

The Virtue of Audacity in Statius's *Silvae*

In lines 61-77 of his *Propemptikon for Maecius Celer* (*Silvae* 3.2), Statius envisions himself standing at the docks watching his dear friend Maecius Celer sail away on military assignment and begins to contemplate the first sailing vessel and its role in the creation of human suffering. Indeed, this is a typical theme in lyric propemptika and in evoking it, Statius also performs a careful allusion to earlier Latin propemptika, specifically Horace's *bon voyage* to Vergil (*Odes* 1.3) and Ovid's elegaic farewell to Corinna (*Amores* 2.11). Yet, Statius sets his interpretation of this theme apart from his predecessors through the critical re-investigation of the role of *audacia* and innovation in human suffering (of which the first sailing vessel is frequently presented in propemptika as a particular cause). This paper aims to demonstrate that Statius's conception of *audacia* is more positive and constructive than the usual view of audacity in the propemptic tradition as deviant and transgressive. By exhibiting sympathy and admiration for famously audacious actors such as the first sailing vessel, Prometheus and Daedalus, Statius attempts to rehabilitate audaciousness from the negative sense to a more positive kind of bold ingenuity, without which meaningful progress and innovation is not possible.

Further, I argue that through his reconfiguration of this theme and the allusion to *Odes* 1.3, Statius erects a theoretical foundation for the expansion of this more positive *audacia* for the discussion of his own style of poetic composition. By examining the phrase *audax ingenii*, used to describe Prometheus' boldness at *Silvae* 3.2.64 and the poetic ingenuity of Statius's beloved father at *Silvae* 5.3.133-136, I suggest that Statius constructs an analogy between mythical audacity and poetic innovation. Adding to these attestations the reference to Statius's own epic abilities and his attempts to challenge the heights of Vergilian epic as *audax* (*Silvae* 4.7.25-28), I argue that in rehabilitating the concept of audacity, Statius aims to show that his attempts to compose an innovative poetry allow him to expand the possibilities of what poetry (specifically Flavian) is capable and, indeed, compose sublime poetry worthy of inclusion in the Greco-Roman literary canon. In this way, Statius shows that an innovative and bold spirit in poetic composition is a special virtue rather than a deviant behavior and that he understands that his own fame and place within the Greco-Roman literary tradition is dependent upon this sort of exceptional approach rather than the mediocre pursuit of the norm.