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VIRGIL AND THE SILVER LATIN EPIC

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The impact of Virgil upon the literature and the thought of subsequent ages has been various and unceasing. Following upon the epic of the Silver Age, with which or with some of which we are here concerned, there is the immense reputation which Virgil enjoyed in the transition from Classical to Medieval times as a master of all the styles, as a treasure-store of all kinds of information and learning, from grammar and philosophy to ritual and bee-keeping. Macrobius in the 5th cent., for instance, says: 'would you hear him speaking with such brevity that brevity itself cannot be more contracted? et campos ubi Troia fuit - look! in a very few words he has consumed and swallowed up a whole city, and left not even a ruin'. Then there is the aetas Virgiliana, as Ludwig Traube called it, roughly the 8th and 9th centuries, when poets such as Ermoldus Nigellus plagiarised most freely from Virgil; this was that so-called Carolingian Renaissance when ecclesiastics playfully assumed or were given names such as Homer, Pindar, and even, as in the case of Modoin, Bishop of Autun, Ovidius Naso. Although Horace succeeds Virgil as the most plagiarised poet in the 10th and 11th centuries, and Ovid's influence seems greatest in the 12th and 13th, yet the Virgilian epic was revived even then, and we have the names of Walter of Chatillon, who wrote an Alexandreis, and our own countryman Joseph of Exeter, whose Bellum Troianum, according to W.B.Sedgwick, beats the Silver Latin poets at their own game.

But if the Carolingians laid Virgil under contribution, they were not the first to do so. The poets of the Silver Age (roughly, the last three quarters of the 1st century AD and onwards) were no less open to his influence. Of the Epic poets of the 1st century there are four whose works have survived, those of Lucan, Silius Italicus, Valerius Flaccus and Statius. Of these I shall be mainly concerned with the last two, but it may be of interest to notice some differences between their productions. Lucan's Pharsalia, as we may conveniently call it (his own title is De Bello Civili), is in many ways a complete contrast to Virgil's work; first, it relates contemporary history or nearly so, for Lucan's death in 65 in his 26th year took place not much more than a century after the battle of 48 BC; secondly, there is no supernatural participation; to have brought in Venus, unavoidably, as she was Venus Genetrix to Julius Caesar and obviously would have had a good deal to say in the matter, would have proved a stale repetition of the Venus-Aeneas theme. Besides, Lucan was too serious for the petty rivalries of goddesses.

He was republican in sympathy, and the fall of the Republic on the field of Pharsalus is the theme of the epic. This gives an underlying intensity to the poem, turns Pompey and Cato into martyrs, and lends a bitter irony to the opening address, in which he tells Nero that any horrors of civil war are worth it (tanti) if they lead to a Nero on the throne. The poem thus possesses an urgency like

that which we find in the Aeneid, where everything leads up, through whatever doubts and trials, to the hero's triumph in Italy; and also in Lucretius, whose vision of the universe carries him through all the difficulties of exposition. It excuses Lucan's faults, monotony of rhythm, excessive straining after epigram, and lack of any beauty of description.

In his four-line preface to the Prize Poem, "Olympia," which he composed in 1885, Gilbert Murray asks whether he shall write in the style of Virgil or Lucan or Statius. 'Ille Maro deus est' he continues, 'rapit ignea Lucanum vis; Papinius nostri carminis auctor erit'.⁽¹⁾ If Lucan then is fired by his theme, can we say as much of the others? Their inspiration is of a different kind; they descend rather from Ovid in that they write because they have the skill and learning; it is this that inspires them rather than any underlying theme. This judgment may perhaps be qualified in the case of Statius, as will appear later in this paper.

Silius (A.D.26-101) had been proconsul of Asia, and in his retirement devoted himself to literature. He was a wealthy man, owning several country-houses. He was a reverent admirer of Virgil, whose tomb near Naples he repaired. In his epic, he relates the Second Punic War to the extent of 17 books, the longest extant Latin poem. He does not disdain supernatural machinery, and his Juno is as keen a champion of Carthage as she is in the Aeneid. His style is reminiscent of Virgil's, though owing something to Lucan. Pliny says that he wrote "maiore cura quam ingenio" (rather industrious than inspired).

Valerius chose a mythological theme. The breaking into new seas that the Argonautica relates is turned into a compliment to the Flavian Imperial house, for the Roman Fleet had lately been exploring the North Sea. In the Prologue Vespasian is begged to look after Roman mariners when he joins the company of the gods in heaven. Valerius was clearly interested in geography, and one would like to know how he proposed to bring the Argo back into the Mediterranean after sending it sailing up the Danube, if he followed his predecessors in this.

Statius (circ. A.D.45-96) was a Neapolitan, who enjoyed the patronage of the Emperor Domitian and some rich friends. Son of a poet and a schoolmaster, he was brought up in familiarity with the Greek and Latin Classics, and acquired a remarkable technique in the writing of Latin verse. Apart from the need of flattering his patrons, particularly the Emperor, he had probably little interest in Roman affairs. The subject chosen, the story of Thebes, was one which would display his learning and technical skill; it had been treated by many earlier Greek poets, Antimachus (5th cent. B.C.) in a vast epic, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides in drama, and by Seneca also in his plays Oedipus and Phoenissae. Besides the Thebaid Statius also began an Achilleid, but it was left unfinished, in the middle of the second book. This was also the fate of Lucan's epic, which ends in Bk 10, and of the Argonautica, which ends in the eighth book, for we may perhaps draw this conclusion from Quintilian's words,

(1) Tene, gravis Stati, Cadmeorumque labores
Annaeinae modos Vergiliine sequar?
Ille Maro deus est, rapit ignea Lucanum vis;
Papinius nostri carminis auctor erit.

written about A.D. 92, 'in Valerius we have lately lost much', rather than suppose that leaves of the MS were missing. Lucan's career was cut short by his implication in a conspiracy against Nero and consequent suicide, that of Statius, it would seem, by ill-health.

The Epic poets of the Silver Age inherited much from that which preceded them. First, there was the epic tradition itself, with its familiar features, similes from Nature, animate or inanimate, participation in the action by super-natural beings, either Olympians or personifications of abstract qualities, regular features of the narrative, storms, games, single combats etc. Then they could draw upon immense stores of learning, literary, mythological, historical, and could rely on appreciative readers or listeners to recitals. They inherited also technique in versification, brought by Virgil to an extreme of sensitiveness, adapted to more superficial and more easily running narrative by Ovid, though debased by the taste for rhetoric and pointed epigram, for which Lucan is largely responsible.

Of these poets I can only deal here with the Argonautica and the Thebaid.

Valerius probably planned his epic in twelve books, like Virgil before him and Statius after. His style is in the main Virgilian, but has been influenced by the contemporary taste for epigram and hyperbole, yet he does not go so far in this as Lucan. Besides this he has a real gift for descriptive writing; the lines on the underworld in the first book and the night scene out at sea in the second are examples, and he has expressive phrases, as of Hesione, exposed to the monster, trembling on the verge of tears (*ad primos turgentia lumina fletus* 2.464), or of the thread of light as the lightning brand passes through the Clashing Rocks (*illa volans tenui per concita saxa luce fugit* 4.672), or of Medea, troubled she knows not why (*castigatque metus et quas alit inscia curas* 6.660) and the beautiful simile that follows:

"Just as the South wind makes gentle sport as it softly stirs the leaves and topmost branches of the woodland, but soon the ships are feeling all its terrible strength."

The action of the deities is constant; Venus has first to lend her girdle to Juno in order to make Medea interested in Jason and then to go herself in the form of Circe; Mars and Pallas also take a hand, and Boreas feels affronted by the appearance of Argo on the high seas.

Of the characters in the story, Jason owes something to Aeneas; he does not of course bear the weight of destiny as Aeneas does; he is simply engaged in a task thrust upon him but rousing no enthusiasm, except where he is inducing Acastus, his young cousin to go with him: 'Lo what mighty tracts of land, what vast expanse of sky is it granted us to know! to what great ends are we opening the paths of the sea, i.168, lines expressing the romance of exploration which, if anything, gives a theme to this epic.

But he is primarily concerned to get the job done, and there is no hint of a future destiny, except indeed for the tragedy of his relations with Medea, of which Valerius gives occasional hints, as in Mopsus's oracular utterances in Bk I (207 ff). Jason is a good captain, concerned for the well-being of his men; he can rebuke them if necessary, as in the critical passage of the Rocks,

he can put the situation before them, as when Aeetes requires their help in his war. It is a test of Jason's character when he first faces Aeetes and has to explain his coming. The speech, which owes something to Apollonius, is tactful yet firm, with a hint of force. 'Had I determined to seek this prize by war, I could have had ships and more princes to help me' (5.471); he shows that he has been compelled to make the voyage, and offers friendly gifts pleading like Aeneas before Evander ties of friendship between the two houses. Is Jason really in love with Medea? In the crisis of their relations, when she has met him and given him the drugs, she is surprised that he betrays no deep emotion. 'Ah, why do no tears stream from your eyes? You know full well that my father in righteous wrath will slay me. For you a prosperous home and a wife and children are waiting, for me desertion and death'. Then Jason speaks, 'for with silent magic had she swayed him and inspired an answering passion'. Was he then just bewitched into loving her? When the crew question whether Medea is worth the trouble of fighting the pursuing Absyrtus, he does not forget his marriage to Medea, yet he does not resist his companions. Medea guesses what is going on, and pleads touchingly with him. Valerius like Virgil has placed his hero in a difficult position but the epic breaks off before we know what Jason replied. Medea's character is based on Apollonius, but Valerius stresses the tender and pathetic rather than the tragic and passionate note. She finds that growing love plays havoc with her peace of mind, in the agonising decisions she has to make between love and family affection. In the depicting of this growth Valerius is superior to Virgil: she is first friendly to the stranger, but then cannot keep her mind off him. The action of the goddesses, as I have said, merely symbolizes the process. Subordinate characters are the crafty Pelias, the ruthless Aeetes, and of the Argonauts Telamon and Meleager, who take different sides in the debate occasion by the loss of Hercules. Orpheus, Mopsus, Tiphys and Pollux are all something more than names. Echoes of Virgil are heard in Amycus, the brutal king of the Bebrycians whom Pollux has to fight, suggesting Cacus, and Absyrtus suggests Lausus or Pallas.

References to Roman matters are faint and few compared with those in Virgil; while in the latter we have the Temple of Janus, the Ludus Troianus, the funeral rites of Misenus and the name Camilla, these are part of the background and theme of the work, organic parts of the fore-ordained course of events, here on the contrary they occur rather by chance. Such references in Valerius are to the Legio Fulminata (12th) on whose shields were thunderbolts, in 6.55, 'nor, soldiers of Rome, are ye the first to spread the flash and glare and flaming pinions of the brand'; to the cry 'Mars vigila' uttered by a Roman general in the temple of Mars on a declaration of war ('keep watch, Gradivus!'); Roman lustrations in Bk.3 and Roman marriage rites in Bk.8, (3.430 and 8.217.)

To mention a few borrowings from Virgil, the carvings seen by Aeneas at Cumae and at Carthage, or on the shield of Vulcan, are paralleled by those that Jason sees in the city of Aeetes (5.407), or the paintings on the Argo (1.120). Then, as the ship sails through the quiet night Tiphys like Palinurus falls asleep with disastrous results. Both poets like night scenes; there is a striking one at the end where the fleece glows and flashes in the darkness as it is being carried to the ship (8.120). Hypsipyle in taking leave of Jason reminds one of Dido's words to Aeneas: 'Gc now' she says, "but forget not the land that first folded you to its bosom . . . bring back hither your sails, I

pray you by this Jason whom you leave in my womb' (2.420). In fact she bore twins (Thoas and Euneos). Then there is the passage where Mopsus the seer explains the cause of the crew's malaise after the battle at Cyzicus (3.377); they refuse to sail, and Jason asks Mopsus the reason; he tells him that, while intentional homicide may result in its victims returning to earth for a while with one of the Sisters (Furies?) to wreak vengeance on the guilty, those who have committed murder unintentionally suffer for it in their own minds, in a slothful languor that can only be purged by a ritual lustration. In Apollonius the Argonauts are purged, but not till they meet Circe in Italy; there are slight echoes here of Anchises' discourse in Aen.6, which deals with the same theme of the soul after death, and contains the same doctrine of its fiery origin.

We may now compare two longer passages, those which describe a storm at sea. Right at the beginning of the Aeneid (1.574) Aeneas and his men are caught in a storm as they leave Sicily. Juno, angry with the hero, visits Aeolus in his cave, where the winds, "indignant magno cum murmure montis circum claustra fremunt". She coaxes him with the offer of a charming nymph for marriage, and bids him 'submersas obrue puppes'. Aeolus ignores Deiopeia the nymph, and says it is for Juno to command, and lets out the winds. After ten vigorous lines of description Aeneas cries that those who died at Troy are happy: why did he not perish there gallantly himself? The storm is further described, the ship breaks up, and 'apparent rari nantes in gurgite vasto'. Neptune appears, and rebukes Eurus and Zephyrus 'quos ego - ', and the famous simile of the mob silenced by the grave senior. In Valerius it is Boreas who complains, for the first ship is defying his domain, and there is a picture of the Sicilian home of the winds. They were formerly uncontrolled, but when their violence broke Sicily off from Italy and Calpe from Libya they were put under restraint. Now they are let out. Virgil's 'magnum volvunt ad litora fluctus' is enlarged into 'raucoque ad litora tractu unanimi freta curva ferunt'. The Argonauts think the sea is always like that, and are not surprised at their forefathers' refusal to violate it. Suddenly Neptune trident and all 'trifida Neptunus in hasta' appears and gives permission for Argo to sail, but blames Tiphys and the ship for all the deaths by shipwreck that will follow. Valerius thus (i) makes his points, of the first sailors thinking the sea to be always stormy, and being responsible for subsequent disasters, (ii) displays his geographical interests, in what he says about the straits of Messina and Gibraltar. He puts in details that are intended to make the narrative more lively, as when Hercules gazes ruefully at his club, which is quite useless in the storm, or to display the author's familiarity with mythology; Jason pours libation with a goblet that belonged to Aeson, given him by Salmoneus, who was not yet the madman he became later, when he dared to imitate the lightnings of Jove; or the vessel is supported by Thetis and Nereus 'socer', father-in-law, because Peleus, one of the crew, subsequently married Thetis. The winds are shown us: 'joyfully from the prison burst the Thracian horses, the west wind and the south wind of the night - dark pinions (nocti concolor alas), and the east wind, his hair dishevelled with the blasts and tawny with much sand. Boreas in his plea to Aeolus says 'the thought of my sons moves me not', for Zetes and Calais were among the crew.

Besides the adaptation of the Virgilian phrase just mentioned we have a borrowing, not ineffective, in Valerius's 'ruit igneus aether' from 'ruit

arduus aether' of the first Georgic.

Finally I would like to quote (in translation) from Valerius' version of the rape of Hylas (3.510). It was, of course, a favourite theme; we have in Greek, Apollonius, Theocritus and the few lines in the Orphic Argonautica and Propertius in Latin. Valerius has supplied an original feature, for while the others describe the boy as going to fetch water for Hercules' evening meal (ὕδωρ ἐπιδόρπιον Theocritus, ὕδωρ ποτιδόρπιον Apollonius), and this seems to be implied by Propertius (Hylas preferred gathering flowers to his officium, though no pitcher is mentioned), Valerius sends both Hercules and Hylas hunting; the boy follows a stag, and getting tired refreshes himself at a spring, and is drawn down by the nymph. There is no mention of a πολυχάνδεα κρωσσόν a too heavy pitcher, or of drawing water at all. In the Orphic Argonautica Hylas misses his way and comes to a cave of nymphs of the mere (Νύμφων λιμναίων σπέος). Date unknown, but latest of the 5. Valerius' lines are charming, without trace of hyperbole or artificiality.

Juno wishes to gratify her grudge against Hercules, who has proved superiour to all the labours she has imposed upon him. "Therewith, glancing at the pine-clad ridges of the hills to leftward, she sees a comely troop of huntress nymphs, the pride of woods and waves. Light bows and green armlets have they all, and shafts of myrtle-wood with tight-drawn strap; knee-high are their skirts, and the straying tresses float and fall gently rippling to the band that confines the hidden breasts. . . . Of these Dryope, hearing the crash of Hercules' advance, as the quarry fled before his shafts, had gone forward to view the havoc of the grove, and was returning to her spring, bringing back from Hercules an awe-struck face. (Juno coaxes her with the promise of Hylas as a mate). So saying she puts up a swift hart through the trackless brush-wood, right in the lad's path. . . Hylas adventures, and madly afire for so near a quarry gives chase, while Alcides urges him on with cheering cry. And now both are out of sight, when as the boy presses on and with weary arm threatens a shot the stag leads him far onward to where a bright fountain gushes forth, and with light bound springs clear over the pool. Thus is the lad's hope baffled nor is he fain to struggle further . . and he sinks beside the pleasant stream. Even as the light that shifts and plays upon a lake, when Cynthia looks forth from heaven or the bright wheel of Phoebus in mid course passes by, so does he shed a gleam upon the waters; he heeds not the shadow of the Nymph or her hair or the sound of her as she rises to embrace him. Greedily casting her arms about him as he calls too late for help and utters the name of his mighty friend she draws him down; for her strength is aided by his falling weight.'

Statius, about 45 to 96 A.D., refers to Virgil in three passages, two in the Silvae, where he thanks his friend Maximus for encouraging him to aspire to the joys of the Mantuan's renown, and where he tells how he repairs to Virgil's tomb to seek inspiration and to find the sleep which would not come to him - his sonnet-like poem to Sleep is perhaps the best known of the Silvae - and the third at the end of the Thebaid, where he exhorts his poem not to rival the divine Aeneid, but to follow it adoringly at a distance. He clearly had a genuine and reverential feeling for the great Master, and was under no illusions as to the respective values of the works. Epics were in fashion and gave Statius an opportunity of displaying his learning and technical skill. His

recitations, as Juvenal tells us, drew crowds to hear him, and his pleasant voice no doubt would do justice to the alliterations and assonances of his verse, often carefully built up through a passage of several lines. Virgil provided him with a model, which he follows in the outline and make-up of his epic; he has 12 books, catalogues of warriors, active gods and goddesses, games, battle scenes, storms on sea and land, similes Virgilian in character, and a metrical technique that is based on Virgil's, while displaying the influence of Ovid.(1)

If the style of Valerius Flaccus may be called post-classical, from its partial reaction from Lucan's excesses, Statius on the other hand carries the rhetorical straining after effect, the morbid sentimentality and love of the horrible, which were to the taste of his audiences, to a degree which has led a recent critic(2) to label him as baroque. He spares no effort to extract every ounce of thrill and emotion from his descriptions, he is fond of the pointed comments, the 'sententiae' that often close a paragraph, and he pushes language to the limit of intelligibility. He is full of learned mythological allusions. He is devoted to the episode; these of course occur in other epics, for instance the Cacus episode in the Aeneid, but they abound in the Thebaid, and are developed for their own sake, halting the action of the story; such are the account of the ambush set for Tydeus (2.496), the story of the Lemnian women (5 40-498), which occurs also in the Argonautica; he is fond too of the purple patch, or ἔκφρασις, for instance the description of the Cave of Sleep, a deliberate attempt to rival Ovid (10.84). His battle scenes carry on the epic tradition. Peaceful scenes are rare; one may mention the practice of divination on the hill-top, when Melampus and Amphiaraus inspect together the flight of birds (3.460), the pretty picture of the child Opheltes lying in the grassy meadow (4.786), or the lines describing Bacchus returning from his wars (4.652). His emotionalism is shown in the laments of Hypsipyle for the child that the serpent has unwittingly killed (5.608), and of Argia for her husband Polynices (12.325). Such laments are traditional in the epic; we may compare those of the mother of Nisus and the father of Pallas in the Aeneid, or of Helen for Hector in the Iliad. It may be of interest here to mention that extracts from Hypsipyle's and Argia's lament are included in the Cambridge Songs, that 10th cent. collection of miscellaneous verse, and also that in the 9th cent. Paris MS of the Thebaid the lines of the former are marked with neums, showing that they were sung. Other MSS containing these passages also have neums, though not the Cambridge MS. I might add that the interpretation of this primitive musical notation is difficult, since they were rather reminders of tunes already known than precise indications telling one what the tune was. In the case of the Puteanus they are very scrappy, so that we must be content with knowing that Statius was sung in the Dark ages.

The indebtedness of Statius to other authors gives a measure of his learning; Homer, Euripides, Apollonius of the Greeks are his original for various scenes - funeral rites, river battle, night raid, the duel of the brothers, the story of the Lemnian women, though here Statius has elaborated considerably.

(1) See Appendices on these subjects.

(2) H. Bardon in Iatomus XXI (1962).

Of the Roman writers he has used Seneca's *Phoenissae*, and there are occasional borrowings from Ovid and Lucan. Virgil, however, provides the greatest number of parallels; Adrastus meeting Hypsipyle greets her as a goddess (4.744), like Aeneas on his first encounter with Dido, the apparition of Allecto while Turnus is sleeping is paralleled by that of Iaius to Eteocles (1.90), the reception of Tydeus by Adrastus (1-end) by that of Aeneas by Evander. There is a good deal of similarity of course in the fighting scenes, the most obvious being the two raids, those of Euryalus and Nisus in Virgil and of Hopleus and Dymas in Statius (10.262). The Argives' rush to arms in 3.572 etc. contrasts with a like passage in *Aen.* 7.572 etc. Whereas Virgil has 'ruit omnis in urbem pastorum ex acie numerus', and while Turnus urges them to war Latinus feebly protests, in Statius 'on every side the war-god sweeps countless troops before him - gladly do they leave their homes and beloved wives and babes wailing on the threshold - eager are they to tear away the weapons from the doorposts and chariots from shrines - they refashion for cruel wounds spears worn by rotting rust and swords that stick fast in scabbards through neglect - the shout goes up like the roar of the Tyrrhenian surge or when Enceladus tries to shift his side.'

Probably the most extended of the parallel passages is that which describes the exploits of Parthenopaeus. (9.570). One of the Seven he is an Arcadian, the son of Atalanta (though according to another tradition an Argive); he must therefore be fleet of foot, and accordingly runs in the foot-race in the funeral games held in honour of Opheltes. The parallel is with the maiden Camilla, to whom we are introduced in the 15 lines that close the 7th Aeneid, which speak of her speed and lightness of foot. Whereas Camilla has the strength and hardihood of a man, Parthenopaeus is a boy with the grace and partly the appearance of a girl (as his name suggests). As a competitor in the footrace, however, he is the double of Nisus or Euryalus. Nisus is winning when he slips in the blood of slain bullocks, and to allow Euryalus to win he throws himself in the way of Salius, running second. In the Thebaid Idas pulls Parthenopaeus back by the hair when he is almost breasting the tape. This causes a great commotion; the Arcadians utter threats and the lad weeps passionate tears, whereupon Adrastus has the race run again, and in separate tracks, adding 'no cheating this time' (*fraus cursibus omnis abesto*). Apparently Father Aeneas was prepared to overlook the unsporting conduct of Nisus, and we hope Salius was contented with his lionskin. In the fighting there is a difference between Parthenopaeus and Camilla, the latter though 'pharetrata' is equally handy with javelin, battle-axe and bow, she cracks the skull of Orsilochus after a skilful bit of manoeuvring, described, as will be remembered, thus: 'magnumque agitata per orbem eludit gyro interior sequiturque sequentem'. Parthenopaeus on the other hand is an archer only; not an arrow can go astray, for he has divine shafts which Diana, whose votary Atalanta is, has secretly substituted for his own. 'Now aims he forward, now shifts from side to side in bewildering change of attack, now flees when assailed, turning nought but his bow to face his enemies'. Camilla, when by a ruse she is challenged to fight on foot and her assailant flees, catches up his horse and disposes of him as easily as a hawk overtakes and slays a dove, whereas Parthenopaeus is on horseback till he meets his fate at the hands of Dryas. Statius is lavish, perhaps too lavish with descriptions of his beauty. Perhaps the poet had in mind the beautiful slave-boy whom he had intended to

adopt as a son. The poet himself had no child of his own, only a step-daughter, his wife Claudia's daughter by a previous marriage. The boy died young, and the poem which is the last of the Silvae and remains unfinished, expresses the poignant grief of the poet. His own death probably occurred about the same time.

Camilla's career is anxiously watched by Diana, who relates to the nymph Opis the story of Camilla's bringing-up, and sees that her death is avenged. All this is much extended by Statius, who describes first the forebodings of Atalanta for her son who has gone to the war against her will, her prayer to Diana, Diana's meeting with Apollo, sad at the death of his prophet Amphiaraus, then the sorrow of Diana herself for the boy's fate, and her secret changing of the arrows, finally the complaint of Venus to Mars on behalf of Thebes, the city of their daughter Harmonia, and Mars' intervention which results in his death. As compared with the simplicity of Camilla's fate 'nihil ipsa nec aurae nec sonitus memor aut venientis ab aethere teli hasta sub exsertam donec perlata papillam haesit virgineumque alte bibit acta cruorem' Statius goes into much detail. Confronted with the gigantic Dryas presentiments of doom crowd upon him, black clouds of death float before him, he feels his strength ebb, the quiver is lighter on his shoulder, he seems to himself but a boy, there is a simile of a swan that sees an eagle above him, he is about to shoot, arrowhead on bow, the string at his breast, when his foe gets in his javelin throw first, it cuts the bowstring and pierces the boy's body; he drops the reins, another javelin checks the horse. They both, Camilla and Parthenopaeus, have dying speeches, Camilla to her sister Acca, with a message to Turnus (rather as Joan of Arc might in similar circumstances have sent a last word to 'Jack'), 'join battle and keep the Trojans from the city'. Parthenopaeus's last words are to his mother, confessing his fault in going to the war against her will. The episode is an example of Statius's favourite mother-son relationship, contrasted with Virgil's preference for that of father and son (Aeneas - Ascanius, Evander - Pallas, Mezentius - Lausus). Both Virgil's maidens, Camilla and Juturna, have something of the other sex. Other examples of Statius's preference are Ismenis - Crenaeus in the river fighting. Thetis - Achilles in the Achilleid, and the frequent references to Ino and Palaemon. This mother and son complex may have acted as a compensation or wish-fulfilment for what nature had not granted to the poet, the presence of a son and mother in his household. If so it may point to a sensitivity, a tenderness, which explains some features of his verse, its emotionalism, and his habit of attributing feelings to inanimate objects, e.g. miserae carinae, (an epithet which occurs all too frequently in his epic.) This tendency may have been encouraged by the prevailing taste for sensationalism, a taste which the poet in his turn was only too ready to gratify. The real humanity of Statius, as will be seen later, was rather implicit than explicit in his treatment of the story of Thebes.

I should not like, in a paper that deals with Statius and Virgil, to pass over without mentioning the meeting of these two in Purgatory, as described by Dante. He relates how they are joined by a shade who after a discourse on earthquakes reveals himself to be Statius, explaining that he had become a Christian, partly owing to Virgil's prophetic Eclogue, but for a long time had not made his conversion known. As a result he was in the circle of those who were working out their punishment for Sloth. On discovering that he is

speaking to Virgil he falls adoringly at his feet, but finds, according to good classical precedent, that he cannot embrace him. The question why Dante should have thought that Statius had become a Christian is an intriguing one, and excited the ingenuity of A.W.Verrall. There may have been some tradition to that effect, but as none is known today Verrall has sought for an explanation in the writings of Statius himself, and thinks it may be found in a contrast between the prologues of the Thebaid and the Achilleid, of which the former recognises the divinity of the Emperor while the latter does not do so explicitly. Next, as Statius tells Virgil that he was converted before he brought the Argives to the waters of Boeotia, the latter part of the Thebaid would have been written as a Christian, and here the description of the Altar of Mercy at Athens may have struck Dante as peculiarly Christian in sentiment.

The mention of this passage leads me to a final point, for I would like to return briefly to the question of an underlying theme in the Thebaid. In one of the three papers which he wrote on the subject of Dante and Statius A.W.Verrall states that the whole story of the Thebaid as conceived by the author is a preparation for the final interference of Athens, an ideal Athens, which figures symbolically as the sacred city of humanism and humanity. The whole Thebaid, he says, is entirely occupied with this idea or sentiment, that of the vindication of the oppressed and respect even for the enemy. If this is so, it is so by implication rather than by any explicit stress laid upon Athenian action. Indeed the 12th book might be thought of as an Epilogue more than as a climax. In the rapid summary given in the opening lines of the Epic there is no mention of it; the words 'tumulisque carentia regum funera' only leave the matter where it is left in Aeschylus' Septem and in Euripides' Phoenissae, while the 11th book closes with the slinking away of the defeated disillusioned host, Adrastus having already fled in his chariot when he saw that the duel of the brothers was inevitable. But if there is no explicit reference in the work, is there not an implied emphasis on humanity, flouted as it is by the expedition and the fraternal quarrel? It is not that the battle scenes are bloody; they naturally are, and were certainly expected to be, and Statius is clever in varying them - Hippomedon and the river-battle, Capaneus on the battlements, Parthenopaeus the boy archer, besides the usual incidents. Their culmination in the hideous picture of Tydeus gnawing Melanippus' head contrasts with the sentimentality of the deaths of young warriors, Parthenopaeus, Atys and Crenaeus. There are the pathetic scenes of the searching for corpses by weeping relatives after the ambush in Bk 2, or where in Bk 12 Argia and Antigone meet by moonlight in their search for husband and brother. Argia's anxieties are twice described, in Bks 2 and 3. The wickedness of the Argive enterprise is emphasized by Jupiter in Bk 1 but he considers Thebes just as reprehensible, and his threats are repeated in Bk 3, and Eteocles does not come short of any of the Seven in brutality. Apart from the other gods, who do as may be expected of them, favouring their own protegés, and Mars naturally being always eager for war, a considerable part is played by the Furies and War-goddesses, symbolizing presumably the ungovernable passions that lead to the horrors of war; Erinyes in Bk 7, Enyo in Bk 8, Tisiphone and Megaera setting the brothers in conflict in Bk 11 and driving Pietas off the field. Rumour, Frenzy, Wrath and Panic, with Bellona, stir up warlike passions in Bk 3, Bellona and Rumour again in Bk 4, while Tydeus and Capaneus lose no opportunity of doing likewise. These two, it may be noted, are rejected by the gods, Tydeus by Minerva,

Capaneus by Jupiter. Hippomedon is pleaded for by Juno, but in vain, Amphiaraus cannot be saved by Apollo, nor Parthenopaeus by Diana, Adrastus flees in all the bitterness of defeat, and we are left to imagine his feelings, through Statius' simile of Pluto finding he has hell for his portion. Two sons-in-law lost, two daughters widowed, his army cut up and in retreat, and he himself only too conscious of the folly and wickedness of the whole campaign. Viewed in this light, the final scene in which Theseus intervenes in the name of humanity and champions the suppliants against the brutal Creon may be regarded as the climax and redeeming feature of the story, in which it stands to the preceding narrative very much as in Homer's Iliad the last book in which Priam persuades Achilles to give up the body of Hector contrasts with the strife and bloodshed of the preceding books.

If this is so, we may be grateful to Statius for having included in his epic that part of the traditional story, and may be sure that his master, Virgil, would have approved.

I will conclude by quoting the passage (12.481) in which Statius describes the Altar of Mercy in Athens. That there was such an altar is proved by two references in Lucian (Timon 42 and Bis Accusatus 21), and in Pausanias, 1 17 (an altar of Mercy in the Agora, to which of the gods, as being helpful in the changes and chances of mortal life, the Athenians alone of the Greeks pay honours); there are also references to Eleos as a god in Timocles, writer of Comedy, and in the scholiast to Sophocles, O.C.261, where Oedipus speaks of Athens as the only city to shelter the vexed stranger.

I quote Verrall's version: (Collected Literary Essays, 1913)

In the midst of the city was an Altar, pertaining not to Might nor the powers thereof, but to gentle Mercy. Mercy there had fixed her seat, and misery made it holy. Thither new suppliants came ever without fail, and found acceptance all.

There to ask is to be heard, and dark or light all hours give access unto
One whose grace costs nothing but a complaint.

The ritual takes no tax, accepts no incense-flame, no drench of blood, but only the dew of tears upon the stone, and the shorn hair of the mourner for a wreath above, and for drapery the cast robe which sorrow puts away.

With trees of kindness the ground is planted about, and marked for pardon and grace with fillet-bounden bay and the olive's suppliant bough.

Image there is not any; to no mould of metal is trusted that form divine, who loves to dwell in minds and in hearts.

Nor lacketh there perpetual assembly. For shaking fear and shivering poverty, these know that Altar well, and only happiness knoweth it not.

The legend is that it was the children of Hercules who founded the sanctuary, in the city whose warriors protected them when their sire had passed from the pyre to the sky.

So the tale sayeth, but sayeth not worthily. Rather we should believe it was those Visitants from Heaven whom Athens had ever made welcome to her soil, the same who there in Athens created law and the new man and the better way,

they who thither brought the seed which thence descended upon the waste places of the earth - these (we will say) did in Athens likewise set apart a place of common refuge for souls that are sick, a sanctuary closed against wrath and threatening and tyrant strength, and which prosperity should not profane.

Even in those old days that spot was known to the wide world. Thither the conquered came, and the exile, fallen power and wandering guilt. There did they meet, and prayed their peace.

The time was near, when the grace of that hospice should vanquish even the fiends of an Oedipus, should cover the corpse of Olynthus, and take even from an Orestes the torture of his mother's ghost.

APPENDIX

Similes compared

(i) qualis ubi in lucem coluber mala gramina pastus
frigida sub terra tumidum quem bruma tegebat
nunc positus novus exuviis nitidusque iuventa
lubrica convolvit sublato pectore terga
arduus in solem et linguis micat ore trisulcis A.2.471

ceu lubricus alta
anguis humo verni blanda ad spiramina solis
erigitur liber senio et squalentibus annis
exutus laetisque minax interviret herbis
a miser agrestum siquis per gramina hianti
obvius et primo fraudaverit ora veneno T.4.72

Virgil's vigorous line (473) is replaced by something weaker in rhythm and more artificial (liber . . . annis exutus). Statius is sentimental on the danger to the countryman.

(ii) ceu duo nubigenae cum vertice montis ab alto
descendunt Centauri Homolen Othrynque nivalem
linquentes cursu rapido; dat euntibus ingens
silva locum et magno cedunt virgulta fragore A.7.674

Non aliter silvas umeris et utroque refringens
pectore montano duplex Hylaeus ab antro
praecipitat; pavet Ossa vias pecudesque feraeque
procubuere metu; non ipsis fratribus horror
afuit, ingenti donec Peneia saltu
stagna subit magnumque obiectus detinet amnem T.4.139

V. is content with a simple picture, while marking the three stages of the course (nivalem, silva, virgulta). St. elaborates by sentimentality (pavet, metu, horror), by forcing the point (duplex, utroque) and by hyperbole (magnum . amnem).

- (iii) quales sub nibibus atris
Strymonias dant signa grues atque aethera tranant
cum sonitu fugiuntque Notos clamore secundo A.10.265
- qualia trans pontum Phariis deprensa serenis
 rauca Paraetonio decedunt agmina Nilo
 quo fera cogit hiems; illae clangore fugaci
 umbra fretis arvisque volant, sonat avius aether,
 iam Borean imbrisque pati, iam nare solutis
 annibus et nude iuvat aestivare sub Haemo T.5.11

There is a difference in application; in V. the comparison is to the shout of the Trojans, in St. to the moving hosts. St. elaborates considerably, and the comparison is rather lost sight of. 14 is a good line with its alliteration of a and v, and the hissing sound of the repeated s. 'fugiuntque . . secundo' becomes 'clangore fugaci'.

- (iv) inde lupi ceu
raptores atra in nebula quos improba ventris
exegit caecoa rabies catulique relict
faucibus expectant siccis. A.2.355

ac veluti pleno lupo insidiatus evili
cum frerit ad caules, ventes perpessus et imbres
nocte super media; tuti sub matribus agni
balatum exercent; ille asper et improbus ira
saevit in absentes, collecta fatigat edendi
ex longo rabies et siccae sanguine guttur A.9.39

 rabidi sic agmine multo
sub noctem colore lupi, quos omnibus agris
nil non ausa fames longo tenuavit hiatu,
iam stabula ipsa premunt, torquet spes inrita fauces
balatusque tremens pinguesque ab ovilibus auae;
quod superest duris adfringunt postibus ungues
pectoraque et siccos minuunt in limine dentes. T.10.42

A combination of the two similes, in which the Virgilian phrases 'improba' etc. and 'collecta' etc. are represented somewhat weakly by 'nil non ausa fames' and 'longo tenuavit hiatu'; an original touch is 'pinguesque . . auae', where some scribes thought that St. should have written 'agnae'.

Passages with difficult grammar

- (i) geminus fragor ardua canet per latera 5.337
 the twofold splash whitens along the steep sides
 An impressionistic phrase appealing to eye and ear
- (ii) cuius iustos pulsantia menses vota tument? 5.115
 whose ripening hope throbs in the womb as the due months
 draw on?

Perhaps 'iustos menses' should be taken as accusative of duration of time.

- (iii) viderat Inachios rapidum glomerare cohortes
Bacchus iter 7.145
B. had seen the Inachian cohorts gather
swiftly for the march

A refinement upon V.'s 'agmina cervi pulverulenta fuga glomerant'
(A.4.154); here a purely impressionistic phrase, unless 'iter' be the
subject.

- (iv) sorte carebat dilatus Polynicis honos 1.164
by the losing of the hazard P.'s reign was deferred

A conjecture 'cadebat' would make it easier, otherwise an extreme kind
of inversion.

Alliteration and Assonance in the Thebaid

- (i) atque ea Cadmeo praeceps ubi culmine primum / constitit 1.123
Triple and symmetrical

- (ii) nox ea cum tacita volucer Cyllenius aura 2.89
Repeated c with l, n, t subordinate

- (iii) umbra fretis arvisque volant sonat avius aether 5.14
Combined s and v to suggest whirring wings

- (iv) spumantem proni mandunt adamanta iugales 3.268
Repeated nt suggest champing of bits, cf. different effect
in 10.6 illic arma et equos ibant quibus ante superbi

- (v) quoties tibi Lemnon et Argo
sueta loqui et longo somnum suadere querela 5.615
Beautiful effect of combined assonance and alliteration

- (vi) laeto regalia coetu
atria complentur, species est cernere avorum
comminus et vivis certantia vultibus aera 2.214
Long a fist with c,l,t; then c mostly with v
Notice similar effect of broad syllables to suggest stateliness in

- (vii) mixta convexa deorum
maiestate tremunt, radiant maiore sereno
culmina et arcano florentes lumine postes 1.298

- (viii) quisquis es Aonidum quem crastina munere nostro
manibus exemptum mediis Aurora videbit 2.697
Symmetrical arrangement of a m m m a

Other examples of assonance and alliteration will be found in
2.81, 2.118, 4.604, 5, 2.13, 14, 2.538-40, cf. 2.41,2 with 6,120,1

- (ix) non secus ac supero pariter si cardine lapsae
Pallas et asperior Phoebi soror, utraque telis
utraque torva genis flavoque in vertice nodo
illa suas Cyntho comites agat haec Aracyntho,

tunc si fas oculis non unquam longa tuendo
expedias cui maior honos cui gratier, aut plus
de Iove; mutatosque velint transumere cultus
et Pallas deceat pharetras et Delia cristas

2.236 ff

p,c,t,l prevail in these lines; in 239 c f c f g t ó é t
where the repetition of Cyntho is saved from being a jingle by the
change of ictus. The same principle prevails in the homoeoteleuton
of 3rd arsis and last syllable, commoner in Silver Latin poetry than
in Virgil. In 242 all the dominant letters occur, and d, c in thesis
(deceat) leads up to d,c in arsis (Delia cristas), the whole line being
a good example of careful balance both in sound and sense.

Other longer passages can be compared, e.g. 1.292-5, 303-309; 2.736-742.

(x) sed nec puniceo rediturum nubila caelo
promisere iubar nec rarescentibus umbris
longa repercusso nituere crepuscula Phoebō;
densior a terris et nulli pervia flammae
subtextit nox atra polos. iam claustra rigentis
Aeoliae percussa sonant venturaque rauco
ore minatur hiems, venti transversa frementes
confligunt axemque emoto cardine vellunt,
dum caelum sibi quisque rapit; sed plurimus Auster
inglomerat noctem tenebrosa volumina torquens
defunditque imbres, sicco quos asper hiatu
praesolidat Boreas; nec non abrupta tremescunt
fulgura et attritus subita face rumpitur aether.

1.342

Notice p,n,c dominant in first few lines with u assonance, repercusso,
crepuscula, p,c alternately in thesis and arsis; after 345 the low
murmurings of the storm suggested by the u sounds broaden out into
claustra and rauco ore, and are followed by Auster and the various o sounds
of 351-3, which suggest the blasts of the wind. In 353,4 the various br,
trs keep up the impression, while the heavens are rent in the last four
words, in which we have u a a u u, alternately in thesis and arsis, but
culminating in rumpitur. Later on we may notice the symmetry of a m a m,
followed by g s g s in

Arcadiae capita alta madent, ruit agmine magno
Inachus et gelida surgens Erasinua in unda

356, 7

and the expressive consonants in

Frangitur omne nemus rapiunt antiqua procellae
bracchia silvarum

361, 2

and the rhythm of

ille tamen, modo saxa iugis fugientia ruptis
miratus, modo nubigenas e montibus amnes
aure pavens etc.

