Re-casting the Master: Further Faces of Virgil in Imperial Rome

Revised from a paper given to the Virgil Society on 17 January 2009

> "A poet, I argue … is not so much a man speaking to men as a man rebelling against being spoken to by a dead man (the precursor) outrageously more alive than himself. A poet dare not regard himself as being *late*, yet cannot accept a substitute for the first vision he reflectively judges to have been his precursor's also".
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> Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (1975, 19).

For Bloom, the poet is (any) one of the English Romantic poets; the precursor is Milton. Yet Bloom's analysis of the belatedness of Romantic poetry is deliberately presented as one which might apply to any poetic system, including classical ones. In this paper, I would like to change Bloom's terms of reference; for Milton, read Virgil; for the Romantic poets, read the Flavian epicists.[1] However, I do not wish here to explore this belatedness entirely on Bloom's Freudian terms, exploring the twin drives towards imitation and originality prompted by response to a factitious author (although that might be interesting and profitable),[2] but rather to think of the relationship between Flavian ephebes and their Augustan precursor in more general terms of reception. In particular, I would like to examine the way in which two of the Flavian poets, Statius and Silius Italicus, negotiate their relationship with Virgil and Virgilian poetry, and more specifically I want to try to confirm the notion that both of these Flavian poets are shaping the Virgilian tradition in quite idiosyncratic and distinct ways.

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[1] In reality the scope of this paper will be even narrower, so that Virgil means, more or less, Virgil's *Aeneid* and the Flavians will be limited to Statius and Silius Italicus. Furthermore, analysis of Statius will be limited to the *Thebaid* and *Silvae*. However, I would contend that the principles of this paper could be extended chronologically forwards and backwards within the Flavian period to encompass Valerius Flaccus and the *Achilleid*. Implicit in this is a strong contrast in intertextual character between Flavian epic and Neronian poetry; see below, 'Refusing the challenge'.

[2] For the concept of "facticity", see Bloom's later work, *e.g.* Bloom (1989).

But first, some words of warning. We must acknowledge that this is pretty well trodden ground these days. Since the publication of a number of ground-breaking pieces in the early nineties, there has been an enormous amount of work done on Flavian epic and especially on the relationship between such poetry and Virgil.[3] Earth-shattering revelation in this field no longer seems a possibility: rather this paper will hope to build on the work of its predecessors, perhaps rather in the manner of a Statius or a Silius, and offer a different, nuanced way of looking at Virgilian reception in the Flavian period. We should offer a further caveat: it is in the nature of Statius and Silius as epic poets to look back to the *Aeneid* in particular. Therefore it will become apparent in this discussion that the words "*Aeneid*" and "Virgil" will become near synonyms. Perhaps more could (or should) be done to highlight the importance of Virgil's earlier poetry for the Flavians, but that is a challenge that will be side-stepped here. Whilst reducing "Virgil" to his *Aeneid* seems naïve, it is a tactic encouraged by the Flavian poets themselves, for whom such a reduction sometimes has distinct advantages.[4]

So to begin with, I offer a brief and recent history of scholarship on Flavian epic and its reception of Virgil. The long-standing and traditional point of view for the reader of Virgil was that Statius and Silius were slavish imitators of the Augustan master. Anything good that one found in the work of either was stolen from Virgil (or possibly from another canonical author), but rarely employed with the same degree of sophistication; everything else was not worth reading. Two passages from Statius' *Thebaid* were regularly adduced to underscore this point of view. The first follows Statius' account of the deaths of Hopleus and Dymas, an episode so closely modelled on Virgil's Nisus and Euryalus that at its climax, the Flavian poet hopes that the Virgilian heroes will not scorn his Thebans in the Underworld:

> *vos quoque sacrati, quamvis mea carmina surgant*
> *inferiore lyra, memores superabitis annos.*
> *forsitan et comites non aspernabitur umbras*
> *Euryalus Phrygiique admittet gloria Nisi.*
>
> (*Theb.* 10.445-48)

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[3] The most important landmarks in this scholarly tradition are Hardie (1993) and Hinds (1998); for specific treatment of the relationship between Statius' *Thebaid* and the *Aeneid*, see Ganiban (2007) *passim*; for the relationship between Statius' *Achilleid* and Virgil, see Heslin (2005), esp. 101-09; for the connection between Silius and Virgil, see Ganiban (2010). For more general analysis of Virgilian reception in the ancient world, useful starting points are Tarrant (1997); Thomas (2001); Ziolkowski and Putnam (2008).

[4] Indeed, Virgil's earlier poetic oeuvre is regularly equated with his *Culex*; see n.43 (below).

(“You too will outlive the mindful years, consecrate, though my songs rise from a lesser lyre, and perhaps Euryalus shall not scorn your attendant shades and Phrygian Nisus’ glory shall grant you entry”).

A similar attitude of self-deprecation and deference informs the coda with which the epic concludes:

vive, precor; nec tu divinam Aeneida tempta,
sed longe sequere et vestigia semper adora.
(*Theb.* 12.816-17)

(“Live, I pray; and essay not the divine *Aeneid*, but ever follow her footsteps from afar in adoration”).[5]

In both passages, so the line of argument runs, Statius acknowledges his own inadequacy in the face of that overwhelmingly dominant master-text, the *Aeneid*. If Statius cannot claim, with the arrogance of an Ovid or a Lucan, to be a worthy successor to Virgil, why should *we* take him seriously? For poor old Silius, the opposition was (and until very recently, remained) even stronger.[6] Silius’ *Punica* offers itself as a sequel to the *Aeneid* and, as such, as a subordinate within the poetic canon.[7] Such opinions are heavily informed by the infamous (to readers of Silius, at any rate) comment of the younger Pliny that, as a poet, he *scribebat maiore cura quam ingenio* (*Ep.* 3.7.5, “he wrote with greater care than inspiration”). Negative readings of this phrase are not difficult to construct, and remain a popular starting point for discussion of the *Punica*.[8] Silius’ *cura* has often been quantified by the scale of his debt to Virgil, whom, we are told (Mart. 7.63; 11.48; 11.50; Pliny *Ep.* 3.7.7-8), Silius venerated. His care in composition, in other words, rendered him little more than a mechanical and unthinking imitator of Rome’s greatest poet. Silius’ reputation as a poet has suffered ever since. Despite the consistency of such readings in the last century of classical scholarship, we will re-examine these interpretive ideas below and seek to tease out some alternative approaches.

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[5] Text and translations of Statius are taken from Shackleton Bailey (2003).

[6] 2010 is a bumper year for publications exclusively or largely focused on Silius. See now, Augoustakis (2010a), (2010b); Tipping (2010) plus a forthcoming monograph by R. W. Cowan.

[7] See Tipping (2010) 51 for the three moments in the *Aeneid* which “inspire” Silius’ poem.

[8] See *e.g.* Henderson (2002), 108 and n.65; Tipping (2010) 1 n.1. On Pliny’s portrayal and its importance for Silius, see Spaltenstein, vol. 1 (1986) xx. Quintilian’s assessment of Virgil at *Inst.* 10.1.86 provides an interesting counterpoint.

Indeed, these points of view have, especially with regard to Statius, become increasingly outmoded, as modern scholars have read both poets with generous and open minds and attempted to approach their poetry on its own terms.[9] I suspect that there is a hard core of unbelievers who still need converting by the fundamentalist Flavians, but, by and large, the academic community has in the last couple of decades embraced the richness of at least Statius' poetry with open arms. A central reason for this considered re-assessment of our Flavian poets is the acknowledgment that both are working within a tradition that involved something significantly more complex than simply looking back at Virgil.

It has been argued with increasing vigour that Flavian epic is possessed of an universalising quality in its use of intertextual allusion to earlier literature.[10] Whilst Valerius Flaccus, Statius and Silius Italicus all undeniably regard Virgil's *Aeneid* as the most important intertext (indeed, all three play on this inevitability of Virgil-as-master-text), they are also keen to include as complete an array of intertextual allusions to as wide a variety of texts as possible within any given textual space. It is not only the most important exemplars of the epic genre that are included in this process, but also more recherché allusions to texts that might not initially strike a modern reader as having especial importance for epic writing.[11] I would argue that such displays of virtuosity and erudition carry as much, if not more, intellectual capital as the more obvious or over-arching invocations of Virgil or Homer.[12] A recent commentary on Statius' *Thebaid* is able to speak of the "encyclopaedic ambition" of the poet in his attempts to compress a huge range of allusion to material both Greek and Roman, and from a wide variety of genres (principally epic and tragic) into a dense literary space (in this instance an epic catalogue).[13] This process of multiple allusion creates a complex overlaying of intertexts, woven into the fabric of epic discourse at the levels of diction, detail, situation or structure, and often a combination of some or all of these.

The more old-fashioned attitude towards the Flavians' relationship assumes a quiet and meek deference towards their Augustan predecessor, with which I am always uncomfortable, not least because it takes those complex, imagistic, autobiographical, metapoetic statements, such as we have just seen in Statius' *Thebaid*, entirely at face value.

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[9] See the bibliography in n.1 (above) for countless examples.

[10] See, *e.g.* Tipping (2007).

[11] *e.g.* for an account of Hellenistic literature's influence, especially that of Callimachus, on Statius' *Thebaid*, see McNelis (2007).

[12] See Stat. *Silv.* 5.3.146-61 with Gibson (2006) *ad loc.*

[13] Micozzi (2007) 6. Micozzi's concept of "memoria diffusa" also has an important potential application, beyond Statius' relationship with Lucan, to all kinds of Flavian epic discourse. See Micozzi (1999) 343-87 and (2004) 136-52.

Further interrogation of the balance between master-author and epic successor is always merited in my view. Deference is clearly an element in that balance, but there are other forces at work in shaping these Flavian epic texts. The *Thebaid*'s first two words, *fraternas acies*, display the text's affiliation to Lucan, whilst the epilogue (12.810-19) from which that latter statement of deference is taken is strongly Ovidian in its ambitions.[14] These conflicting associations have long been acknowledged, so there is no need to go into further detail here, and we should merely note that it does seem simplistic to think purely in terms of an uncomplicated subordinate relationship with Virgil.

There is perhaps more of a case to be made with regards to Silius, whose poem, after all, is constructed as a sequel to the Carthaginian events in the *Aeneid*. In the first book, the sense of continuation on from the *Aeneid* is embedded in the prologue (*ordior arma, quibus caelo se gloria tollit / Aeneadum*; "here I begin the war by which the fame of the Aeneadae was raised to heaven", 1.1-2)[15] and then foregrounded by the characters of Juno and Hannibal in the opening book (*Pun.* 1.21-139). Yet I would suggest that Silius displays a breadth of intertextual affiliation that is routinely underestimated or ignored. Moreover, while the *Punica* leads us on from the *Aeneid*, it has also been noted how the poem depicts a mid-point between that Virgilian world and Lucan's shattered republic in the *Bellum Civile*.[16] To assert a purely deferential attitude is, I suspect, to underestimate the complexity of the *Punica*.

The Modern View of the Relationship

A more aggressive reading of the connections between Augustan and Flavians casts the later poets as more than merely deferential. For example, we can read Statius not as the dutiful successor, but as competitive, fighting against (however unsuccessfully) the oppressive shackles of the Virgilian master-work. This is certainly a highly politicised way of looking at such a relationship, and it carries with it a certain Marxist flavour, as we watch the Flavian poetic proletariat struggle to overthrow the bourgeois Augustan regime. Although such a reading of Virgilian reception is more than a little on the stylised side, nonetheless it chimes in quite nicely with the shift, for example, in social status that is always so much at the forefront of Statius' oeuvre; unlike his predecessor, Statius is very much the jobbing professional writing for clients. Juvenal's well-known depiction of Statius as a pimp (7.82-87) relies on such a characterisation of our epic poet.

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[14] Henderson (1991) 38-39; Hardie (1993) 110-11.

[15] Text of Silius is taken from Delz (1987), translation from Duff (1934).

[16] See Tipping (2007) and (2010) 35-40 on Silius' self-positioning with respect to Lucan.

Furthermore, I think that such narratives of (paradoxically futile yet hugely productive) resistance to the overwhelming influence of the *Aeneid* can be read in the opening lines of the *Thebaid*:

> *Fraternas acies alternaque regna profanis*
> *decertata odiis sontesque evolvere Thebas*
> *Pierius menti calor incidit. unde iubetis*
> *ire, deae? gentisne canam primordia dirae,*
> *Sidonios raptus et inexorabile pactum*
> *legis Agenoreae scrutantemque aequora Cadmum?*
> *longa retro series. trepidum si Martis operti*
> *agricolam infandis condentem proelia sulcis*
> *expediam penitusque sequar, quo carmine muris*
> *iusserit Amphion Tyriis accedere montes,*
> *unde graves irae cognata in moenia Baccho,*
> *quod saevae Iunonis opus, cui sumpserit arcus*
> *infelix Athamas, cur non expaverit ingens*
> *Ionium socio casura Palaemone mater.*
> *atque adeo iam nunc gemitus et prospera Cadmi*
> *praeteriisse sinam: limes mihi carminis esto*
> *Oedipodae confusa domus,*
> *… nunc tendo chelyn; satis arma referre*
> *Aonia et geminis sceptrum exitiale tyrannis*
> *nec furiis post fata modum flammasque rebelles*
> *seditione rogi tumulisque carentia regum*
> *funera et egestas alternis mortibus urbes,*
> *caerula cum rubuit Lernaeo sanguine Dirce*
> *et Thetis arentes adsuetum stringere ripas*
> *horruit ingenti venientem Ismenon acervo.*
> *quem prius heroum, Clio, dabis? inmodicum irae*
> *Tydea? laurigeri subitos an vatis hiatus?*
> *urguet et hostilem propellens caedibus amnem*
> *turbidus Hippomedon, plorandaque bella protervi*
> *Arcados atque alio Capaneus horrore canendus.*
>
> (*Theb.* 1.1-17, 33-45)[17]

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[17] On this passage and its affiliations, see Ganiban (2007) 44-50.

> ("Pierian fire falls upon my soul: to unfold fraternal warfare and alternate reigns fought for in unnatural hate, and guilty Thebes. Where do you command me to begin, goddesses? Shall I sing the origins of the dire folk, the rape Sidonian, the inexorable compact of Agenor's ordinance and Cadmus searching the seas? Far back goes the tale, were I to recount the affrighted husbandman of covered soldiery hiding battle in unholy furrows and pursue to the uttermost what followed: with what music Amphion bade mountains draw nigh the Tyrian walls, what caused Bacchus' fierce wrath against a kindred city, what savage Juno wrought, at whom hapless Athamas took up his bow, wherefore Palaemon's mother did not fear the vast Ionian when she made to plunge in company with her son. No; already shall I let the sorrows and happy days of Cadmus be bygones. Let the limits of my lay be the troubled house of Oedipus … For now I but tune my lyre; enough to recount Aonian arms, sceptre fatal to tyrants twain, fury outlasting death and flames renewing battle in the strife of the pyre, kings' bodies lacking burial, and cities emptied by mutual slaughter, when Dirce's blue water blushed with Lernaean blood and Thetis was aghast at Ismenos, as wont to skirt dry banks he came on in a mighty heap. Clio, which of the heroes do you offer first? Tydes, untrammelled in his wrath? Or the laurelled seer's sudden chasm? Stormy Hippomedon too is upon me, pushing the river his enemy with corpses. And I must mourn the fight of the overbold Arcadian, and sing Capaneus in consternation never felt before").

Although these opening lines are explored again and again by critics of Statius, we often underestimate the essential component of surprise that underpins them; here Statius is emphatically un-Virgilian in his expression (in stark contrast to Silius). These kinds of introductory passages are places where poets mark out their intentions and express their affiliations. Statius opens with his Lucanian heart on his sleeve, his amplification of Lucan's famous *cognatas acies* sets up this poem as very much a post-Virgilian epic. Virgilian *arma* (the second word of the *Punica*, by contrast) are delayed for 33 lines. As Statius debates where he might start his Theban narrative in lines 4-16, he expresses his bond with Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; his *longa retro series* is almost a summary of books 2.836-4.603, the Theban section of Ovid's epic. It is a very Ovidian way of signalling one's debt to Ovid.[18] Yet it is also a very strong statement as regards Statius' relationship with Virgil and Virgil's *Aeneid*. The *Thebaid* assumes the mantle of "anti-*Aeneid*" from the get go, and the poem itself celebrates those disquieting aspects of Virgil's writing, those aspects which display an uneasiness about the origins and the nature of power, both divine and political. Moreover, the sense of surprise is also encoded in the series of plot- and character-catalogues which Statius summarises and weighs up before plumping for his Oedipal theme; as Ganiban notes, such explicit and detailed foregrounding of a text's plot is familiar within the theatrical genres of comedy and tragedy, but startling at the beginning of an epic poem.[19] These competing processions of potential epic (anti-) heroes have a metaliterary function as well; Statius parades competing intertexts vying for his poetic attention. That emphasis on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* encodes a sense of transformation within the fabric of the poem. So here is a sweeping generalisation for us to pick at: Statius' *Thebaid* rejoices in, develops and foregrounds those darkest aspects of the Virgilian corpus, those moments where Virgil can be read as playing the political antagonist. Statius programmatically signals his status as poetic deviant by diverging from the *fons et origo* of his own poem's ethos.

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[18] For this observation and details of Statius' relationship with Ovid, see Keith (2002), (2004-05).

Of course, this kind of reading suits Silius much less comfortably. After all, Nero's last consul could scarcely be described in the same socio-economic terms as his professional Neapolitan contemporary. Silius' *Punica* is unashamedly Virgilian in form and content, from its opening *ordior arma* onwards. The opening phrase blends Virgil and Livy in a new historio-epic whole which has left a sour taste in the mouth of many a critic. It is all a bit too unsubtle, and those opening words set a pattern for the epic as a whole, where Silius rehashes Rome's greatest poet and her greatest historian. There is a different mode of political resistance entailed in Silius' armchair poetics, ones which reject contemporary imperial values (implicitly degenerate in comparison to the moral apogee that dominates during Hannibal's invasion of Italy, of course) in favour of wistful glances back to better bygone days of the Roman republic.[20] But Silius' rather obvious double allusion to Virgil and Livy masks a greater subtlety in his composition, which most readers fail to appreciate.

The *Punica* regularly employs systems of multiple intertextuality, alluding to a variety of intertexts simultaneously, in intricate ways that enrich a literary tradition habitually characterised as suffocating or overdetermined. Such an assessment is typical of current trends of scholarship on imperial Latin literature, yet recent articles have also noted genuinely novel ways in which Silius uses intertextual allusion. Manuwald discusses the appearance of earlier epicists as characters within the *Punica* as a unique strategy for signalling and controlling intertextual relationships with earlier epic.[21] Meanwhile, Wilson has noted how the *Punica* does not consistently signpost its intertexts through verbal "quotation", but "prefers to signal the intertextual connection by alternative means, in particular, by coincidence of situation and detail rather than wording and, occasionally, by more explicit hints".[22]

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[19] Ganiban (2007) 46-47.

[20] See Tipping (2010) 45-50.

[21] Manuwald (2007) 71-90. I am very grateful to Dr. Manuwald for showing me a draft of this piece.

We are only scratching the surface of a series of complicated and interrelated problems, but it is possible to demonstrate that both Silius and Statius are, despite their belatedness, working with the Virgilian tradition in ways which are anything but mechanical, predictable and straightforward. However, this brings us back to the central focus of this paper and to the problem that has exercised me so much in thinking about these poets, and the ways in which they use and represent Virgil. All the modes of reading Flavian epic that we have summarised have one thing in common, and that is the manner in which they portray Virgilian poetry. Virgil is a constant, a static, immutable, monolithic presence. All poets display their negotiation of their place in the canon by reference to this one solid object.

That is not to say that the poem to which the Flavians refer is not open, plural, complex or playful, but rather that references by poets like Statius and Silius to the *Aeneid* portray the poem as closed, singular and authoritative. Such a depiction of the master-poet is a *construction*, however universally it is applied. As a construction it is reductive of the realities of Virgilian poetry (we have already alluded to the many voices within the *Aeneid*) and I believe that this reduction is indicative of the ways in which imperial writers think about poetry, inspiration, composition and tradition, but also indicative of deliberate strategies of self-positioning within these poetic traditions. Ganiban's recent monograph, *Statius and Virgil*, comes up against precisely this complication in setting up its own reading of Statius' intertextual practices:

> "there can be no doubt that the *Aeneid* has an 'Augustan' ('optimistic' or 'public') voice … this reading had clearly dominated the poem's reception since antiquity … whether Statius read the *Aeneid* ambivalently or as an Augustan poem, we simply cannot know. What is clear, however, is that the *Thebaid* explores and expands those troubling elements that challenge the *Aeneid*'s Augustan voice".[23]

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[22] Wilson (2004) 226.

[23] Ganiban (2007) 8-9. Two caveats suggest themselves: firstly, without addressing the notion of authorial intention, we can form our own readings of the *Thebaid* which construe the poem as exploiting *both* reading strategies, *i.e.* that the poem, depending on what suits it purposes at that point in the text, can interpret the *Aeneid* as an "Augustan" text, in Ganiban's formulation, and as an ambivalent text; secondly, Ganiban's reading of the *Aeneid* tends to depict the challenges to the "Augustan" voice as external to the poem (*e.g.* as seen in Lucan) whereas I would foreground the ways in which Statius exploits ambivalent elements *within* the *Aeneid* itself.

The Monolith and its Makers

The monolithic attitude towards Virgil is one which we ourselves as modern readers of Virgil generally do not share, but it *is* one which is pushed forward by imperial readers of Virgil and especially, it seems, by those imperial authors for whom Virgil is most influential. The idea of Virgil as some of kind of unchangeable object is particularly clear in the younger Pliny's portrayal of Silius Italicus:

> *Multum ubique librorum, multum statuarum, multum imaginum, quas non habebat modo, verum etiam venerabatur, Vergili ante omnes, cuius natalem religiosius quam suum celebrabat, Neapoli maxime, ubi monimentum eius adire ut templum solebat.* (*Ep.* 3.7.8)
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> ("He had quantities of books, statues and portrait busts, and these were more to him than possessions – they became objects of devotion, particularly in the case of Virgil, whose birthday he celebrated with more solemnity than his own, and at Naples especially, where he would visit Virgil's tomb as if it were a temple").[24]

Pliny makes the process of reification very obvious. While Silius has a number of books, statues, and busts in his collection, he comes to venerate these as though they were objects of religious significance. Virgil's birthday assumes greater importance than Silius' own; we note the overtones in the choice of word *religiosius*. Moreover, Silius visits Virgil's tomb as though it were a temple. Here, if you like, is the dutiful obeisance of the Flavian poet laid bare for all to see. Yet I should prefer to emphasise the slight vagueness in Pliny's expression which encourages us to see Silius not merely venerating a portrait of Virgil, but also his books. Thus the texts of Virgil also become set in stone.[25] Martial's own poetic portrayal of Silius' veneration further associates such quasi-religious fervour with poetic practice:

> *Iam prope desertos cineres et sancta Maronis*
> *omina qui coleret, pauper et unus erat.*
> *Silius optatae succurrere censuit umbrae,*
> *Silius et vatem, non minor ipse, colit.*
>
> (11.50)

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[24] Text and translation are taken from Radice (1969).

[25] This contextualisation is one which Martial encourages us to adopt by his own characterisation of Silius as one who is defined by his *scrinia*, (*has nugas … quas et perpetui dignantur scrinia Sili*; "these trifles … which even the bookcases of immortal Silius deem worthy", 6.64.8-10).

> ("There was now only one man, a poor man, to honour Maro's almost forsaken ashes and sacred name. Silius decided to come to the rescue of his destitute shade, and honours the poet, no lesser poet he").[26]

The end result of Silius' philanthropic gesture of monumental renewal is a surprising one; he ends up the poetic equal of Virgil (*non minor ipse*). The restoration of Virgil's tomb becomes a metaliterary trope, the equivalent of Silius' poetic activity when he cries, *ordior arma*. Yet just as Silius' physical act of restoration becomes the equivalent of his poetic production, so Virgil's poetic production becomes, as these Flavian poets present it, the equivalent of his monument, his tomb. So, whilst it is tempting to take Pliny's epistolary literary criticism at face value, his depiction of Silius as a Virgilian worshipper becomes even more loaded when we see Statius promoting a very similar set of images surrounding his own relationship with Virgil:

> *en egomet somnum et geniale secutus*
> *litus ubi Ausonio se condidit hospita portu*
> *Parthenope, tenues ignavo pollice chordas*
> *pulso Maroneique sedens in margine templi*
> *sumo animum et magni tumulis adcanto magistri.*
> (*Silv.* 4.4.51-55)

> ("Look! Pursuing sleep and the genial shore where stranger Parthenope found refuge in Ausonian haven, I idly strike the slender strings; sitting on the verge of Maro's shrine, I take heart and sing at the tomb of the great master").[27]

There is a odd mixture of deference and assertiveness in this. This is the temple of a *magnus magister*, and Statius is only *sedens in margine*.[28] Yet, much like his image of following in footsteps at the end of the *Thebaid*, Statius' marginal position also contains a suggestion of autonomy; he is not too much under the thumb. Amusingly, perhaps, Statius visits Virgil's tomb, but seems to be singing very much with Horace's voice. Moreover, the quality of Statius' own poetry is affirmed by the Callimachean *tenues chordas*. We can also see the way in which Virgil the poet and Virgil the poetry are elided very much as they were in Pliny's and Martial's accounts of Silius' worship; it is difficult to separate the act of singing from visiting a tomb near Naples. Furthermore, this is a poem where Statius will later speak confidently, not diffidently, of the *Thebaid*'s success (87-92); it is only the task of epicising his emperor that really daunts Statius – Virgilian song is a trifle, the work of an idle thumb, *ignavo pollice*. Virgil himself is safely contained, dead and buried, there for the Flavian poet to manipulate as he will.

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[26] Text and translation are taken from Shackleton Bailey (1993).

[27] Statius continues his self-presentation as a poetic outsider through Parthenope, the Siren who was washed ashore and founded the city of Naples; see Coleman (1988) *ad loc.* Parthenope principally stands for the Bay of Naples as the location of Virgil's tomb and of Statius' leisurely song, but Naples is also Statius' home town and Parthenope's status as *hospita* reminds us that Statius (a Greek, professional, lower class, pseudo-exile) is, too, an outsider.

[28] This phrase almost gives Statius a peritextual quality; if Virgil's tomb is a text, then Statius is a lemma scrawled around that text, a single item of a wider commentative discourse on Virgil. For the term peritext, see Genette (1997); for the commentary tradition on Virgil up to the 4th century AD, see Ziolkowski & Putnam (2008) 626-28.

So we notice then a sense of reification, or even ossification, that goes hand in hand with the veneration of Virgil and his works as religious objects. Virgil poet and text becomes assimilated into a single *monimentum* or *tumulus*. This conscious recasting of Virgil and his *Aeneid* as a species of monument underpins the way in which Statius and Silius operate at an intertextual level. The monument is something unchanging, except when "restored" by a later, venerating poet who, despite his subservient identity, now maintains exclusive control over the presentation of the monument. As Riffaterre puts it:

> "Monumentality is that constant authority or guarantee that the intertext offers for the text. Intertextuality bespeaks the indissoluble union of scandal and conformity, rule and rule-breaking, norm and anomaly. Because there cannot be an aberrant text without its corresponding *ad hoc* intertextual norm, the peculiarities of literary discourse, however extreme they may be, do not appear gratuitous … The text cannot cancel or upset the intertext without compelling the reader to refer back to that intertext's authority and to acknowledge its pertinence".[29]

For Flavian authors, therefore, the monumentality of Virgil as it appears in their intertextual practice is expressed through a literalisation of the architectural or sculptural metaphor. The reasons for this way of viewing and portraying Virgil may well be found in the "reading systems" of the early empire.[30] A salient example of such a "reading system" might be the Virgilian cento. The cento was a poem, usually bawdy or vulgar in content, which was composed entirely of small units culled from the text of Virgil and placed in a new order.[31] Although this literary tradition flourished in the later empire, the earliest surviving example of a cento is found in Petronius:

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[29] Riffaterre (1997) 175.

[30] Here I distinguish between the "reading practices" of allusive poets producing their own epic poetry, to which I referred earlier, and the "reading systems" of a wider audience, those who have read (*e.g.* as part of their education) but not written, or only copied Virgil verbatim, or written only in less sophisticated and complex ways than have Statius and Silius in their epics. These two categories clearly overlap and Flavian poets clearly do both kinds of reading and potentially can do both simultaneously.

[31] On the Virgilian cento, see Ziolkowski & Putnam (2008) 471-85.

> *illa solo fixos oculos aversa tenebat,*
> *nec magis incepto vultum sermone movetur*
> *quam lentae salices lassove papavera collo.*
>
> (*Sat.* 132 = Virg. *Aen.* 6.469-70; *Ecl.* 5.16; *Aen.* 9.436)
>
> ("It stayed there turned away with eyes fixed on the ground and at this unfinished speech its looks were no more stirred than pliant willows are or poppies on their tired stalky necks").[32]

This genre of poetry provides us with a hugely important illustration of the ways in which imperial readers might use Virgil; the original "meaning" of Virgil's text (Dido in the Underworld, the death of Euryalus) is re-appropriated in favour of a new satirical and comic narrative of Encolpius' impotence. The original context of the Virgilian lines is preserved only as an object of satire. Placing Flavian readings of Virgil in this context opens up the possibility of a monolithic *Aeneid* whose lines become "building blocks" in poetic production.

Another prominent "reading system" which enforces this process of reification is the role that Virgil plays in Roman education in the imperial period. Again, we are scratching the surface of a vast and unwieldy topic, the exact particulars of which are often contentious, not least because much of our best and most detailed evidence for Virgil's role in education comes after the first century AD.[33] The evidence confirms, however, that Virgil was read as an educational text from an early age, was re-read many times in the course of a Roman education, and was learnt in a repetitious fashion. Another Flavian, Quintilian, confirms that Virgil was introduced to young students and that repetitious reading was a feature of his use:

> *Ideoque optime institutum est ut ab Homero atque Vergilio lectio inciperet, quamquam ad intellegendas eorum virtutes firmiore iudicio opus est: sed huic rei superest tempus, neque enim semel legentur.*
>
> (*Inst.* 1.8.5)
>
> ("It is therefore an admirable practice which now prevails, to begin by reading Homer and Virgil, although intelligence needs to be further developed for the full appreciation of their merits: but there is plenty of time for that since the boy will read them more than once").[34]

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[32] Text and translation are taken from Heseltine (1975).
[33] See Mair (2008) 33.
[34] Text and translation of Quintilian are taken from Butler (1920-22).

Elsewhere, Quintilian confirms that students should begin with Homer and Virgil (*Inst.* 12.11.26).[35] Now, although we should not get bogged down in any assessments of Virgil's use in the schoolroom, it is worth reminding ourselves that however sophisticated our poets became in the way they read and used Virgil in their own poetry, it was in this rather unimaginative and repetitious manner that both Statius, presumably from his *grammaticus* father, and the aristocratically educated Silius Italicus, first encountered Virgil, learnt Virgil and assimilated Virgil into their own poetic psyches. For one thing, to think of Virgil as a master-author, or the *Aeneid* as a master-text, assumes a slightly different and perhaps less awe-inspiring significance when viewed in this context. This remarkable shift in attitude towards Virgil seems to be one which happened very early in the history of his reception. Caecilius Epirota is famously recorded by Suetonius as having taught Virgil as a school text within the poet's own lifetime:

> *primus dicitur Latine ex tempore disputasse primusque Vergilium et alios poetas novos praelegere coepisse, quod etiam Domitii Marsi versiculis indicatur:*
> *Epirota tenellorum nutricula vatum.*
> (*Gram.* 16)
>
> ("He is said to have been the first to hold extempore discussions in Latin and the first to begin the practice of reading Virgil and other recent poets, a fact alluded to by Domitius Marsus in the verse:
> Epirota, fond nurse of fledgling bards").[36]

The grammarian was teaching in the 20's BC, before the publication of the *Aeneid* and using only the *Eclogues* and the *Georgics* (hence Marsus' *tenellorum*). Yet the inclusion of the *Aeneid* in exciting new curricula cannot have been long delayed, and even if Epirota was a pioneer in the history of Virgilian education, given that Virgil's pre-eminence as a poet was undisputed within his own lifetime (see Prop. 2.34.66), his central place in Roman education must have been assured within a generation or so of his death.

Furthermore, I would suggest that the texts of Virgil, when approached in the manner which I outlined above, undergo a distinct change; we are used to thinking of Virgil as slippery, malleable, contentious, difficult and rewarding, but these texts may under the strictures of a Roman education have become read, chanted, repeated, mastered, and ultimately may have coalesced into a fixed whole. If this seems a little preposterous then maybe it is worth remembering that Statius refers to Virgil as his *magister* (*Silv.* 4.4.55).

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[35] Such a system of Virgilian education seems to have persisted in essence until St. Augustine's time: *Nempe apud Vergilium, quem propterea parvuli legunt, ut videlicet poeta magnus omniumque praeclarissimus atque optimus teneris ebibitus animis non facile oblivione possit aboleri, secundum illud Horatii: 'Quo semel est inbuta recens servabit odorem / teste diu'.* (St. Aug. *De Civ. D.* 1.3, quoting Hor. *Ep.* 1.2.69-70). Moreover, Macrobius tells us of the way which the text of Virgil was read out by the *magister*, learnt and then chanted back by his pupils, *Sat.* 1.24.5. Cf. *SHA Clod. Albin.* 5.1-2.

[36] Text and translation of Suetonius are taken from Rolfe (1939).

There is a natural tendency in the Roman mind, therefore, to view Virgil as a rather more immutable entity than we might ourselves do. But where sophisticated, highly educated and experienced poets such as Silius and Statius and critics like Pliny are concerned, I do not believe that it is enough to see a certain unconscious slippage in reading patterns towards the static Virgil we encountered above. Rather it seems that writers in this period are actively mobilising the statuesque representation of Virgil and using this for their own purposes. In addition, it is worth pushing the sculptural metaphor entailed in this a little harder. We have already seen in the Plinian letter on Silius how text and sculpture were blended into one artistic whole. Given the associations that this letter, 3.7, has with the one that precedes it, which discusses Pliny's statue, I suspect that Pliny may be doing something quite complex. The full range of responses available to letter 3.6 in particular, but to Book 3 of Pliny's letters as a whole, was brilliantly unpacked in a recent monograph by Henderson.[37] Safe to say, Pliny has brought the language and values of artistic criticism to bear on his subject in 3.7, which I quote more fully here:

> *doctissimis sermonibus dies transigebat, cum a scribendo vacaret. scribebat carmina maiore cura quam ingenio, non numquam iudicia hominum recitationibus experiebatur. novissime ita suadentibus annis ab urbe secessit, seque in Campania tenuit, ac ne adventu quidem novi principis inde commotus est: magna Caesaris laus sub quo hoc liberum fuit, magna illius qui hac libertate ausus est uti. erat φιλόκαλος usque ad emacitatis reprehensionem. plures isdem in locis villas possidebat, adamatisque novis priores neglegebat. multum ubique librorum, multum statuarum, multum imaginum, quas non habebat modo, verum etiam venerabatur, Vergili ante omnes, cuius natalem religiosius quam suum celebrabat, Neapoli maxime, ubi monimentum eius adire ut templum solebat.*
>
> (*Ep.* 3.7.4-8)

("He passed his days in cultured conversation whenever he could spare time from his writing. He took great pains over his verses, though they cannot be called inspired, and frequently submitted them to public criticism by the readings he gave. Latterly his increasing age lead to his retirement from Rome; he made his home in Campania

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[37] Henderson (2002).

> and never left it again, not even on the arrival of the new Emperor: an incident which reflects great credit on the Emperor for permitting this liberty, and on Italicus for venturing to avail himself of it.
>
> He was a great connoisseur; indeed he was criticised for buying too much. He owned several houses in the same district, but lost interest in the older ones in his enthusiasm for the later. In each of them he had quantities of books, statues and portrait busts, and these were more to him than possessions – they became objects of devotion, particularly in the case of Virgil, whose birthday he celebrated with more solemnity than his own, and at Naples especially, where he would visit Virgil's tomb as if it were a temple").

So let us ourselves unpack this series of artistic interpretations as Pliny presents them. Silius is making an object of veneration of Virgil and, as we have mentioned, the *Punica* performs a function towards the *Aeneid* in many ways identical to that of its author towards Virgil. The language of artistic criticism is pervasive in this passage; the quality of Silius' poetry is revealed in public performance, meanwhile Silius the rapacious *philokalos* is also subject to criticism for his acquisitiveness. Pliny makes a connection between the collector of busts, statues and books and the writer of careful, uninspired poetry. For Pliny, Silius approaches the physical object that is Virgil – his bust, his tomb, his poetry – much as a Roman schoolboy would do. In his naïvety, Silius treats his Virgil's texts as he would his statue. The result is *carmina* written *maiore cura quam ingenio*. Pliny implies that the Flavian poet treats the act of writing Virgilian epic and collecting works of art as one and the same process. The *Punica* becomes a monumental collection of Virgilian language in epic form. Silius' is a schoolboy's approach to Virgil.

We will return once more to Pliny's letter, and possibly demonstrate ways in which reifying Virgil may be a beneficial strategy for Silius. But before that, we should look briefly at ways in which this play on the language and criticism of plastic arts informs Statius' relationship with Virgil. In *Silvae* 4.2, Statius describes a banquet he attended in Domitian's Palatine palace. From the beginning, Statius positions himself firmly in the tradition of Homer and Virgil:

> *regia Sidoniae convivia laudat Elissae,*
> *qui magnum Aenean Laurentibus intulit arvis;*
> *Alcinoique dapes mansuro carmine monstrat,*
> *aequore qui multo reducem consumpsit Vlixem.*
> (1-4)

> ("He that brought great Aeneas to the fields of Laurentum extols the feast of Sidonian Elissa, and he that wore out Ulysses with much seafaring portrays Alcinous' repast in immortal verse").

The Virgilian theme of this banquet becomes more explicit when Statius comes to describe the astonishing size of the palace within which the banquet takes place, as Statius alludes to Latinus' palace in Virgil's *Aeneid*:

> *tectum augustum, ingens, non centum insigne columnis,*
> *sed quantae superos caelumque Atlante remisso*
> *sustentare queant.*
> (18-20)

> ("An august edifice, vast, magnificent not with a hundred columns but as many as might support the heavens and the High Ones were Atlas let go").

> *tectum augustum, ingens, centum sublime columnis*
> *urbe fuit summa, Laurentis regia Pici,*
> *horrendum siluis et religione parentum.*
> (*Aen.* 7.170-72)

> ("towering over the city, its huge roof raised by a hundred columns, august and sublime, stood the palace of Laurentine Picus, eerie with bristling forests and old superstitious traditions").[38]

The near quotation of the Virgilian line explains the difference between the palaces of Domitian and Latinus. The imperial palace in Rome seems almost limitless in scope; Virgil's hundred columns (itself an artful variation on that clichéd *topos*, of "countless tongues") are trumped by Statius' own expression of boundless size. From the point of view of a reader looking for Virgilian reception, this passage does not look especially fruitful. Statius is, after all, anything but subtle in his invocation of Virgil in this poem. It looks as if that robotic knowledge of the *Aeneid* gained in the schoolroom has come to the fore in Statius' extemporising poetry.

However, a recent reading of *Silvae* 4.2 by Malamud has identified greater complexity in Statius' allusive technique.[39] She notes the absence of *imagines* depicting ancestors in Domitian's palace – a key feature in the palace of Latinus and in Statius' other re-working of that passage in the depiction of Adrastus' palace in *Thebaid* 2. Malamud reads both the passage from *Aeneid* 7 and *Silvae* 4.2 as alluding back to Virgil's depiction of the cave of Polyphemus in *Aeneid* 3:

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[38] Translations of the *Aeneid* are taken from Ahl (2007).

[39] Malamud (2007).

> *domus sanie dapibusque cruentis,*
> *intus opaca, ingens. ipse arduus, altaque pulsat*
> *sidera (di talem terris avertite pestem!)*
> *nec visu facilis nec dictu adfabilis ulli.*
> (*Aen.* 3.618-21)

("It's a filthy home for a banquet of blood. He's gigantic, high as the stars (gods, keep earth free of such pestilent creatures!) Looking at him isn't easy; conversing is out of the question").

Polyphemus' cave, like both royal palaces, is astonishingly huge; the word *ingens* sits in the same metrical *sedes* in all three passages. Like the Cyclops' cave, Domitian's palace is enormous and its occupant astounding in size; there is a close connection made between the scale of building, dining room and inhabitant:

> *tanta patet moles, effusique impetus aulae*
> *liberior campi multumque amplexus operti*
> *aetheros, et tantum domino minor; ille penates*
> *implet et ingenti genio iuvat.*
> (*Silv.* 4.2.23-26)

("so wide the pile, such the thrust of the hall, freer than a spreading plain, embracing much of heaven within its shelter; he fills the household and weighs it down with his mighty being").

Malamud paints a dark picture of Domitian's palace; this is a political tale which casts Statius' emperor in the role of monstrous protagonist and poet as a Ulyssean resistance fighter, subtly undermining his honorand's power with Virgilian poetics. Malamud depicts a complex, slippery poem that admits of multiple readings and which is informed by a multifaceted Virgilian poetics. Yet reading Domitian's light, sophisticated, airy palace as an equivalent to Polyphemus' dark, blood-stained cave (as it is depicted in Virgil's version in contrast to the Homeric) seems a little forced, to say the least.[40] Unlike the unspeakable Virgilian monstrosity (*nec dictu adfabilis ulli*), Statius renders

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[40] *Pace* Malamud (2007) 233-37.

Domitian's palace entirely effable; the palace stretches Statius' poetics to its limits but not to breaking point. Polyphemus strikes against the heavens in a kind of gigantic assault (*ipse arduus, altaque pulsat / sidera*), whilst Domitian embraces the heavens (*multumque amplexus operti / aetheros*). Better perhaps to emphasise the unrestricted aspect of Domitian's palace and the stress that Statius places on light, colour and transparency in contrast to Polyphemus' dark, forbidding hovel:

> *aemulus illic*
> *mons Libys Iliacusque nitet, multa Syene*
> *et Chios et glaucae certantia Doridi saxa;*
> *Lunaque portandis tantum suffecta columnis.*
> *longa supra species: fessis vix culmina prendas*
> *visibus auratique putes laquearia caeli.*
>
> (*Silv.* 4.2.26-31)
>
> ("Here contend the mountains of Libya and the gleaming stone of Ilium, dark Syene too and Chios, and rocks to rival the grey-green sea, and Luna, substituted only to support the columns. Far aloft extends the view; your weary eyes could scarce attain the roof, you would think it the gilded ceiling of heaven").

The metonymic quality of the palace's marble – different colours and different stones from different geographical locations all standing for the Roman empire – has been noted before.[41] However, I would like to go one stage further and read this poem with allusive Virgilian eyes rather than simply from a Flavian, political point of view. It is possible to see this poetry as metapoetic as well as metonymic, with Statius constructing his palace as a monumental, ekphrastic example of that allusive process. Despite the apparent straightforwardness of Statius' Virgilian allusions, this way of reading pushes our understanding of Virgilian reception still further. Virgil retains, in Statius' hands, that monolithic, statuesque quality. There is development from the Virgilian homes of Polyphemus and Latinus to Statius' Domitianic super-palace; we move from a grotesque, blood-stained grotto, to a majestic, if primitive, palace, to something altogether greater. The columns which supported Latinus' roof become the very building blocks of Domitian's palace, yet Statius alludes to the real complexity of his allusive practice itself through the variety of marble with which he builds his poetic palace. This is an open-ended, "sky-is-the-limit" poetics; Virgilian language becomes oddly subordinated in Statius' hands. Despite situating himself so firmly and explicitly in the Homeric-Virgilian tradition and so patently alluding to the *Aeneid* in the ekphrasis of Domitian's house, Statius takes control of his dominant predecessor by playing the role of architect, using Virgil as nothing more than a poetic bricks and mortar. As we saw in his depiction of his tomb, Statius has a playful, subversive, if ultimately deferential relationship with Virgil. This is the pupil teasing the schoolmaster, the modern architect building with borrowed tools. There is no Statius without Virgil, and this is something the Flavian poet readily acknowledges. There is, however, a power that derives from treating source-text as so basic an element in one's own composition; Statius becomes the innovator, the artist, the sculptor, the architect.

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[41] Cf. Newlands (2002) 267-71, where coloured marble is read as a metonymy for competitive court politics; Zeiner (2005) 87-90; Bradley (2006).

Refusing the Challenge

Another poem from the *Silvae* may suggest something further about Statius' relationship with Virgil. The final poem of book 2 is a Genethliacon in hendecasyllables given to Polla, the widow of the Neronian poet Lucan, in honour of the dead man's birthday.[42] As we noted earlier, Lucan was a dominant influence on Statius' *Thebaid,* and he plays a similar role here. Lucan is portrayed by Statius as the model of what he might have been had he really taken up the challenge of rivalling Virgil. The poem provides extraordinary praise for Lucan's poetic skill as Statius depicts the Muse Calliope taking the infant Lucan in her lap and predicting his great future. Statius, through Calliope, portrays Lucan as a poet first and foremost:

> *nocturnas alii Phrygum ruinas*
> *et tardi reducis vias Ulixis*
> *et puppem temerariam Minervae*
> *trita vatibus orbita sequantur:*
> *tu carus Latio memorque gentis*
> *carmen fortior exeris togatum.*
> (*Silv.* 2.7.48-53)

("Let others pursue the night of Phrygian downfall, the returning travels of tardy Ulysses, and Minerva's temerarious vessel: born of Latium and mindful of your race, you shall be bolder, unsheathing a song of Rome").

Lucan's role in life is to surpass the great epic poets of the past, here Homer and Apollonius. Indeed, there is a nationalistic flavour to these lines, pitting Lucan's toga-wearing song against the best the Greeks can offer. Calliope then goes on the narrate Lucan's own (future) poetic career, culminating in a detailed description of the *Bellum*

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[42] Cf. Malamud (1995); Lovatt (1999).

Civile. All this he will accomplish at an extraordinarily young age, and Lucan will surpass the greatest Roman epicists so far that even the *Aeneid* will revere him as he sings:

> *Baetim, Mantua, provocare noli.*
> . . .
> *haec primo iuvenis canes sub aevo,*
> *ante annos Culicis Maroniani.*
> *cedet Musa rudis ferocis Enni*
> *et docti furor arduus Lucreti,*
> *et qui per freta duxit Argonautas,*
> *et qui corpora prima transfigurat.*
> *quid? maius loquar: ipsa te Latinis*
> *Aeneis venerabitur canentem.*
>
> (35, 73-80)

> ("Mantua, challenge not Baetis … All this you shall sing as a young man in early life before the age of Maro's *Gnat*. Bold Ennius' untutored Muse shall yield, and the high frenzy of skilled Lucretius, and he that led the Argonauts through the seas, and he that transforms bodies from their first shapes. Nay a greater thing I shall utter: *Aeneis* herself shall do you reverence, as you sing to the men of Latium").[43]

Hand in hand with the portrayal of poetic dominance goes Lucan's role (here subordinated to his poetic exploits) as political freedom-fighter against the tyrannical Nero. Lucan will narrate the fire of Rome and ultimately commit suicide in opposition to the emperor:

> *dices culminibus Remi vagantis*
> *infandos domini nocentis ignes.*
> . . .
> *sic et tu (rabidi nefas tyranni!)*
> *iussus praecipitem subire Lethen,*
> *dum pugnas canis arduaque voce*
> *das solacia grandibus sepulcris,*
> *(o dirum scelus! o scelus!) tacebis.*
>
> (60-61, 100-04)

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[43] Again, Virgil's early career is represented exclusively by the *Culex*. Cf. Suet. *Vit. Luc.*, esp. *et quantum mihi restat ad Culicem?* The picture created by *Aeneis venerabitur* surely evokes and reverses both the close of the *Thebaid*, with which this poem is roughly contemporaneous, and the veneration by Silius.

> ("You shall tell of the monstrous fires of a guilty ruler at large over the roofs of Remus … And so even you (outrage of a crazy tyrant!) bidden plunge into Lethe as you sang of battles and with lofty utterance gave solace to grand sepulchres (O foul crime, O crime!) shall be silent").

The image of Nero "at large over the roofs" of Rome provides us with another neat contrast with the safely contained Domitian of poem 4.2. Lucan's own poetry seems to transgress reasonable bounds; his utterance is much more than "lofty". *arduus* is the epithet accorded by Virgil to his gigantic Polyphemus and by Statius to his own gigantic hero, Hippomedon (*Aen.* 3.619; *Theb.* 4.129; 5.560; 6.654; 9.91. The latter is an ambivalent figure to say the least). Lucan seems to be contaminated by association with Nero; it is he who takes up the challenge of Polypheman poetics. The connection between Lucan as writer and Lucan as political opponent of Nero is made in similar by terms in Suetonius' biography of the poet (see Suet. *Vita Lucani, passim*), while Tacitus simply sees competition in poetry as the cause for Lucan's personal animosity:

> *Lucanum propriae causae accendebant, quod famam carminum eius premebat Nero prohibueratque ostentare, vanus adsimulatione.*
>
> (*Ann.* 15.49)

> ("Lucan's animosity was personal. For Nero had the impudence to compete with Lucan as a poet, and had impeded his reputation by vetoing his publicity").[44]

Yet in neither prose author is Lucan's gigantic poetic ability quite so much at the forefront, nor does it drive his political activism in quite the same way as it does in Statius. Lucan's rivalries with Nero and Virgil are paradoxically successful and unsuccessful; Lucan surpasses his adversaries and destroys himself in the process. It is for Statius to pick up the pieces and provide the appropriate veneration. Writing this kind of praise as a genethliacon hammers the point home – Lucan will never celebrate his own birthdays. That is an activity reserved for the Flavian poets, and both tellingly celebrate the birthdays of their poetic predecessors, Statius that of Lucan and Silius Virgil.

Statius lionises Lucan not least because the Neronian poet achieves all of those measures of independence which Statius fails to attain for himself. Statius casts himself, once again, in the ranks of the unworthy, although next to Lucan these ranks have become remarkable indeed:

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[44] Translation of Tacitus from Grant (1989).

Lucani proprium diem frequentet
quisquis collibus Isthmiae Diones
docto pectora concitatus oestro
pendentis bibit ungulae liquorem.
ipsi quos penes est honor canendi,
vocalis citharae repertor Arcas,
et tu Bassaridum rotator Euhan,
et Paean et Hyantiae sorores
laetae purpureas novate vittas,
crinem comite, candidamque vestem
perfundant hederae recentiores.
docti largius evagentur amnes,
et plus Aoniae virete silvae,
et, si qua patet aut diem recepit,
sertis mollibus expleatur umbra.
centum Thespiacis odora lucis
stent altaria victimaeque centum,
quas Dirce lavat aut alit Cithaeron.
Lucanum canimus, favete linguis;
vestra est ista dies, favete, Musae,
dum qui vos geminas tulit per artes,
et vinctae pede vocis et solutae,
Romani colitur chori sacerdos.
(*Silv.* 2.7.1-23)

("Lucan's own day let him attend whosoever on the hill of Isthmian Dione has quaffed the water of the flying hoof, heart stirred by poetic frenzy. You yourselves, to whom belongs the grace of poetic song, Arcadian finder of the vocal lyre, and Euhan, whirler of the Bassarids, and Paean, and the Hyantian sisters, joyfully put on new purple fillets, dress your hair, and let fresher ivy stream down your white robes. Let poetic rivers wander more copiously, and woods of Aonia be greener; if anywhere your shade opens letting in the sun, let soft garlands fill the gap. Let a hundred fragrant altars stand in Thespiae's groves, and a hundred victims that Dirce bathes or Cithaeron feeds: Lucan we sing. Be silent all. This is your day, Muses, be propitious while he is honoured that bore you through both arts, of free speech and of fettered, priest of the Roman choir").

Apollo, Bacchus and the Muses will celebrate Lucan's birthday, as should anyone who has drunk from the Hippocrene or whose heart has been stirred to poetic frenzy. Statius himself falls remarkably short of this Lucanian challenge: the phrase *docto pectora concitatus oestro* is reminiscent of the opening of the *Thebaid*, but of a passage where Statius anticipates an occasion when he might be sufficiently inspired to sing an epic of Domitian's exploits:

> *tempus erit, cum Pierio tua fortior oestro*
> *facta canam: nunc tendo chelyn.*
> (1.32-33)

> ("A time will come when stronger in Pierian frenzy I shall sing your deeds. For now I but tune my lyre").

These two poems from the *Silvae* show us a Flavian poet who is unworthy of the great inheritance which Lucan supplies, one who might aspire to the heady heights of Lucan's political independence but who falls short, and falls short in his attempts to become a more authoritative and independent epic poet as well. Statius still relies all too heavily on his predecessors. Yet with that lack of independence in comparison to Lucan we can see a Statius who remains confident in working with, rather than against, the big names of the epic tradition. The repetition of *favete* (2.7.19-20) is telling; all will be silent (*favete linguis*), except Statius. The Flavian uses Lucan's heavyweight cachet to win his own inspiration from the Muses (*favete Musae*). Furthermore, Statius' desire to situate himself directly in the Homeric and Virgilian tradition that we saw in *Silvae* 4.2 is also expressed in the epistolary preface to the opening book of the collection:

> *sed et Culicem legimus et Batrachomachiam etiam agnoscimus, nec quisquam est inlustrium poetarum qui non aliquid operibus suis stilo remissiore praeluserit.*
>
> ...
>
> *sed apud ceteros necesse est multum illis pereat ex venia, cum amiserint quam solam habuerunt gratiam celeritatis. nullum enim ex illis biduo longius tractum, quaedam et in singulis diebus effusa. quam timeo ne verum istuc versus quoque ipsi de se probent!*
> (*Silv. 1 praef*)

> ("But we read the *Gnat* and even recognise the *Battle of the Frogs*; and none of our illustrious poets but has preluded his works with something in lighter vein ... But with the general public they must necessarily forfeit much of its indulgence since they have lost their only commendation, that of celerity. For none of them took

> longer than a couple of days to compose, some were turned out in a single day. How I fear that the verses themselves will testify on their own behalf to the truth of what I say!")

Although Statius advertises his first book of *Silvae* to his patron Stella as lightweight, this nonetheless contains lightweight poetry in the manner of Homer or Virgil and lightweight poems that at least match those early steps of Lucan. What is more, Statius states that the speed of their composition is their best feature, a feature lost on the reading public. Juxtaposing these two important features of Statius' self-presentation suggests that the notion of the Virgilian building block that I posited in relation to poem 4.2 may not be entirely fanciful. Moreover, the manner of composition and the style of poetry, "commissioned" by a series of heavyweight Flavian patrons and produced at speed, seems very different to the frenzied, inspired, super-poetry that Statius and Calliope depict in poem 2.7. Whether we choose to take the poet's profession of speedy composition at face value or not, there is a sense that the Virgilian basis of Statius' extemporising poetry has more to it than meets the eye – Statius manipulates Virgil for his own ends whilst simultaneously professing his own weakness in the face of Virgilian tradition.

With these Statian party tricks in mind, let us return for the third and last time to Pliny's Silius, and to Pliny's Silius' Virgil. We have seen how that portrait of Silius constructs his relationships with epic predecessors through portraits of Virgil, and we have seen what Pliny gets from the art critic's perspective by sculpting this construction. But let us assume that Pliny's Silius has a solid basis in reality and that this veneration of Virgil in paper and in stone was indeed a genuine and conscious system employed by Silius Italicus himself. From Pliny's point of view, Silius plays Toad of Toad Hall, collecting anything and everything, forgetting about his old villas when he buys a new one, buying art like it is going out of fashion. Yet despite the slow and painful death which Pliny narrates at the beginning of the letter, Silius' lifestyle brings him a long life of relaxed tranquillity and Pliny himself is brought to philosophise on the brevity of human life in contemplation of Nero's last consul:

> *in hac tranquillitate annum quintum et septuagensimum excessit, delicato magis corpore quam infirmo … quod me recordantem fragilitatis humanae miseratio subit. quid enim tam circumcisum tam breve quam hominis vita longissima? an non uidetur tibi Nero modo modo fuisse? cum interim ex iis, qui sub illo gesserant consulatum, nemo iam superest.*
>
> (*Ep.* 3.7.9, 10-11)

("In this peaceful atmosphere he completed his 75th year, delicate rather than unsound in body … The thought of this fills me with pity for human frailty; nothing is so short and fleeting as the longest of human lives. It must seem to you only the other day that Nero died, yet not one of those who held consulships in his time is alive today").

There is a connection to be made between this biographical set of statements by Pliny and his portrayal of the retired consul and epic poet's pseudo-religious fervour before Virgil. While Pliny himself records accurately the number of old Silius' years, Silius himself ignores the passing of time, preferring to celebrate Virgil's birthday and renovate Virgil's tomb. The comparative phrase, *delicato magis corpore quam infirmo*, inevitably recalls Pliny's pejorative critical response to his writing (*maiore cura quam ingenio*), but here Silius' physical substance acquires the classic characteristic of Callimachean poetry, delicacy and fragility. The poet measures the passing of the years by reference to his precursor's tomb and in the process ties his own sense of self inextricably to Virgilian monumentality. Silius derives a sense of timelessness both in life and in poetic production through his conscious decision to subordinate himself to a Virgil of his own construction. It is no coincidence that Martial choose to accord Silius the epithet *perpetuus* (cf. Mart. 6.64.10):

> *Perpetui numquam moritura volumina Sili*
> *qui legis et Latia carmina digna toga*
> *Pierios tantum vati placuisse recessus*
> *credis et Aoniae Bacchica serta comae ?*
> (7.63.1-4)

("Reader of the everlasting volumes of immortal Silius, poems worthy of the Latin gown, think you that only Pierian retreats and Bacchic garlands for Aonian locks have pleased the bard?")

Silius was, as Martial reminds us (7.63.5-12) a senior advocate and consul before turning his hand to Virgilian arts. Martial depicts the epic poet as a kind of *pater patriae* in his own right, one who epitomises the ancient male value set of Rome. There is a sense of seniority and completeness in his career. Nero's last consul embodies an alternative set of poetic and political responses to overwhelming authority to those symbolised by Lucan (in Statius' poem). Lucan's frenzied poetics do not simply entail violent opposition to Nero but an equally powerful rejection of Virgilian influence. As a result, Lucan attempts, as Riffaterre might put it, to "cancel the intertext" that is Virgil. This is, of course, another poetic fiction, but a powerful one mobilised by Statius in *Silvae* 2.7. Yet this Lucan's attempt to erase his precursors is an ultimately self-destructive strategy, one which results in his own "erasure" in a very literal sense, as Nero wipes him from the face of the earth.[45] Lucan loses that sense of monumentality so central to Virgil; he is all scandal and no conformity. Silius, by contrast, takes a more careful, studied route that results in his own "perpetuity". Silius ultimately becomes, in Martial's panegyric epigram and Pliny's epitaphic epistolary memorial, another incarnation of Bloom's "dead man"; through careful poetics and carefree consumption of cultural goods, Silius transcends the gulf between ephebic imitator and paternal precursor. Silius creates his own sense of monumentality, and he and his poetry evoke, mimic and in due course acquire that monolithic trait of Virgil's poetry.

In conclusion, we have demonstrated ways in which Statius and Silius use particular metaphorical methods of looking back at Virgil and Virgilian poetry, methods which involve a process of subordination on the part of the Flavian poet and a careful construction of Augustan poet as being akin to a lapidary work of art, whether sculptural or architectural. The basis for such reductive readings of Virgilian poetry can be found in the wider reading systems of the early imperial period, in particular those which involve Virgil as an educational text and those which involve systematised parody of Virgil. Lapidary language and motifs filter through into more sophisticated and complex readings of Virgil and inform the intertextual practices of poets such as Statius and Silius. Overt competition with Virgil is avoided, and Statius constructs Lucan as a rival to Virgil (and object of veneration in his own right), but one whose poetics is ultimately self-destructive. For Silius, the result of this process is reassuring rather than competitive, creating a timeless authority for the author of the *Punica*. Silius allows himself to be drawn into the sculptural process, moulding himself into his own lasting cultural monument. For Statius, in his *Silvae* in particular, Virgilian poetry doubles as an inspirational foundation, but also as a poetic shorthand, a means to a greater end. Statius undeniably plays pupil to Virgil's master, but his self-portrayal as dutiful follower is disingenuous; complex poetic material yields increasingly multifaceted and intricate allusive qualities. There is a hint of confidence, not only in the manner by which he appropriates Virgil, but also in manner by which he sculpturally supersedes him.

Downside School **JEAN-MICHEL HULLS**

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[45] Tacitus' *prohibuerat ostentare* can be read in this way.

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