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Timothy M. O'Sullivan

*Waiting on a Friend: Statius, Silvae 4.7**

The renewed embrace of historicism in recent decades has helped revive the reputation of Statius' *Silvae*. As remnants of the relationship between poet and patron in Flavian Rome, for example, the *Silvae* can exemplify the careful navigation required in the imperial court and high society of the time.¹ Yet appreciation of their literary qualities has lagged behind this increased interest in the cultural context of the *Silvae*, and analysis of the poems' exuberant strategies of praise too often seems to involve a degree of defensiveness.² In recent years this trend has begun to reverse, with the appearance of studies treating the poems as poems and not mere cultural artifacts.³ Statius' lyric ode to

* For their comments and advice on earlier drafts of this article, I would like to thank Joan Burton, Kathleen Coleman, Alessandro Schiesaro, and the anonymous reviewer for «MD».

¹ See especially Ahl 1984; Nauta 2002, pp. 193-248 and 327-55; Rühl 2006.

² Cf. McNelis 2007a, p. 283, who takes critics to task for «undervaluing or even discounting the artistic programmes that drive Statius's poems». There have been, of course, early exceptions; see especially Cancik 1965; Pavlovskis 1973; Hardie 1983; Coleman 1988.

³ See especially Henderson 1998; Newlands 2002; Zeiner 2005; Rühl 2006; various articles in Nauta, van Dam, Smolenaars 2006; and the articles in «Arethusa» 40.2 (2007), which, according

Vibius Maximus (*Silvae* 4.7) has yet to receive such treatment, however.⁴ Yet this poem offers an intimate and important view of Statius' contemplation of his own art as well as its complicated relation to his patron.

Silvae 4.7 has been studied more often for its prosopographical data than for its literary qualities. Critical attention has focused on the precise identification of Statius' friend and mentor: is he the Vibius Maximus who would later become prefect of Egypt, addressee of the second letter in the third book of the Younger Pliny's *Epistulae*? Or is he the addressee of Martial 11.106 (*Vibi Maximi, si vacas havere...*)? Ronald Syme 1957 initially suggested that all three Vibii were the same man, and it is tempting to suppose that three of the more prominent literary figures of the period had a friend in common. Peter White 1973 convincingly showed, however, that the three addressees cannot be the same man. Stripped of his post in Egypt, our Vibius Maximus fits more readily into the ranks of Statius' non-imperial honorands: somewhat wealthy, but also somewhat removed from the power struggles at Rome.⁵ This paper, however, is interested in a different aspect of Vibius' identity, not as historical figure but rather as poetic persona. By focusing on the literary artfulness of *Silvae* 4.7, we shall see how the poet guides our

to the editors, are «based on the premise that the *Silvae* are to be taken seriously as poetry as well as for their rich and deep range of cultural information» (Augoustakis, Newlands 2007, p. 117).

⁴ The most extended discussions of the poem are offered by the two commentaries: Vollmer 1898, pp. 483-87; Coleman 1988, pp. 195-209. See also Newmyer 1979, pp. 80-82; Hardie 1983, pp. 172-74; Henderson 1993, p. 164; Zeiner 2005, pp. 253-55; Heslin 2005, pp. 60-61; Lovatt 2005, pp. 24-25; Nauta 2006, pp. 34-37; Rühl 2006, pp. 224-26.

⁵ The point is made by White 1973, p. 299, who notes that Rutilius Gallicus (*Silv.* 1.4) is the exception.

view of his patron's role within his poetic world. Self-conscious of its literary lineage and its own art, the poem conveys the implicit hope that Vibius is as dependent on Statius' poetry as Statius' poetry is dependent on his patron.

1. *Epic vs. Lyric: Stanzas 1-3*

Iam diu lato spatia campo
fortis heroos, Erato, labores
differ atque ingens opus in minores
contrahe gyros.

For a long time now, brave Erato, you have trod on the wide plain; delay those heroic efforts and draw your huge work into tighter circles.⁶

Statius' opening gambit, a *recusatio* of sorts (a request to his muse to put off the labors of epic composition and rein in his work to the narrow boundaries of a smaller racetrack) will be familiar enough to readers of Augustan poetry. Virgil in his *Eclogues*, Horace in his *Odes*, Ovid in his *Amores* – all define their poetic project in opposition to epic. The move away from the grand and sprawling subject matter of epic to the confined and personal world of “shorter” poetry was a central tenet of Callimacheanism, and the

⁶ Except where noted, I have taken the Latin text from Shackleton Bailey 2003. All translations are my own.

effects of this literary trend on the poetry of ancient Rome was pervasive.⁷ By Statius' time, the Callimachean aesthetic was inevitably filtered through the Roman poets Catullus, Virgil, Propertius, Horace—poets who did not simply translate the Callimachean aesthetic into Latin, but rather adapted it, altered it, to fit their own poetic visions.⁸

Statius' opening thus recalls the Callimacheanism of these poets, yet he also reshapes it to fit his own unique, poetic place. Statius' *recusatio* is of a different sort here because he is not actually rejecting epic, but merely taking a break from it.⁹ Thus where Callimachus and his Augustan followers might decry the writers of epic for their subject matter, style, diction, and verbosity (the muddy Euphrates, the well-traveled road), Statius prefers less negative associations; he focuses instead simply on the great size of the epic by emphasizing its length – both spatially (*lato...campo; ingens opus*) and

⁷ On the reception of Callimachus in Rome see, most recently, Hunter 2006. Even if Cameron 1995 is correct that the *Aetia* prologue is not concerned with epic poetry at all, Augustan authors clearly saw their resistance to epic in Callimachean terms. Cf. Hunter 2006, p. 2: «modern distortions, such as the idea that Callimachus repeatedly preached against the writing of hexameter epic, derive ultimately from Roman poetry itself».

⁸ That is not to say, however, that Statius himself did not have direct access to Callimachus' poetry; thanks to *Silv.* 5.3.156-7 we know that Statius' father included Callimachus in his teachings. Moreover, as Thomas 1983, pp. 103-05 shows, Statius was a sensitive reader of Callimachus. On Statian Callimacheanism, see also Delarue 2000, pp.117-40; Gibson 2006b, pp. xxiii-xxvii; McNelis 2007b, *passim*.

⁹ In this way the poem is quite different from Horace's «Scriberis Vario» (*carm.* 1.6); see Coleman 1988, pp. 197-98; Zeiner 2005, pp. 254-55; Nauta 2006, pp. 34-37.

temporally (*iam diu*).¹⁰ Of course, Statius would have been keenly aware of the difference between epic and non-epic composition, having spent a good deal of time and effort composing both.¹¹ This awareness manifests itself whenever he speaks of his composition of his *Thebaid*—a task which he tells us consumed twelve years of his life (*Theb.* 12.811). In contrast, Statius' *Silvae* are always carefully placed in one moment in time, one given context.¹² This idea emerges most clearly in the prefaces to each book of the *Silvae*, in which he stresses the speed of their composition. For example, in the preface to book four, he speaks of how his poems «flowed from me with a sudden passion and with a sort of enjoyment of the haste» (*mihi subito calore et quadam festinandi voluptate fluxerunt*). The immediacy of the *Silvae*, their relevance to one specific context, one moment, is emphasized by the verbs he uses to describe their composition, which are, with few exceptions, in the past tense; we are indeed often told the very day on which the

¹⁰ For the muddy Euphrates, see Callim. *Hymn* 2.108-9; for the well-traveled road, see Callim. *Aet.* fr. 1Pf 25-8. Length was of course at issue in the Callimachean conception of aesthetic preference as well (fr. 465Pf).

¹¹ In this sense, Statius' choice of Erato as his muse in this poem is particularly appropriate; like Statius, she is also ambidextrous, associated with both love poetry (e.g., *Silv.* 1.2.47-49) and epic poetry (e.g., Verg. *Aen.* 7.37). On the choice of Erato, see Coleman 1988, ad loc. and Gibson 2006a, pp. 174-75.

¹² On the professed immediacy of the *Silvae* and its effect on interpretation, see Newlands 2002, pp. 33-34; Zeiner 2005, pp. 247-51. On the place of Statius' extemporizing in the Greek epideictic tradition, see Hardie 1983, pp. 76-85.

poem was composed, with no suggestion of later editing.¹³ Thus, like a good Callimachean disciple, Statius defines his *Silvae* in opposition to his epic. But he also inverts the Callimachean hierarchy, for the opening of *Silvae* 4.7 seems to valorize his epic and denigrate his *Silvae*, and this ploy has been deleterious to their interpretation ever since.¹⁴ The extemporaneous and unedited quality of the *Silvae* may be exaggerated by Statius, but this is partly the point: he wants us to believe that his *Silvae* are non-epic trifles, even if their subject matter, diction, and meter often suggest the opposite.¹⁵

¹³ In contrast, Statius cannot end his *Thebaid*, his *longus labor* (*Silv.* 3.5.35), without expressing his hope that the epic poem will live on, and will transcend the circumstances of its composition (*Theb.* 12.810-813):

durabisne procul dominoque legere superstes,
 o mihi bisseos multum vigilata per annos
 Thebai? iam certe praesens tibi Fama benignum
 stravit iter coepitque novam monstrare futuris.

Will you endure for long, my *Thebaid*? Will you be read, surviving your master, who lost much sleep over you for twelve years? Already certainly Fame is at hand and has strewn a kind road for you; she has begun to show you off anew for future generations.

¹⁴ For a fuller discussion of this inversion, see Nauta 2006, pp. 34-37.

¹⁵ Moreover, as the anonymous reader for «MD» points out to me, Statius on occasion draws attention to the ability of the *Silvae* to confer immortality on their subject, despite their extemporaneous quality; see, e.g., *Silv.* 1.6.98-102, 5.1.11-15. Cf. Zeiner 2005, p. 251: “Statius’ statements on the swift compositional nature of the poems [are] inexorably intertwined with his self-fashioning and programmatic statements, whereby he is advertising his poetic skill and literary power in transforming the ephemeral into something eternal.”

The next two stanzas formally introduce Statius' intentions, giving us a concrete program to take the place of the (momentarily) refused epic:

tuque, regnator lyricae cohortis,
da novi paulum mihi iura plectri,
si tuas cantu Latio sacravi,

Pindare, Thebas.

Maximo carmen tenuare tempto.
nunc ab intonsa capienda myrto
serta, nunc maior sitis, at bibendus
castior amnis.¹⁶

And you, Pindar, lord of the lyric cohort, give me control of a new pick for a little while, if I honored your Thebes with a Latian song.

I am trying to make a fine-spun poem for Maximus. Now we must take a crown from uncut myrtle, now our thirst is greater, but we must drink of a purer stream.

The kletic hymn has a new addressee in the second stanza: we move from the divine Erato to Pindar, the lyric master. The hymnic conventions are more apparent in this stanza, with the second personal pronoun, specification of the divinity's dominion (*regnator...*), a request in the imperative, and a *si*-clause appealing to earlier acts of piety

¹⁶ For the conjecture *maior sitis, at bibendus* (for Courtney's †*maior*† *sitis et bibendus*) see Shackleton Bailey 2003, p. 395.

performed for the ‘god’ in question.¹⁷ Yet here too Statius emphasizes the brief and immediate moment of the *Silvae*, for Statius asks to be given the rights to this novel genre only for a little while (*paulum*): this request for help in composing lyric poetry has a time-limit. Statius’ *Silvae* thus exist only in relation to his epics, as pieces composed in a short amount of time during rest stops on the long and winding road of epic composition.¹⁸

Callimachean language returns in full force in the third stanza. Statius’ claim to «make a fine-spun poem» (*carmen tenuare*) for his patron is a nod to the familiar use of *tenuis* as a calque for *leptos*, a central byword of the Callimachean ideal, while his preference for a *castior amnis* is surely a reference to Callimachus’ rejection of the Euphrates in *Hymn* 2.108-9.¹⁹ Yet despite this direct evocation of Alexandrian aesthetics the dominant point of reference in this stanza is rather the poetry of Horace: Statius’ striking repetition of *nunc* paired with *bibendus* (4.7.10-11) echoes the famous opening of the Cleopatra ode (1.37), while myrtle is also a familiar feature of the Horatian lyric landscape, even sometimes paired with an emphatic *nunc* (e.g., *carm.* 1.4.9: *Nunc decet aut viridi nitidum caput impedire myrto*).²⁰ The frequent emphasis on time markers

¹⁷ For a brief introduction to hymnic conventions, including useful summary of relevant bibliography, see Bremmer 1981, pp. 193-97.

¹⁸ Cf. his use of *paulum* to convey the same point in *Silv.* 1.5.8-9: *paulum arma nocentia, Thebae, / ponite* («Thebes, lay down your deadly weapons for a little while»).

¹⁹ For the literary use of *leptos* by Callimachus and his followers, see Pfeiffer 1968, pp. 137-38.

²⁰ «Now is the time to crown our anointed heads with garlands of green myrtle». On Statius’ use of myrtle in *Silv.* 4.7, see also Zeiner 2005, pp. 254-55.

throughout *Silvae* 4.7 (*iam* 1; *paulum* 6; *nunc* 10, 11; *quando* 13; *tardius* 22) also evokes the lyric obsession with time that is a central concern of the Horatian ode; as Lowrie notes, “lyric time is the *hic et nunc*.”²¹ Statius’ Callimacheanism, in other words, is heavily filtered through a Horatian lens. Statius appreciates the novelty of the Horatian experiment: it was Horace’s achievement to unite the classicism of lyric with the Hellenistic aesthetic of Callimachus and others. Thus when Statius chooses to write Latin lyric, his ready evocation of Callimachus and Horace at the same moment recognizes the great achievement of his Augustan predecessor, after whom to write a lyric poem is automatically to write a poem in the *tenuis* style.²²

The first three stanzas of *Silvae* 4.7, then, portray the poet as the heir of a poetic lineage extending from Callimachus through Horace to Statius himself. As a parallel to this triad, the poem also helps effect the switch from epic to lyric by the change in addressee, from Erato to Pindar to Vibius.²³ The grouping of the three figures of Erato, Pindar, and Vibius is one of many important triads in this poem. The message is clear: all three are sources of inspiration for Statius. The triad is thus an indirect way for Statius

²¹ Lowrie 1997, p. 49. Cf. Vollmer 1898, p. 484, who suggests that the poem’s first word is a reference to the opening of Horace’s first poem in Sapphics, *carm.* 1.2 (*Iam satis terris...*).

Moreover, the reference to Pindar in a poem in the sapphic meter is surely a nod to Horace’s *carm.* 4.2 (*Pindarum quisquis studet aemulari*), as noted by Coleman 1988, ad loc.

²² Horatian references are even more abundant in Statius’ alcaic ode to Septimius Severus (*Silv.* 4.5); see Vessey 1970, pp. 513-14. On Horatian Callimacheanism, see Wehrli 1944; Wimmel 1960; Cody 1976; Thill 1979, pp. 224-62; Coffta 2001.

²³ Stanza three introduces Vibius in the third person; from the fourth stanza until the end of the poem the second person will refer to Vibius exclusively.

to heap praise upon his friend, by placing him in such company, while at the same time introducing the theme of Vibius' importance for Statius' poetic composition (as made explicit in stanzas six and seven). By coming at the end of this triad, Vibius even eclipses the first two, for if Erato is Statius' epic muse, and Pindar his lyric one, Vibius tops that, as both inspiration for Statius' epic and honorand of his lyric.

2. Poet and Patron: Stanzas 4 and 5

Stanzas four and five elaborate on the relationship that exists between poet and patron, while at the same time introducing the ostensible subject of the poem—Statius' request that Vibius return from Dalmatia:

quando te dulci Latio remittent
Dalmatae montes, ubi Dite viso
pallidus fossor redit erutoque
concolor auro?
ecce me natum proprio terra
non tamen portu retinent amoeno
desides Baiae liticenve²⁴ notus
Hectoris armis.

²⁴ liticenve notus Hectoris armis *Politianus*: liticenque *Shackleton Bailey*

When will you be sent back to sweet Latium from the Dalmatian mountains, where the miner emerges pale, the color of his excavated gold, after seeing Hades?

Look at me: I was born on nearer ground but nevertheless idle Baiae does not keep me back in her pleasant bay nor the trumpeter familiar with Hector's weapons.

Statius pulls out all the rhetorical stops in his attempt to bring his friend back home. While Statius takes the liberty of ordering Erato and Pindar around (*differ, contrahe; da*), he respectfully phrases his request of Vibius in the form of a question; indeed it is this request which Statius himself claims is the primary motivation for the poem.²⁵ The stanzas turn on an explicit comparison between the situation of Vibius and the situation of his poet friend. Why shouldn't Vibius return to the sweet Latin landscape when his native Dalmatia is so grim and dreary? The author chooses Latium over his own birthplace, even though the bay of Naples is both closer and more pleasant than Latium and Dalmatia. That Naples is the finest of the three locales is emphasized by a *tricolon abundans*, with Latium modified by one adjective, Dalmatia described by one (grim) dependent clause, and the pleasures of the bay of Naples taking over virtually the entire

²⁵ *Silv.* 4 praef.: «I had already sufficiently shown that Vibius Maximus was dear to me on account of his standing and eloquence in my published letter to him about the debut of my *Thebaid*; but now also I ask him to return from Dalmatia more speedily» (*Maximum Vibium et dignitatis et eloquentiae nomine a nobis diligi satis eram testatus epistula quam ad illum de editione Thebaidos meae publicavi; sed nunc quoque eum reverti maturius ex Dalmatia rogo*).

fifth stanza. While Dalmatia clearly has items of value, they are difficult to extract, requiring a heroic quest to the underworld on the part of local miners. Baiae's pleasures, on the other hand, are readily apparent, and its geographical features even bear the hallmark of Homeric antiquity. Statius thus flaunts his ability to introduce heroic and epic themes into his lyric setting; his lyric predecessor Horace often did the same.

Yet the mention of gold mining in a poem to a patron can also conjure the economic disparity behind their relationship. The action Statius urges his friend to take (to return, *redire*) resounds in the anaphora of the three main verbs in the two stanzas: *remittent, redit, retinent*. Perhaps he is hinting at the possibility that Vibius will bring back (or send back, *remitto*) some of Dalmatia's fabled gold along with him?²⁶ The tone of the request is kept light, even jocular, and it is no doubt this comfortable teasing about Vibius and his homeland that led Peter White 1975, p. 292 to call him a «good friend» of Statius. The poet emphasizes his affection for his patron here, and suggests a kind of parallel situation by devoting one stanza to each of them, himself and his patron, with parallel openings: *quando te, ecce me*. But it is in the following two stanzas that the extent of Statius' debt to his friend will be made clear.

3. *Writer's Block: Stanzas 6 and 7*

²⁶ Cf. Heslin 2005, p. 60 (on *Silv.* 4.7.21-8): «In short, Statius wants money and material help, but his request is made very politely, using the conventional and correct rhetoric of patronage».

Statius now makes explicit what he had previously only implied: that the presence of his friend Vibius—not just his economic or spiritual support—is a necessary inspiration for his poetry.

torpor est nostris sine te Camenis
tardius sueto venit ipse Thymbrae
rector et primis meus ecce metis
haeret Achilles.
quippe te fido monitore nostra
Thebais multa cruciata lima
temptat audaci fide Mantuanae
gaudia famae.

Without you my muses are paralyzed, Apollo himself, the ruler of Thymbra, comes more sluggishly than usual, and—look!—my Achilles is stuck at the first turning post.

Indeed with you as loyal advisor our *Thebaid*, tortured by many a file, tries for the delights of Mantuan fame with its bold music.

These two stanzas close out a four-stanza appeal for the return of Statius' friend; the unity of the four stanzas is emphasized by the similar openings of the first and last stanzas of the group: *quando te* (13) / *quippe te* (25). Statius also carefully contrasts the middle two stanzas of the group. In stanza six, the sluggishness and hesitation that infest his poetry in his friend's absence (*torpor, tardius, haeret*) provide a negative counterpart

to the positive, seductive laziness of Statius' native area, as stressed in stanza five (*retinent, desides*). The transition from stanza five to six is further reinforced by the metonymic use of the two great antagonists of the *Iliad*, Hector and Achilles.²⁷ The two Iliadic heroes occupy the same line in their respective stanzas, with a parallel arrangement of the opening letters: *H*ectoris *a*rmis (20) / *h*aeret *A*chilles (24). Thus, on the verbal level, these four stanzas exhibit chiasmic arrangement, in addition to the more obvious division into thematic pairs (Table 1).

| Table 1. Structural patterns in stanzas 4–7 |
|--|
| <p><i>CHIASMUS:</i></p> <p>Stanza 4 (<i>quando te...</i>)</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Stanza 5 (...<i>Hectoris armis</i>)</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Stanza 6 (...<i>haeret Achilles</i>)</p> <p>Stanza 7 (<i>quippe te...</i>)</p> |
| <p><i>CONTRASTING PAIRS:</i></p> <p>Stanza 4 (Vibius in Dalmatia) / Stanza 5 (Statius in Rome)</p> <p>Stanza 6 (the stalled <i>Achilleid</i>) / Stanza 7 (the completed <i>Thebaid</i>)</p> |

The seventh stanza details the importance of the honorand, Vibius, for Statius' completed epic, the *Thebaid*. The reader of the fourth book of the *Silvae* will have

²⁷ *Liticenve notus / Hectoris armis* (19-20) is a rather mannered way of referring to Misenum, the northernmost point of the bay of Naples which was named for Aeneas' comrade Misenus, who is buried there in *Aen.* 6.212-35. Using the name of its main hero Achilles as a metonymy for the title of the *Achilleid* was common enough (*Silv.* 4.4.94; 5.2.163).

already known of Vibius' importance to the *Thebaid*, as Statius himself tells us in the preface (*Silv.* 4 praef.): «I had already sufficiently shown that Vibius Maximus was dear to me on account of his standing and eloquence in my published letter to him about the debut of my *Thebaid*» (*Maximum Vibium et dignitatis et eloquentiae nomine a nobis diligi satis eram testatus epistula quam ad illum de editione Thebaidos meae publicavi*). Thanks to this statement, we know that Statius' assertion of Vibius' importance to the *Thebaid*'s publication in the seventh stanza is not empty flattery; he has already given witness (*eram testatus*) publicly on the matter.²⁸ Furthermore, by calling Vibius his *fidus monitor* Statius completes another triad, this time of *-tor* nouns: *regnator* (5), *rector* (23), *monitor* (25). Once again the honorand is the cap to an impressive triad: Pindar, Apollo, Vibius. Even the use of *nostra* seems loaded here: Vibius was such a help to the *Thebaid* that Statius can no longer legitimately claim the epic as his alone. By contrast, the *Achilleid*, which is suffering without his faithful mentor, is here claimed by Statius alone (*meus ... Achilles*) and emphatically so, by the fronting of a singular possessive adjective.²⁹

The seventh stanza's description of the *Thebaid*'s aspirations to the «delights of Mantuan fame» refers explicitly to the famous epilogue of the *Thebaid*, where Statius

²⁸ The statement is also of great general interest because of what it reveals about publishing culture in imperial Rome. On the use of epistolary prefaces in ancient publication, see Coleman 1988, pp. 53-55.

²⁹ Statius' use of *nostra ... Thebais* at *Silv.* 5.3.233-4 is similarly loaded; *nostra* is «not merely a poetic plural ('my'), but also a recognition of his father's involvement ('our')» (Gibson 2006b, ad loc.) I thank the anonymous reviewer for «MD» for alerting me to this comparandum.

warns his epic not to follow too closely in the footsteps of the *Aeneid*.³⁰ Yet the *Silvae* passage also reverses the *Thebaid*'s warning, as Hinds 1998 has observed: whereas in the *Thebaid* the poet warns his epic *not* to «try for» (*nec ... tempta*) the *Aeneid*, here Statius announces that the *Thebaid* is in fact «trying for» (*temptat*) Mantuan fame. The *volte-face* is a tribute to his patron's involvement with the epic, as Coleman, ad loc. notes: «if the credit is to be worth sharing with Vibius it must be exalted». Moreover, by evoking the end of his *Thebaid* here in a dedicatory poem to his friend—the same friend who received a dedicatory letter that may have introduced the epic—Statius pays his friend the ultimate compliment of being involved with the poem's beginning and with its end. Vibius Maximus is so important to the poet's epic that he figuratively embraces the whole.

4. A Child is Born: Stanzas 8-10

The second half of the poem starts by abruptly shifting from Statius' literary progeny to Vibius' human progeny—the birth of a real child. The change of subject is marked from its beginning by the prominent and first appearance of the adversative conjunction *sed* in the poem:

sed damus lento veniam, quod alma

³⁰ *Theb.* 12.816-7: «do not try for the divine *Aeneid*; follow and always honor its footsteps from afar» (*nec tu divinam Aeneida tempta, / sed longe sequere et vestigia semper adora*). The epilogue has attracted much scholarly attention in recent years; see, e.g., Henderson 1993, pp. 163-64; Malamud 1995, pp. 21-27; Hardie 1997, pp. 156-58; Hinds 1998, pp. 91-98.

prole fundasti vacuos penates.
o diem laetum! venit ecce nobis
Maximus alter.
orbitas omni fugienda nisu
quam premit votis inimicus heres
optimo poscens (pudet heu!) propinquum³¹
funus amico.
orbitas nullo tumulata fletu:
stat domo capta cupidus superstes
imminens leti spoliis et ipsum
computat ignem.

But we forgive your slowness since you have shored up your empty home with nourishing offspring. Look! another Maximus comes our way.

With all your efforts you must flee childlessness, which a hostile heir pursues with his prayers, demanding (oh the shame of it!) a hasty death for his best friend.

No one weeps at the funeral of the childless. The greedy survivor stands looming over the spoils of death in the captured house and adds up even the cost of the fire.

³¹ Shackleton Bailey 2003 accepts the manuscript reading *propinquo*; *propinquum* is a Renaissance conjecture preferred by Courtney 1990.

The sluggishness that Statius had attributed to his poetic abilities in Vibius' absence is suddenly transferred to Vibius himself, who is forgiven for being *lentus* (presumably in returning to Rome). Whereas in stanza four Statius politely pleads with Vibius to end his Dalmatian sojourn, here in stanza eight Vibius' dallying becomes something entailing a forgiveness of sorts. Statius thus teases his friend; not only has he been *lentus* to return to Rome, he has also been *lentus* in producing an heir. Indeed Vibius seems the perfect man to monitor the twelve-year task of the *Thebaid*—a man who takes his time.

As Alex Hardie demonstrates, this poem offers a fine example of Statius' gift for combining the public and private sides of his addressees in one seamless whole.³² Hardie identifies the poem's first (public) half as a kletic hymn praying for the return of his friend, while the second (private) half serves as a *genethliakon* on the birth of Vibius' son. The eighth stanza provides the transition: «The key link is *uenit* (31): this word, here applied to the child's birth, is conventionally used to announce the arrival of a traveller, or the return of someone who has long been absent. Statius uses it to associate his major genre, the kletic address, with the minor, the *genethliakon*, and to give the latter the nuance of an arrival long desired».³³ Strengthening Hardie's point is the fact that *venit* appears in precisely the same metrical position in line 22, describing the delayed arrival of the god Apollo.

This shift from public to private is reinforced by the excursus on childlessness. Through a subtle use of military language (*capta*, *spoliis*, and, to a lesser degree, *fugienda* and *premit*), Statius suggests that the efforts of greedy legacy-hunters bring the public

³² Hardie 1983, pp. 172-74.

³³ Hardie 1983, p. 172.

arts of war into the private world of the home, where they do not belong.³⁴ Instead of the horrors of an *urbs capta* (a commonplace of rhetorical description), Statius presents us with a *domus capta* (38: *stat domo capta*), potentially an even greater assault to the norms of society.³⁵ This clever inversion is also a reminder that Statius has left the world of epic (where the *urbs capta* motif abounds) for the moment, and has entered the more domestic world of the *Silvae*. The stanzas thus provide a grim picture of the road not taken for Vibius, and the joy everyone feels at the birth of a child is magnified by the morbid details of what the alternative would have been. But the digression has another function here: the greedy and impious *captatores* can also serve as a negative foil for Statius' own pious regard for his patron's well-being. Statius implies that there are certain things expected in exchange for an inheritance—an attitude of piety and respect toward one's patron and the promise of a big and weepy funeral—things which the *captator* cares for not one bit. By these comments on the respectful treatment of Vibius and his money and his memory, Statius sheds an indirect and positive light on his own abiding respect for his patron and his posterity.³⁶ Unlike the siege tactics of the *captator*, Statius' poetry shows proper respect for his patron's public and private personas.

³⁴ On the commonness of diatribes on the perils of childlessness and the greediness of *captatores*, see Coleman 1988, pp. 204-05.

³⁵ On the *urbs capta* motif, see Paul 1982.

³⁶ Cf. Hardie 1983, p. 173: «his moralising strictures on *orbitas* and on greedy legacy hunters ... represent him as a true friend and not as a 'greedy' poet seeking material reward from his patron».

Yet if the second half of the poem is indeed the ‘private’ half, it is also remarkable for the complete disappearance of the narrator who had been so prevalent in the first half of the poem. The shift in subject matter is reinforced by word repetition; in stanza eight, for the third time in the poem, Statius uses the interjection *ecce*. It is worth observing what exactly Statius is urging the reader to look at each time he uses this word. In the first instance of *ecce* (17), the first personal pronoun follows the word as Statius urges Vibius to compare their similar situations (*ecce me ... non ... retinent...Baiae*). In the second instance (23), Statius is holding up for public view his writer’s block, the stalled composition of his *Achilleid*: *primis meus ecce metis / haeret Achilles*. The subject matter now shifts from Statius to his poetic project, while still retaining a sense of the first person singular in the phrasing—through both the emphasis on the personal adjective *meus* and the echo of the first *ecce me* (17) in the phrasing of the second: *ecce metis*.³⁷ The third and final *ecce* appears in v. 31, right after the verb *venit*, which Hardie has identified as the pivotal word of the poem: *venit ecce nobis / Maximus alter*. This threefold repetition of the word *ecce* thus acts as a map, charting a path through the poem’s thematic concerns: from Statius himself (and his relationship to his patron) to Statius’ poetry (specifically the *Achilleid*, his own progeny) to the newborn son of Vibius Maximus.³⁸

The ascendance of the newborn boy is emphasized not only by word repetition but also by syntax. Indeed, the introduction of the baby boy as the new subject of the

³⁷ Heslin 2005, p. 61 makes the intriguing suggestion that his use of *ecce* here may suggest that Statius included with this poem a draft of the first book of his *Achilleid*.

³⁸ It is yet another of the poem’s triads which culminates in its grandest member.

poem comes only as Statius' voice recedes; after stanza eight, the first person is completely absent from the remainder of the poem. Statius effects this change by a carefully graduated use of the first person in the poem: *mihi* (6), *sacravi* (7), *tempto* (9), *me* (17), *nostris* (21), *meus* (23), *nostra* (25), *damus* (29), and *nobis* (31). The assertive presence of the first person singular gives way to the milder first person plural, and then disappears entirely.³⁹ Indeed the final instance of the first person—*venit ecce nobis / Maximus alter* (31-2)—does not even take the place of the singular, as in the other cases. This *nobis* now refers to all humanity, and Statius disappears among them.

5. Story-telling: Stanzas 11-13

Stanza eleven happily reintroduces Vibius' baby boy; stanzas twelve and thirteen transition to Vibius' own glory—his legacy:

duret in longum generosus infans,
 perque non multis iter expeditum
 crescat in mores patrios avumque
 provocet actis.
 tu tuos parvo memorabis enses,
 quos ad Eoum tuleras Oronten
 signa frenatae moderatus alae

³⁹ The one exception to the progression—*meus* (23)—is pointed: Statius wants to claim the *Achilleid* as his own since it is having such difficulties, difficulties which are due entirely to his friend's absence.

Castore dextro.

ille ut invicti rapidum secutus

Caesaris fulmen refugis amaram

Sarmatis legem dederit, sub uno

vivere caelo.

May the excellent infant endure for a long time! May he grow into his father's character, a path offered to few, and may he rival his grandfather in his accomplishments!

You will recall for the little boy the swords that you carried to Orontes in the east, leading the standards of a bridled cavalry wing, with Castor on your right.

He will recall how he followed the quick thunderbolt of Caesar the invincible and established a bitter rule for the fugitive Sarmatians—that they live under one sky.

Stanza eleven closes out the four-stanza section with which the second half of the poem begins. This section also exhibits chiastic arrangement: stanzas eight and eleven discuss the baby boy, with stanza eight focusing on his birth in the present tense, while stanza eleven is more forward-looking, with wishes for future prosperity expressed in the subjunctive. Stanzas nine and ten, the internal stanzas, are united by the anaphora of their first word, *orbitas*, and contain the digression on childlessness. Structurally these four stanzas, eight through eleven, mirror the final four stanzas of the first half of the poem,

four through seven, which are also set apart as a unit by thematic and verbal echoes, as we saw above.

The eleventh stanza not only closes out one section of the poem but is also transitional to the next section of the poem: it introduces the topos of a boy living up to the deeds and characters of his father and grandfather. Statius heaps praise upon the martial feats of his patron and of his patron's father-in-law.⁴⁰ But instead of recounting the achievements himself, he evokes a scene that surely must have made his friend smile, for he imagines the father and grandfather taking the boy on their knees and telling their own stories. Statius is being very clever here, and once again his propensity for artful arrangement enhances the pleasure. The eleventh stanza has three independent clauses, each introducing a separate generation, moving backwards in time (*infans–patrios–avum*). This movement is then repeated on a broader scale: the young *infans* is the subject of the eleventh stanza, Vibius is the subject of the twelfth, and the grandfather the thirteenth. Once again we have a triad, this time doubled, and the movement up the family tree (son–Vibius–grandfather) further emphasizes the poet Statius' absence from the second half of the poem: no matter what Statius' relationship with his patron might be, he cannot rival the ties of kinship.⁴¹ His place has been overtaken by the birth of the heir. Indeed, the very way in which Statius paints the domestic scene reinforces his own

⁴⁰ Coleman 1988, p. 196 points out that it is unlikely that the *avum* of line 43 is Vibius' own father, since he would have been too old to have fought with Domitian against the Sarmatae in 92-3.

⁴¹ The kinship pattern is not a strictly genealogical chain (since it is the boy's maternal grandfather); yet Statius' reticence on the matter encourages the assumption of a family tree.

displacement, for Vibius himself and his father-in-law become narrators, telling the young boy of their wartime glory; Statius is out of the picture.

6. The Poet's Return: Stanza 14

Statius knows he cannot break through the ties of kinship—indeed he emphasizes his inability in this regard—so he ends the poem by reminding Vibius of Vibius' own literary pretensions:

sed tuas artes puer ante discat,
omne quis mundi senium remensus
orsa Sallusti brevis et Timavi
reddis alumnum.

But first let the boy learn your arts, by which you travel back through the whole old age of the world and restore the works of concise Sallust and the nursling of the Timavus.

On one level the effect of this ending is clear: Vibius not only has the ability to teach his son the finer points of warfare, but he can also impart some literary lessons—as an amateur historian. Again Statius avoids a simple laundry list of his patron's noble qualities, this time by putting them into the mouth of his patron himself, thereby preempting any criticism for empty flattery—for who could find fault with a father instructing his son in the nobler arts? Yet Statius is also operating on another level here. The first word of stanza fourteen recalls the only other *sed* in the poem, which marks the

beginning of the poem's second half, when the news of the birth of the son effectively pushed Statius and his personal worries about his poetry out of the poem entirely. Do we have a similarly fundamental opposition here in the last stanza? On the face of it, no: Statius is merely using the word *sed* to set up a traditional contrast between men of action and men of words—and also to cleverly suggest that Vibius is one of those rare men who is both. That would be a fine, traditional way to end the poem. Yet Statius seems to be hinting at more, for if Vibius does in fact keep up his literary hobbies, as Statius indirectly encourages here, than surely he too will have to appeal to his well-known literary bond with Statius? This in any case would be Statius' hope—that he cannot be completely written out of Vibius' life. Statius hopes that their bond may be restored, and that Vibius needs Statius for realizing his own literary pretensions (his history) as much as Statius needs Vibius for his own literary projects, his *Thebaid* and *Achilleid*.⁴²

Why, then, is this poem in a lyric meter? The answer may be a simple one: perhaps Vibius Maximus requested a poem in sapphics. But is there anything about the poem, about its thematic concerns, which is inherently lyrical? We have seen how Statius throughout this poem emphasizes and even conveys his subject matter through his own unique verbal patterns and structural arrays; but this is what all good poets do, whether they are writing a 10,000-line epic or a three-line haiku. We have seen how Statius uses Callimachean and Horatian allusions to signpost for the reader that we are in a specifically non-epic realm; but isn't this true of all of his *Silvae*? It is very difficult to

⁴² Cf. Statius' other lyric poem, *Silv.* 4.5, in which the author is similarly absent from the second half of the poem, but concludes by calling on his patron to be «mindful of me» (*memor ... nostri*, 58-9) and to take up the lyre once again.

assign these poems to one specific genre, but it is clear that Statius defines all of them in relation to his epic, indeed as the opposites of epic, because of their immediate, extemporaneous quality. In this regard, *Silvae* 4.7 is no more or less lyric than the rest of the collection.

Yet a stronger argument might be made. Ralph Johnson, in *The Idea of Lyric*, identifies one type of lyric poem (the most common type) as the «I-You» poem:

What concerns me in this category is a speaker, or singer, talking to, singing to, another person or persons, often, but not always, at a highly dramatic moment in which the essence of their relationship, of their ‘story’, reveals itself in the singer’s lyrical discourse, in his praise or blame, in the metaphors he finds to recreate the emotions he seeks to describe.⁴³

Statius’ *Silvae* 4.7 may sound less obviously personal than some of Horace’s *Odes*. Yet its subtle revelation of the essence of his relationship with Vibius, its easy transition between public and private, and its combination of lofty themes and diction with a more personal panegyric voice—all are strongly in the mode of Horatian lyric. And on a broader level, through its marked and graduated play of «you» and «I» throughout the poem, *Silvae* 4.7 is clearly and manifestly lyrical in mode as well as meter.

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⁴³ Johnson 1982, p. 3.

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