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THE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES, OR,
ON FLATTERY AND ENCOMIUM IN THE *SILVAE**

BY CYNTHIA DAMON

In the first letter of his ninth book Pliny urges his friend Maximus to hurry on the publication of a work in which Maximus attacks a certain Pompeius Planta. Planta has just died, but Pliny maintains that if Maximus (who has been working on this piece for some time) gets it published promptly, it will have the same effect as if it had been published while its victim was still alive: *in defunctum quoque tamquam in uiuentem adhuc editur, si editur statim* (Ep. 9.1.4). This is obviously wishful thinking, a willful dismissal of a fact of life, or, more precisely, of the fact of Planta's death. And, be it said, a public display of wishful thinking on Pliny's part, since he himself selected this letter for his collection.

Both the publication of Pliny's letter and the envisaged publication of Maximus' book assume that the book's readers will align themselves with this mode of thought; will agree, that is, that the distinction between *defunctus* and *uiuens* can be willed away. On the evidence of the *Siluae*, written a decade or so earlier, the assumption was perfectly justified. For these poems everywhere bespeak a taste for the collective suspension of disbelief and indulge that taste with paradoxes far bolder than Pliny's.

Thus when Tacitus comes along with his insistence on distinguishing between *species* and reality and getting behind appearances, he is rather like the small boy in the story alluded to in my title, the boy who sees (and says) that the emperor's new clothes aren't new and don't clothe him. Which, of course, makes the *Siluae* out to be lavish descriptions of those non-existent clothes. My first task, then, is to justify implying in the title that the *Siluae* are both fanciful and insubstantial. But my second is to show that Statius means his insubstantial fancies seriously.

In order to reduce this topic to a manageable compass I have limited it in two ways. First, I only treat poems that Statius wrote for patrons outside of the imperial household (the *priuati*); and second, I

* My thanks go first to audiences at the Statius Conference in Dublin, Brown University, and the University of Arizona, whose questions helped me sharpen my argument. But foremost to Ted Courtney, under whose tutelage I first read the *Siluae*.

focus on one particularly problematic kind of praise in those poems, namely, competitive comparisons, or *Überbietungen*, in which Statius sets real Romans in competition with mythological Greeks.¹

I. COMPONERE MAGNIS PARVA

Siluae 3.1 provides our first examples. The poem celebrates the construction of a temple to Hercules on the shore of Surrentum by a favorite *priuatus*, Pollius Felix. The effort Pollius put into the project is twice declared a Herculean labor, the second time by Hercules himself (3.1.166–70;² cf. 19–22):

‘macte animis opibusque *meos imitate labores*,
qui rigidas rupes infecundaeque pudenda
naturae deserta domas et uertis in usum
lustra habitata feris foedeque latentia profers
numina.’

Meos imitate labores, though not precisely a comparison, sounds a competitive note, and the list of Pollius' achievements (*domas . . . uertis in usum . . . profers numina*) aligns nicely with the themes of Hercules' contributions to civilization. Another of Hercules' claims to fame is evoked earlier in the poem, where the young priest of the temple, probably Pollius' grandson, is said to resemble Hercules in his youthful serpent-strangling phase (46–48):

hic templis inscriptus auo gaudente sacerdos
paruus adhuc *similisque tui* cum prima nouercae
monstra manu premeres atque exanimata doleres.

Pollius' wife, Polla, has her own connection with the Hercules tale; besides meriting one of the apples of the Hesperides, the fruit of his 11th labor, she would, were she still young, make Hercules her slave just as Omphale did (158–62):

si tibi poma supersunt
Hesperidum, gremio uenerabilis ingere Pollae,

¹ E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. W. R. Trask (Princeton 1953; German edition Bern 1948) 162–66. The poems that Statius wrote directly or indirectly to the emperor's address have many *Überbietungen* of their own, of course. According to *Siluae* 3.4, for example, Domitian's cupbearer Earinus has a better head of hair than Nisus or Achilles (3.4.84–85), both of whom, along with Apollo, are the regular mythological *exempla* for outstanding hair. But exaggeration in the praise of an emperor and his creatures is notoriously difficult to assess: when does it cross over the line from the merely fulsome to the subversive? This is an important question, but one that I prefer to approach indirectly, i.e. by looking at Statius' manner in praising *priuati*.

² The text used for the *Siluae* is, of course, our honorand's 1990 OCT.

nam capit et tantum non degenerabit honorem.
quodsi dulce decus uiridesque resumeret annos,
(da ueniam, Alcide) fors hic et pensa tulisses.

In these passages the honors are about even; Statius refrains from showing Hercules defeated by the present in a poem about his own temple.

Other heroic figures, however, are treated less tenderly. Thus Pollius' construction project, in addition to being a Herculean labor, is like Amphion's raising the walls of Thebes with his lyre, and like the labor of Apollo and Neptune on the walls of Troy, but swifter than either: *non Amphioniae steterint uelocius arces Pergameusue labor* (115–16). Then the sheer noise of the project requires another double comparison (130–33):

non tam grande sonat motis incudibus Aetne
cum Brontes Steropesque ferit, nec maior ab antris
Lemniacis fragor est ubi flammeus aegida caelat
Mulciber et castis exornat Pallada donis.

And a still longer list of comparisons describes the dedication ceremony, a ceremony worthy of Olympia's Zeus or Delphic Apollo (140–42 *nec . . . aspernetur*) and better than those associated with Poseidon and Nemean Zeus: *cedat lacrimabilis Isthmos, / cedat atrox Nemeae: litat hic felicior infans* (142–43).³

Turning to the poems for another *priuatus*, Claudius Etruscus, the successful son of a successful imperial freedman, we see more competition with the mythological world. In *Siluae* 3.3, a poem on the death of Etruscus' aged parent, the competition comes at the patron's request: Etruscus had asked Statius for a song to surpass the Sirens' song, a lament that would out-swan the swan song and out-mourn Procne's mourning for Itys (173–76):

hic maesti pietas me poscit Etrusci
qualia nec Siculae moderantur carmina rupes
nec fati iam certus olor saeuique marita
Tereos.

In the poem itself Etruscus' mourning is likened to Theseus' grief at Aegeus' death: *haud aliter gemuit per Sunia Theseus / litora, qui falsis deceperat Aegea uelis* (178–79).⁴ And finally there is Etruscus' boast that

³ *Lacrimabilis* and *atrox* refer to the games' foundation stories, each commemorating the death of a child (see G. Laguna, *Estacio Siluas III: Introducción, edición crítica, traducción, y comentario* [Madrid 1992] ad loc.). Pollius' games, by contrast, have a happy occasion (142 *nil his triste locis*) and a lucky child (143). For *cedere* in competitive comparisons see Laguna ad 142 and Curtius (above n. 1) 162 n. 65.

⁴ Statius must assume here that his audience will accept the boundaries he sup-

he, with his filial affection, had a better claim than Orpheus to retrieving a loved one from the underworld: *hoc quanto melius pro patre liceret!* (194). A poem written for the happier occasion of the opening of Etruscus' baths, sounds a lighter, but still competitive, note. How to convey the character of the new baths? By saying that Aphrodite would prefer to have been born here, that Narcissus would see his reflection more clearly here, that Hecate would wish to bathe here even if she had to put up with spectators (1.5.54–56).

In poems written for a third *priuatius*, Atedius Melior, we hear that his recently deceased *puer delicatus* Glaucias could have taken Hyacinthus' place with Apollo, or Hylas' with Hercules (2.1.112–13 *Oebaliden illo praeceps mutaret Apollo, / Alcides pensaret Hylan*; cf. 140–45). And also that Glaucias would have softened the hearts of the mythological *exempla* of hard-heartedness towards children (2.1.140–45):

hunc nec saeua uiro potuisset carpere Procne
nec fera crudeles Colchis durasset in iras,
editus Aeolia nec si foret iste Creusa;
toruus ab hoc Athamas insanos fleteret arcus;
hunc quamquam Hectoreos cineres Troiamque perosus
turribus e Phrygiis flesset missurus Vlixes.

In short, Melior's *puer* was, in life, more desirable than those beloved of the heroes, and, in death, more pitiable than the child victims of tragedy. Melior's parrot, which was also loved and lost, Statius first takes the measure of by looking at the natural world. It was a creature of surpassing beauty (2.4.26–28),

quem non gemmata uolucris Iunonia cauda
uinceret aspectu, gelidi non Phasidis ales
nec quas umentis Numidae rapuere sub austro.

But defunct, this parrot received from Melior a pyre that would have done the dying phoenix proud: *senio nec fessus inertis / scandet odoratos phoenix felicior ignes* (36–37).

What is one to make of these comparisons? In his epics Statius shows himself fond of bold and even paradoxical comparisons, but these seem

plies for the comparison: Etruscus' grief is like that of Theseus, i.e. heroic, but his situation is quite different. Statius is not, I think, implying that Etruscus, like Theseus, caused his fond father's death by his own carelessness (those mistaken sails). It is useful to keep this example in mind when looking at the mythological allusions in the poems to Domitian, which have sometimes been seen as subversive. As, for example, in the comparison made at *Siluae* 1.1.11–16 between the new equestrian statue of Domitian in the Roman forum and the Trojan horse. When Statius says that neither Aeneas himself nor great Hector would have been able to drag *this* horse into Troy he may simply be making a statement about size. *Contra*, F. M. Ahl, "The Rider and the Horse: Politics and Power in Roman Poetry from Horace to Statius," in *ANRW* 2.32.1 (1984) 40–124, esp. 92.

positively flippant. When Statius begins to trot out lists of *exempla*, all of whom his present *laudandus* surpasses, one has to feel that he does not take any of the 'victories' very seriously.⁵ The figure of emphasis, or, saying less than you mean, has often been invoked lately to explain the literature of the empire, but the phenomenon we are examining would appear to be the opposite of emphasis: Statius makes big claims, and means very little by them.

A glance at some comparisons that work rather differently will help show how odd these passages really are. For not all of Statius' comparisons involve outdoing, or at least not this sort of easy outdoing; when the comparison is not mythological but real one finds not facile victory but rather caution.⁶ The challenge that Statius' epics present to Virgil and Lucan, for example, is either undecided, as in poem 4.7 (25–28 *quippe . . . nostra Thebais . . . temptat audaci fide Mantuanae gaudia famae*), or deferred, as in the preface to Book 2, where Statius says he avoided writing about Lucan in hexameter: *laudes eius* (sc. *Lucani*) *dicturus hexametros meos timui* (25–26). This might be the poet's modesty—though modesty is hardly Statius' signature virtue—but one can also adduce the precision with which he delimits the terms in which the current owner of the Hercules statuette described in *Siluae* 4.6, Novius Vindex, can compete with its former owners (who were, to be sure, a hard-to-beat lot; 106–108):

*nec te regnator Macetum nec barbarus umquam
Hannibal aut saeui posset uox horrida Sullae
his celebrare modis.*

Hercules will prefer Vindex to Alexander and Hannibal and Sulla because only Vindex can render his praise in verse, a safe enough assumption. Finally, the baths of Etruscus. These are compared, not with mythological baths (which are hard to come by), but with real baths in Baiae and Rome (1.5.60–63):

⁵ Thus B. C. Verstraete, "Originality and Mannerism in Statius' Use of Myth in the *Siluae*," *L'Antiquité classique* 52 (1983) 195–205, esp. 204 "In the profusion of mythological comparisons and allusions . . . there is relatively little imaginative force. The mythological material is not, in general, played off against the realities of the present and developed as such for its dramatic, psychological, or ironic possibilities, but usually appears as a conglomeration of bland clichés."

⁶ These competitive comparisons might also be contrasted with the manner in which mythological themes are deployed (some decades later) on sarcophagi, where analogy and allusion seem to be the operative principles, not competition. See for discussion and bibliography M. Koortbojian, *Myth, Meaning, and Memory on Roman Sarcophagi* (Berkeley 1995); for Hercules in particular see P. F. B. Jongste, *The Twelve Labours of Hercules on Roman Sarcophagi* (Rome 1992). (My gratitude for this suggestion goes to Ross Holloway.)

*nec si Baianis ueniat nouus hospes ab oris
talia despiciet (fas sit componere magnis
parua), Neronea nec qui modo lotus in unda
hic iterum sudare neget.*

Etruscus' baths win the competition, it is true, but Statius qualifies the victory with a disclaimer: *fas sit componere magnis parua*. Recognizing that there is something to excuse in such a comparison is precisely what is lacking in the passages we looked at earlier; with mythological comparanda there are seemingly no limits.

The most extreme example of boundless praise in the non-Domitianic poems is perhaps a line from the *laudes Crispini*, Crispinus being an ambitious 16-year-old about to enter his public career. Midway through the poem Statius reaches the topic of the boy's physique. Claiming to have witnessed the boy exercising on the Campus Martius, he waxes enthusiastic: *siqua fides dictis, stupui, Martemque putau* (5.2.117). An epiphany of Mars on the Campus Martius is bold enough—the more so because Crispinus is still adolescent and Mars is usually portrayed in heavy maturity—but this line also seems to contain the means of its own undoing in the words *siqua fides dictis*. Does he want us to trust his words, or does he not?

On this somewhat aporetic (not to say exasperated) note I end part one, having demonstrated, I hope, that there is something in the *Siluae* very much like the enthusiasm of the fairy-tale crowd for the color, texture, and cut of the emperor's new clothes. Now for part two.

II. FLATTERY AND ENCOMIUM

I'll begin with the proposition that *fides*, in the expression *siqua fides dictis*, though it is Statius' own word, is simply the wrong word for what Statius wants from his readers. In the *Siluae* he refuses to allow readers any comfortable reliance on authorial sincerity.

And yet this is contrary to what one might expect in occasional poems, which were supposed, after all, to be sincere cliental *munera*, spontaneous demonstrations of the client-poet's personal involvement in the events of his patron's life. In the miniature debate about this sort of composition that Statius included in the preface to the fourth book (and second collection) of the *Siluae*, the poet's rather hostile interlocutor concedes that one might write light poems of this sort "for private audiences," i.e. for those whose occasions were their subjects: *exerceri autem ioco non licet? 'secreto' inquit (4 praef. 29–30)*. On this view a *consolatio*, for example, was supposed to console, and a wedding poem to celebrate; the poems were not supposed to advertise the addressee's literary taste or the author's skill. And if Martial's 220 or so occasional poems—the biggest collection we have—give grounds to judge by, the

rhetoric, if not the reality, of most such poems remained that of sincerity: though published in book form, Martial's epigrams retain their occasional integrity. That is, they speak to their addressees without acknowledging the larger readership.⁷ As for the *Silvae*, however, the poet's response to the interlocutor's *secretio*—*sed et sphaeromachia spectantes et palaris lusio admittit* (4 *praef.* 30–31)—suggests that spectators were envisaged from the beginning of the poetic enterprise.

A passage from Augustine that Michael Dewar cited in an article on Lucan's over-the-top praise of Nero in the *Pharsalia* proem is helpful here.⁸ At *Confessions* 6.6 Augustine says, of an upcoming occasion that would require him to praise the emperor, that he would be telling many a lie (*plura mentirer*) and would win approval for his lies (*mentienti faueretur*) from those who knew they were lies (*ab scientibus*).⁹ Here it is clear that there was merit in the performance of praise even if no one believed its content, and that approval would be bestowed not (or not only) by the person praised, here the emperor, but (or but also) by the community of listeners. Augustine does not mean that what he would really like to do is criticize the emperor, or that he wants his audience to read criticisms into his praises, but simply that his literary form, the *laudatio*, has been emptied of real content, or, perhaps, that the form has become the significant content: a *laudatio* provides the necessary verbiage for an occasion that constitutes a declaration of loyalty, an up-to-the-moment demonstration of the fact that, whatever discontents might be festering under the façade of loyalty, the façade is holding up. This is something that both emperor and audience needed to see confirmed periodically. *Fides*, the term that sent me off on this trail, is doubly irrelevant: Augustine was not sincere in his praise of the emperor, nor did the audience believe the praise. (And in 'audience' here I am including both the emperor, who presumably knew what was or was not true, and the members of the crowd, in whom the occasion itself blocked belief.) But both parts of the audience found merit in the performance: *faueretur ab scientibus*.

With Statius' Meliours and Polliuses and Crispinus the double irrelevance of *fides* is the same: we are no more likely than Crispinus was to believe that he brings Mars to mind or that Statius was sincere in saying it. But the social situation is quite different: it is not clear what

⁷ In this respect they are comparable to Pliny's *Epistulae*, which are also published versions of private communications and are similarly reticent about their new life in the public's view.

⁸ "Laying It on with a Trowel: The Proem to Lucan and Related Texts," *CQ* 44 (1994) 199–211.

⁹ *Aug. Conf.* 6.6 *die illo quo, cum pararem recitare imperatori laudes quibus plura mentirer et mentienti faueretur ab scientibus*.

the public—and it is publication that makes occasional poems problematic—stood to gain from Statius' *laudatio*.

Augustine's audience and Statius' readership differ in this: the former is a natural community of interest (the emperor and his subjects), the latter is not. With his book *Poets, Patrons, and Epideixis in the Graeco-Roman World* Alex Hardie contributed a great deal to our understanding of the *Siluae* by showing how much material Statius has drawn from the public genres of encomium for them, but one thing that Statius could not transfer from Greek rhetoric to Latin verse, at least not directly, was the community in which public encomium of important members had a social function.¹⁰ And to put it bluntly, without the public setting, encomium is just plain flattery, an interpersonal strategy used for purely personal ends. However, the temper of the Flavian age was not such as to let a mere gap in nature get in the way of progress; if Pollius can raise a mountain where a plain used to be (as Statius says he does at *Siluae* 2.2.54), perhaps Statius can create a community in which his flattery counts as encomium.

That such was his aim will, I think, emerge if we pursue the contrast with Martial a little further. Each of Martial's occasional poems is a poem with a job to do: weddings and birthdays are fêted, voyagers are sped on their way, career milestones are commemorated, people or things are described and/or praised, deaths are lamented, and so on. The poems generally provide no information about the poet/patron relationship of which the poem is a momentary instantiation. Thus Martial's poem on the opening of Claudius Etruscus' bathhouse—the same bathhouse where, according to Statius, Venus would have preferred to have been born—contains nineteen lines of description of the water, the atmosphere, the lighting, the decor, the warmth, and so on, but nothing on how Martial knows Etruscus or why he is writing (6.42). That was obvious to writer and addressee and irrelevant, according to the rhetoric of sincerity, to anyone else. As private utterances delivered in presentation-quality *libelli*, such poems provided one kind of 'cultural capital' for their addressees: they'd look nicely on bookcases, for example, or one could casually quote choice bits in conversation, or even, as Pliny did with the verses Martial wrote for him (and published: it is *Ep.* 10.19), transcribe lines into one's letters (*Epist.* 3.21).¹¹ Such poems are aptly imaged in the preface to the ninth book of the *Epi-*

¹⁰ (Liverpool 1983).

¹¹ For bookcases and casual quotation cf. *Mart.* 6.64.10–11 *quas (sc. nugae) et perpeti dignantur scrinia Sili, / et repetit totiens facundo Regulus ore*; for the latter alone cf. *Stat. Silu.* 1 *praef.* 23–26 *Manilius certe Vopiscus, uir eruditissimus et qui praecipue uindicat a situ litteras paene fugientes, solet ultro quoque nomine meo gloriari uillam Tiburtinam suam descriptam a nobis uno die.*

grams, where we learn that Stertinius Avitus, consul in 92, displays a bust of Martial (complete with *titulus* by Martial) in his private library (9 *praef.*):

hoc tibi sub nostra breue carmen imagine uiuat,
 quam non obscuris iungis, Auite, uiris;
 'ille ego sum nulli nugarum laude secundus,
 quem non miraris sed, puto, lector, amas.
 maiores maiora sonent: mihi parua locuto
 sufficit in uestras saepe redire manus.'

Avitus clearly wants to say to those who visit his library and see the bust "*poeta meus!*" This physical *imago* constitutes a more readily displayed, but still privately displayed affirmation of the relationship between patron and poet that is attested on the patron's special occasions by the poet's occasional poems.

But Martial's occasional poems were also issued in *libri* distributed by booksellers and stowed in the sweaty pockets of the reading classes of Rome, as Martial proudly boasts in *Epigram* 6.60: *laudat, amat, cantat nostros mea Roma libellos*. So published, the occasional poems have more in common with another form of testimonial that Martial offers, namely, the position of addressee in poems on subjects not directly connected with the addressee.

Recipients of occasional poems in fact appear frequently in the flattering role of poet's interlocutor in programmatic poems, and also, less frequently, in the satiric epigrams. Aquillius Regulus, for example, is the addressee of 4 occasional poems and 8 occasionless ones; for other addressees the proportions vary but the practice is the same. Stertinius Avitus—he of the bust—is named in two epigrams about the writing of poetry and in three other occasionless poems.¹² The former serve as testimonials of his literary taste, the latter attest association with a poet, which is really all that the occasional poems achieve in published form. In fact, the occasionless addresses may have been the more successful of the two categories, since exposing the *munera* of an interpersonal relationship to the public gaze tended to arouse irritation and *inuidia* in readers other than the addressee.¹³ To develop the metaphor I used

¹² E.g. 1.16 *sunt bona, sunt quaedam mediocria, sunt mala plura / quae legis hic: aliter non fit, Auite, liber* (cf. 10.96, 10.102, 12.24, 12.75).

¹³ Some of what Martial has to say about this is indicated in *Epigram* 1.40, a comment on a reader's likely reaction to reading 1.39, a poem praising someone called Decianus: *qui ducis uultus et non legis ista libenter, / omnibus inuideas, liuide, nemo tibi*. And from 10.59, where he abuses the reader who skips the longer poems—and the longer ones tend to be occasional—it is clear that disinterest is no less to be expected than envy. Similarly negative reactions are challenged in 5.15 and 10.45.

earlier, publication of occasional epigrams can be considered equivalent to opening Avitus' front door so that passers-by can see at a distance the bust of Martial. Neither strolling past the door nor reading the epigram demands much commitment or community of interest in the viewer/reader and is as likely to arouse *invidia* as admiration, but each activity may result in some small gain of stature for the poem's addressee.

Statius' occasional poems for private patrons have a fundamentally different relationship with the reading public. They seem rather to usher the public in, to give it access to an essentially private occasion. For unlike Martial, Statius gives himself a prominent presence on the occasions that called forth the poems and offers his eyes for the public to see with.

The contrast emerges clearly from the poems on the wedding of Arruntius Stella and Violentilla. Where Martial shows the event through the eyes and words of the goddess of love—his poem, *Epigram* 6.21, begins "As joyous Venus was uniting for all time the bride and Stella the poet she says 'I could not give you more'"—Statius, setting himself amidst the crowd of clients and friends (and divinities) who help the couple celebrate the day, describes the festivities through his own eyes and speaks *dum feruent agmine postes* (1.2.47). And yet, according to Peter White, Martial knew Stella far better than Statius did.¹⁴

That opening up his addressee's privacy to public viewing was Statius' purpose can be demonstrated in more detail from the first poem in Book 3, the poem that we glanced at earlier for its competitive comparisons with Hercules *et al.* This poem celebrates a public occasion, the dedication of Pollius' restored temple of Hercules. Statius' poem, however, treats the private story behind the public event. His is a narrative of Pollius' simple summer picnic, a picnic that was threatened by stormclouds (Virgilian stormclouds, no less, comparable to those that bedded Dido and Aeneas: 73–75). Instead of a cave, however, Pollius' party finds a derelict temple of Hercules to take shelter in. The proprietary god seizes his chance and appears to Pollius, suggesting that Pollius replace his rundown shrine with an edifice more worthy of both of them. And so on. The poem gives an aetion for the public occasion, and does so by describing in detail—and the details are many, including the food, the wine, and the pillows for Polla—the details of a day in the life of Pollius as told by a poet who was an intimate of the household: *facundi . . . larem Polli non hospes habebam* (65). Also included in the poem is a reprise of Statius' poem on Pollius' Surrentine villa, *Siluae* 2.2: lines 93–101 of 3.1 catalog the highlights: hilltop setting,

¹⁴ "The Friends of Martial, Statius, and Pliny, and the Dispersal of Patronage," *HSCP* 79 (1975) 265–300, esp. 267–72.

wooded acres, statues in marble and bronze, encaustic paintings, columned portico, bath suite.

Pollius, obviously, did not need to be told any of this. Nor, one suspects, did his friends. Publication would in fact seem to be the very reason d'être of *Siluae* 3.1: it doesn't make sense to write a poem that ushers in the audience for an audience that would already have access to the interior, i.e. for Pollius himself and those who, like Statius, enjoy his hospitality. The question is, *is* there an audience that would want to be ushered in by the poet, and would that audience accept the mythological apparatus of the poem—the competitive comparisons that we looked at earlier, the Virgilian storm, the divine epiphany—would it accept all this as encomium?

A full answer to this question goes beyond the scope of the present paper, but one line of approach draws on the mythological comparisons with which we began.

Many of Statius' *Überbietungen* come from two thematic areas, conspicuous consumption and intimate relationships. We have seen Pollius' temple renovation and celebratory games, Etruscus' *pietas* and luxurious baths, two much-indulged favorites of Melior. One might also point to passages on Arruntius Stella's ardor as a lover, on the villa of Manilius Vopiscus, on various *pueri delicati*, and on the virtues of Statius' wife as both wife and mother.¹⁵ Other subjects yielding competitive comparisons are poetic virtuosity and sensuous beauty.¹⁶ This is odd, because both *luxuria* and emotional excess are frowned upon in Latin literature of all periods, and commentaries on the *Siluae* are full of passages from Horace, Seneca, Petronius, Pliny, and Juvenal that decry precisely the same luxuries and emotional excesses that Statius celebrates. The other categories, poetry and sex appeal, while not frowned upon per se, are

¹⁵ Further competitive comparisons involving conspicuous consumption and intimate relationships from poems for *priuati*: 1.2.85–90 (Stella a more ardent lover than Hippomenes, Leander), 1.2.194–95 (Asterie more intensely loved than Hylas), 1.2.213–17 (Stella more deeply in love than Paris, Peleus), 1.2.243–46 (Violentilla more appealingly chaste than Lavinia and Claudia), 1.3.76–94 (Vopiscus' villa site preferable to a whole series of hallowed spots, beginning with Egeria's grove and ending with Epicurus' Garden), 2.1.140–45 (Glaucias more pitiable than Itys, Medea's sons, Athamas' sons, Astyanax), 2.1.23 (Melior grieves more than parents), 2.6.25–33 (Ursus' *puer* more beautiful than young Theseus, Paris, Achilles, Troilus), 2.6.54–58, 82–85 (Ursus' *puer* more faithful than Achilles, Theseus, Eumaeus), 3.5.51–52 (Statius' wife more wifely than Penelope), 3.5.57–59 (Statius' wife a more loving mother than Alcyone, Philomela).

¹⁶ E.g. 1.2.130–31 (Violentilla more lovely than Daphne), 2.2.36–42 (Pollius' spring tops list: Helicon, Piplea, Hippocrene, Castalia), 2.2.116 (Pollius' song better than Siren's), 2.4.9–10 (Melior's parrot more eloquent than swan), and see references on Violentilla and Ursus' *puer* in note above. On miscellaneous topics: 1.4.112–14 (Gallius' cure quicker than that of Telephus, Menelaus), 1.5.20–33 (Roman aqueduct water takes precedence over Greek springs).

not exactly what one thinks of as *laudatio* material either. But in all of these areas Statius' praise may in fact reflect contemporary reality better than the voices of traditional morality do.

Consider Pliny's account of Aquillius Regulus' reaction to the loss of a son (*Ep.* 4.2, 4.7). Regulus manifested both intense grief and a desire for display: he gave his son an ostentatious pyre, he had *imagines* of the boy rendered in wax, bronze, silver, gold, ivory and marble, he sent 1000 copies of the *laudatio* that he read at the boy's funeral to cities throughout Italy and the provinces together with a request that the best speaker in each place read it out to the local populace. Pliny, ever one to play by the rules, has only scorn for what he perceives as Regulus' excess: *luget insane* (4.2.3), he says, *nec dolor erat ille, sed ostentatio doloris* (4.2.4), *luget ut nemo* (4.7.1), and so on. But even Pliny can see that the *mos maiorum* on matters of bereavement was unnecessarily and perhaps inhumanly restrictive, for when he contemplates the grief of a father less hateful to him than Regulus was his reaction is rather different. When his friend Fundanius, for example, said, in Pliny's hearing, that he would spend the sum that he had intended for his daughter's trousseau on her pyre, Pliny remarks that the grieving father's philosophical and moral training appeared to have gone out the window—*expulsis uirtutibus aliis*—but also that what remained was a virtue: *pietatis est totus* (*Ep.* 5.16.7–8). That is, Pliny knows that Roman tradition does not sanction extravagance in mourning, but he nevertheless finds Fundanius' grief understandable and he even urges his addressee, a mutual friend, to defer to it, at least for a time (5.16.10). More to the point, the behavior of both fathers shows that grief and competition can act in tandem in this period, even if Pliny disapproves.

And one only has to turn to Pliny's villa letters to see that conspicuous consumption was the decorating rule, not the exception among *priuati*.¹⁷ All the better, of course, if you can have your villa and advertise it, too, as Manilius Vopiscus, another Statian *priuatus*, did: *solet ultro quoque nomine meo gloriari uillam Tiburtinam suam descriptam a nobis uno die* (1 *praef.* 25–26). The poem in question, *Siluae* 1.3, details the *miracula* (1.3.14) that make Vopiscus' estate preferable to Egeria's grove, Alcinous' orchards, Epicurus' Garden and other lovely spots; it also makes it possible for even those who cannot visit the villa to see it. About Pollius, for whom Statius wrote another villa poem (2.2), we can say even more.

Earlier in life Pollius had cut a figure in the public life of both Naples and Puteoli (2.2.133–38):

¹⁷ See *Ep.* 2.17, 3.19, 5.6, 9.7 as well as 1.3 on his friend Caninius' *pinguis secessus* (3). For discussion see Bettina Bergmann, "Visualizing Pliny's Villas," *JRA* 8 (1995) 406–20.

tempus erat cum te geminae suffragia terrae
 diriperent celsusque duas ueherere per urbes,
 inde Dicarcheis multum uenerande colonis,
 hinc adscite meis, pariterque his largus et illis.

As part of that effort he had erected costly buildings in both cities; it is for this reason that Hercules calls him *largitor opum* (3.1.91–93):

‘tune’ inquit ‘largitor opum, qui mente profusa
 tecta Dicaearchi pariter iuuenemque replesti
 Parthenopen?’

But in both 2.2 and 3.1 Statius depicts Pollius as a man who has withdrawn from the contests and risks of public life. In 2.2 Pollius’ public endeavors are characterized as a youthful enthusiasm and ascribed to his (former) ignorance of the good (*iuuenile calens rectique errore superbus*, 2.2.137); the life he chooses now is one of *quies* (121–25; cf. 3 *praef.* 1–2 *hac cui tam fideliter inhaeres quiete*):

uiuue, Midae gazis et Lydo ditior auro,
 Troica et Euphratae supra diademata felix,
 quem non ambigui fasces, non mobile uulgus,
 non leges, non castra terent, qui pectore magno
 spemque metumque domas uoto sublimior omni.

It is clear that Pollius, comfortable with his millions, does not waste time on the *fasces* or the *vulgus* or *leges* or *castra*. But *quies* needn’t imply that Pollius is not ambitious for the public eye: at 3.1.106, for example, Statius’ Hercules urges Pollius to compete with his past efforts: *da templum dignasque tuis conatibus aras*. What is different is the competitive venue, not the competitiveness itself; Pollius has simply changed the way he displays himself to the public. And for Pollius’ new endeavors Statius’ services were essential: it was the poet who provided the proper packaging.

What we see in the poems for Pollius is the pinnacle of what a contemporary Roman *priuat* might achieve with sufficient wealth and leisure. In raising himself to this pinnacle Pollius was competing in a field where not even achievement, let alone competition, was sanctioned by the *mos maiorum*. And the same might be said of Regulus’ *ostentatio doloris*. But although neither private luxury nor intimate emotion figures prominently in Roman models of *virtus*, the competitions engaged in by both Pollius and Regulus make it clear that these attainments had contemporary social value. And Romans who espoused these values, who surrounded themselves with beauty and cultivated their emotions, might well constitute a community of interest that would

value Statius' *Siluae*. Not, of course, because they believed that Flavius Ursus' *delicatus* was more winsome than Paris, or that Vopiscus' villa was nicer than the Garden, or that Pollius' song was better than the Siren's—as I suggested in part one, in my view these poems describe the private equivalent of the emperor's new clothes—but because they focus the gaze in the right direction, on writing verse, living in a nice villa, and loving. Statius provides a neat summary of the new values championed in the *Siluae* when his Hercules blesses Pollius' spirit and his wealth: *macte animis opibusque* (3.1.166).¹⁸

It is of course no compliment to Statius to cast him as master of ceremonies in the story about an emperor on parade in his underwear. But Statius would be the first to admit that his *Siluae* were a risky proposition. Books 1–3, which were published as a unit a few years before the single Book 4 and the posthumous Book 5, were in fact criticized (or so Statius would have us believe); he responded by putting more poems in his fourth book than in any of the earlier ones so that his critics would not think him chastened (4 *praef.* 25–27 *ne se putent aliquid egisse qui reprehenderunt, ut audio, quod hoc stili genus edidissem*). One might think, given *what* they praise, *animi opesque*, that the *Siluae* herald a revolution in Roman values. However, no one, to my knowledge, has argued that Statius is a latter-day Catullus. Largely, I think, because of *how* the *Siluae* praise. The mode of praise that we have been looking at—setting real Romans in competition with mythological Greeks—is typical of the riot of fanciful poetic effects that Statius' deploys in describing the world of Pollius and the other *priuati*. If you want to see clothes on the emperor or value in what Statius' patrons compete for, you are welcome to do so, but Statius won't insist. In fact, he gives us his response to those who fail to see the value of the poems in the preface to *Siluae* 4: *quisquis ex meis inuitus aliquid legit, statim se profitetur aduersum. ita quare consilio eius accedam? in summam, nempe ego sum qui traducor; taceat et gaudeat* (31–34). He shrugs, and invites the hostile reader go off and enjoy a snicker by himself. To my mind this shrug is what makes these poems hard to stomach as poems today. We don't belong to the community of interest in which Statius' praise could count as encomium, and therefore to us they seem, too easily, mere flattery.¹⁹

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¹⁸ Cf. 2.2.95–96, also on Pollius: *macte animo quod Graia probas, quod Graia frequentas / arva*, and 1.3.105–106 on Vopiscus: *digne Midae Croesique bonis et Perside gaza, / macte bonis animi*. See Laguna (above n. 3) ad loc. for parallels beyond Statius.

¹⁹ We do, however, belong to a community in which praise of scholarship and teaching counts as encomium. Ted has always insisted on precision and spoken with authority, and to show in his honor and with much gratitude how effective his example has been

I append here a footnote to a comment of mine found wanting when I gave a paper at UVA not long ago. At issue is the translation of Josephus, *AJ* 18.54, a passage on the death of Germanicus: καὶ γὰρ γενόμενος κατὰ τὴν ἀνατολὴν καὶ πάντα διορθώσας ἀνηρέθη φαρμάκῳ ὑπὸ Πείσωνος, καθὼς ἐν ἄλλοις δεδήλωται. Following Feldman's Loeb translation for καθὼς ἐν ἄλλοις δεδήλωται "as other writers have explained," I took this to be direct evidence of the existence in the Flavian period of narratives about the Piso/Germanicus episode so famously told later by Tacitus in *Annals* 2 and 3. Ted observed, however, that the phrase would more naturally mean "as is shown in others (sc. of my works)." I have since pursued the question. Josephus has two basic cross-reference formulas: the impersonal passive form used here (and at *AJ* 11.305, 13.186, 13.253, 13.371, 14.98, 14.119, and 14.270) and a first person form that appears in the future tense (*AJ* 1.193 ἐν ἄλλοις δηλώσω, referring to a work named and shaped into four books, but never completed; cf. 3.74, 6.322, 15.372, *Ap.* 1.92), in the aorist (*Vit.* 61 ὡς ἐν ἄλλοις ἐδηλώσαμεν, referring to *BJ* 2.483), and most commonly in the perfect (*AJ* 7.394 καθὼς καὶ ἐν ἄλλοις δεδηλώκαμεν, referring to *BJ* 1.61 [and also *AJ* 13.249]; cf. 12.245, 13.37, 13.61, 13.108, 13.119, 13.271, 13.347, 13.372). The passages referred to by the first person formulas can generally be located in Josephus' works, but the passive formulas are a different matter. All are occasioned by topics of Hellenistic and Roman political and military history; the Roman topics (from *AJ* 14) are Gabinius' restoration of Ptolemy Auletes, Crassus' Parthian expedition, and the assassination of Julius Caesar. There are no other discussions of these chestnuts in Josephus, nor is there any call for them. In the Loeb Josephus at *AJ* 11.305 Ralph Marcus promises an appendix on "cross-references not readily identifiable in Josephus' extant writings" for the final volume of the set (which he did not live to see); none is in fact present. In his note to 13.186 he suggests that the expression either is taken verbatim from Josephus' source or bears the (somewhat artificial) meaning "in other authors." Given the well-attested status of the subjects mentioned in these passages (including the death of Germanicus), the latter seems a reasonable hypothesis. In short, we were both right. But I'm glad I checked.

Vertis in usum

Studies in Honor of Edward Courtney

Edited by
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