / nec tamen adueto tardius orta dies.'

Stattius applies to himself (2); the appeal to the pity of Somnus is thus intensified when it is pointed out to him that even Aurora is willing to show some compassion. *Amores* 1.13 is thus an important antecedent, not only for the techniques of persuasion used, but also for the recasting of Aurora in this poem.

The mention of Aurora and her pity seems to offer a slight consolation to the poet, but we should notice how Statius has already demonstrated with great subtlety that such consolation can only be but slight, since he has not even been able to catch up on his lost sleep during the day³². This state of affairs becomes apparent when we consider the various phenomena described in lines 7–9, *Phoebe* (the moon), the *Oetaeae Paphiaequae ... lampades* (the Evening and Morning stars) and *Tithonia* (the dawn). *Phoebe* corresponds to the middle of the night, but the most significant of all is *Oetaeae ... lampades*, the evening star: if the return of the evening star sees Statius still without solace, then he has been unable to sleep even during the day.

Another striking detail is the mention of Argus, oddly described as 'sacer' (12). Statius seems to be saying that not even if he had the thousand eyes of Argus, who was never wholly awake (13), would he be equal ('unde ego sufficiam?', 11) to his prolonged insomnia. This is a slightly obscure passage, but the thought must be that even if Statius were, like Argus, equipped with a thousand eyes which would not all be open at the same time, he could not endure his sleeplessness. Moreover, it will be recalled that Argus does not succumb to Somnus, but to Heracles, in the *Prometheus Bound* ascribed to Aeschylus, and to Mercury in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Thus Argus, noted for his vigilance, is in a sense an *exemplum* of the ineffectiveness of Somnus – it required a Hermes or a Heracles to subdue him.³³ This is something of a provocation. 'unde ego sufficiam?' (11) is thus not merely a cry of despair, but also a challenge to the god to prove whether in fact he is able to save the situation. Indeed the parenthetical *sufficit* ('it is enough') at the end of the poem may well suggest that the god is finally responding to the entreaties and bringing a long-awaited respite from insomnia. The present indicative suggests that the poet is finally falling asleep, which is why the poem breaks off.

Stattius approaches Somnus in a playful manner for most of the poem. At the end there is a slight shift as the poet becomes more aware of the nature of the deity he is invoking. Hence the god is asked not to overdo his assistance.³⁴ Somnus has only to touch Statius with the tip of his staff or to pass above him gently. These instructions to the god are gently humorous. Statius gives the god precise details as to how to proceed. He is not to overwhelm Statius with the feathers on his wings; such complete sleep is requested by others, a *turba laetior*. Who is this mysterious 'happier crowd'? The simple explanation is that Statius is only asking for a brief sleep; others, who are happier than he is (*miser*, 2), are accustomed to ask for a more substantial sleep. However, this seems weak in such an allusive poem: we are entitled to ask who such persons are. As we shall see, the closing lines of the poem hint at the connexion between sleep and death. But if 'totas infundere pennas' were to refer to the deeper sleep of death, then why should the *turba* be *laetior*? The puzzling epithet can,

³² On the seriousness of prolonged insomnia during both day and night, see Celsus 2.4.2.

³³ Cf. Silius Italicus 10.345–7:

... non mille premendi
sunt oculi tibi, nec *spernens tua numina* custos
Inachiae multa superandus nocte iuvencae.

³⁴ Perhaps compare Silius Italicus 10.343–5, where Juno tells Somnus that he is not required for 'maioribus... / ausis'. For mortal reluctance to ask too much of a god compare e.g. Ovid, *Ex P.* 1.8.71–2.

however, be explained: *laetus* can appear in Elysian contexts, such as Virgil, *Aen.* 6.638, 'devenere locos laetos'. Even more relevant is the end of Horace's Mercury ode (*C.* 1.10.17–20), where we find a *turba* as well:³⁵

tu pias laetis animas reponis
sedibus virgaque levem coerces
aurea turbam, superis deorum
gratus et imis.

You set pious souls in their happy abode, and with your golden staff you keep within bounds the insubstantial crowd, pleasing to the gods of heaven and of the underworld.

Statius reworks the Horatian model; the *turba laetior* are the blessed dead, who successfully appeal for sleep in Elysium.

Despite its humour, the poem does not shy away from inauspicious traditions concerning sleep and Somnus. The allusion to the sleep of Argus (as Ovid tells the story),³⁶ though it is nothing to do with Somnus, is one example. More obvious allusions are effected by Statius' mention of the god's *virga*, and his request to be touched only 'extremo ... cacumine'. In *Aeneid* 5, when Palinurus is left alone to guide the fleet at night, Somnus descends from the heavens and causes Palinurus to fall asleep (Virgil, *Aen.* 5.854–6):

ecce deus ramum Lethaeo rore madentem
vique soporatum Stygia super utraque quassat
tempora, cunctantique natantia lumina solvit.

Lo! the god brandishes over both his temples a branch dripping with the dew of Lethe and drugged with the power of the Styx; as the helmsman hesitates, he frees his swimming eyes.

Once he is asleep, the god throws him into the water, and he meets the doom which he will recount to Aeneas in the underworld (*Aen.* 6.347–62). There is thus good reason for Statius' caution. Somnus is, after all, the brother of the god of death.³⁷ Moreover Statius' references both to Argus and to the *virga* of Somnus recall the *virga* of Mercury used against Argus, which, as Virgil tells us, was not only endowed with the power of bestowing sleep, but also that of determining life or death:

tum virgam capit: hac animas ille evocat Orco
pallentis, alias sub Tartara tristia mittit,
dat somnosque adimitque, et lumina morte resignat.

(Virgil, *Aen.* 4.242–4)

Then he takes his staff; with this he calls forth pale shades from Orcus, and sends others beneath grim Tartarus, and gives and takes away sleep, and opens the eyes of the dead.³⁸

This passage is itself an imitation of the description of the *ῥάβδος* of Hermes.³⁹ Thus the closing lines hint at the more severe aspects of the god.⁴⁰

³⁵ Note that this passage also refers to the *virga* of Mercury (on which see below).

³⁶ Ovid, *Met.* 1.713–21

³⁷ In the *Iliad* the body of Sarpedon is rescued by Hypnos and Thanatos, who are described as *διδυμάοισιν* ('twins') at *Il.* 16.672, 682. Cf. *Il.* 14.231, Hesiod, *Theog.* 756, Virgil, *Aen.* 6.278, 'consanguineus Leti Sopor', Pausanias 5.18.1. Note also metaphorical descriptions of death as sleep: *κοιμήσατο χάλκεον ὕπνον* (*Il.* 11.241); 'olli dura quies oculos et ferreus urget / somnus' (Virgil, *Aen.* 10.745–6).

³⁸ On the difficulties of *lumina morte resignat*, see Pease and Austin ad loc., whose view that Mercury opens the eyes of the dead on the funeral pyre (they had previously been closed by relatives) I have followed.

³⁹ *Il.* 24.343–5, *Od.* 5.47–9. The details of the staff's deathly attributes are not however in Homer, who merely refers to the giving and withholding of sleep.

⁴⁰ Note also *leviter* (*Silv.* 5.4.19), perhaps recalling *levis*, applied to Somnus at *Aen.* 5.838.

The poem ends with a joke. If Somnus will not give Statius a little relief, then at least the god of sleep must not disturb him ('aut leviter suspenso poplite transi, 19).

At the start I alluded to some of various explanations of this poem, such as the view that the poem is evidence not only for the insomniac nature of the early imperial period, but also for the troubled character of those times. Another suggestion has been that the poem is an erotic poem, a view most eloquently argued by A. J. Pomeroy.⁴¹

Pomeroy's paper presents a striking thesis. The essential argument is that the poem is cast as an erotic invitation to the god to come to Statius.⁴² As well as noting the parallel with *Aeneid* 4 in lines 3–6,⁴³ Pomeroy also suggests links with Propertius 1.3. He argues that the appeal to Somnus who has been rejected by the lovers of lines 14 and 15 is similar to Cynthia's imagining that Propertius has returned to her after a repulse from the doors of another lover,⁴⁴ and compares the mention of Argus to a passage where the poet watches over his mistress as keenly as Argus once kept his many eyes intent on Io.⁴⁵ This last point, especially, seems problematic; the possible erotic associations of Argus (in any case not a lover) are secondary to the number of his eyes, which would not grant Statius relief from sleep. The difficulty with reading the poem in terms of Statius' 'invention of a hypothetical erotic narrative' (the phrasing is Pomeroy's)⁴⁶ is that the last two lines specifically indicate what is expected of the god; all that is required is that he lightly touch the poet with his *virga* or else pass by. Neither of these activities imply a lengthy or erotic encounter. Nowhere does the poem contain a directly erotic request.

One might modify Pomeroy's thesis, by arguing that the allusions in the poem to Ovid's *Amores* 1.13 and to Dido, whilst not being equivalent to an erotic invitation to the god of sleep, nevertheless suggest that Statius is in love;⁴⁷ the echo of the description of nocturnal calm in *Aeneid* 4 would assume the erotic associations of that passage. Such a reading might also offer some kind of explanation for the puzzling *heu* (14);⁴⁸ as it stands, the description of the lovers seems an odd place for such a melancholy exclamation, so that a reader might be attracted to the possibility that Statius is expressing regret for the joys that might have been his. Either unrequited or rejected love could be the cause. Such a reading might seem consistent with the text.

However *heu* does not have to take on these ramifications; the word is rhetorically effective without such a situation being implied. Whether or not Statius is in love, there is still a telling contrast between the lovers who wish to dismiss the god from their presence, and Statius who is unable to secure his attendance. In the absence of any statement to that effect, the view that Statius is a lover cannot be proved.

Another possibility would be to consider the poem in terms of its context within the book. *Silvae* 5.4 is preceded by a lament for Statius' father and followed by a lament for a young boy. Vollmer suggested that the poet's insomnia can be interpreted against the background of these bereavements;⁴⁹ indeed, *Silvae* 5 has only one positive poem, the second, the *Laudes Crispini*, which praises a young man about to embark on his public career. Certainly, as we have seen, grief can be a cause of

⁴¹ Pomeroy, op. cit. (n. 26), henceforth referred to as 'Pomeroy'.

⁴² Pomeroy 91: 'Statius' purpose from the beginning of the poem is to lure the god into his bed and the themes used are designed to achieve this.'

⁴³ Pomeroy 93–4.

⁴⁴ Pomeroy 92.

⁴⁵ Pomeroy 95.

⁴⁶ Pomeroy 97.

⁴⁷ For insomnia as a symptom of love, see the list of passages collected by McKeown on Ovid, *Am.* 1.2.1–4.

⁴⁸ *heu* si *Barth* : *heus M.*

⁴⁹ F. Vollmer, op. cit. (n. 1), 546.

insomnia; compare the grief of Achilles for Patroclus at the opening of *Iliad* 24. A further argument for the connexion between the poems would be the two verbal correspondences between 5.4 and 5.5: thus 'miser' (5.4.2) is recalled by 'me miserum', (5.5.1), and 'Crimine quo merui ... / quove errore (5.4.1-2) is similar to 'quae culpa, quis error / quem luimus tantus' (5.5.7-8). Thus both poems open on a note of incredulous reproach. These are striking parallels, and it would be alluring to see the poem on sleep as an interlude before the return to lament; moreover it could be said that 5.5, the final poem of the books demonstrates the nature of true suffering, showing that there are far worse pains to be endured than mere loss of sleep.

Such analyses are appealing, but they are unnecessary and perhaps misleading.⁵⁰ *Silvae* 5.4, for all its allusions, does not support such readings. Statius' technique is not only to use but also to play on the extensive traditions concerning sleep and sleeplessness. Thus the address to Somnus might suggest the genre of hymn, but this can be set against the by no means unequivocal treatment of the god. Similarly Statius teases with frustrating hints of love poetry.⁵¹ The charm of the poem is that it pretends, with all its complexities of allusion, to lead towards something deeper, something which is concealed, something which must be prised out of the text: something more profound than insomnia. In the final analysis, however, the poem is unstable ground on which to build such readings. Perhaps we are terrified by the prospect of a poem which deals with insomnia and nothing more; we must nevertheless take care not to engage in a fruitless search for profundity. Readings of the poem might usefully concentrate on the poem's exploitation of genre and literary predecessors, rather than engage in speculative enquiry concerning the causes of the poet's insomnia. This is definitely a poem where the artistry is at a premium; the subject is insomnia.⁵²

University of Newcastle upon Tyne

B. J. GIBSON

⁵⁰ Note also that *Silvae* 5 was almost certainly published posthumously; the poems were probably arranged by an editor. See further G. Laguna, *Estacio, Silvas III. Introducción, Edición Crítica, Traducción y Comentario* (Madrid, 1992), 11-12.

⁵¹ For such generic 'deceiving', see F. Cairns, *Tibullus: A Hellenistic Poet at Rome* (Cambridge, 1979), 166-91, who identifies this technique of false generic signposts in Tibullus.

⁵² I should like to thank Dr S. J. Heyworth, Mr D. E. Hill, Dr A. J. W. Laird, Professor R. G. M. Nisbet, Professor M. Winterbottom and the *CQ* referee for their valuable comments on earlier drafts of this paper.