

Statian Bull-Similes: Virgilian Intertext and Poetic Program in the *Achilleid* and *Silvae*

This paper examines the adaptation of two Virgilian passages, the description of the erotic rivalry and combat of bulls at *Georgics* 3.209-236 and the simile of fighting bulls at *Aeneid* 12.715-722, in the poetry of Statius. The influence of these two passages on subsequent Latin epic more generally, and on the *Thebaid* specifically, is well-established (cf. Hardie 1993; Taisne 1994; Hershkowitz 1998; Ganiban 2007). Their importance for the bull-simile in the *Achilleid* (1.313-317) has also been noted (Bernstein 2008; Parkes 2008), but the Virgilian reference in Statius' mention of cattle at *Silvae* 4.5.17-20 has been overlooked, and the relation of these Virgilian intertexts to Statius' poetic program in the two poems has been comparatively little discussed. In both instances, Statius' adaptation of Virgil serves as a means of positioning himself in relation to his predecessor and of distancing his poetic project from his more "epic" model.

In the *Achilleid* Statius compares the love-struck Achilles to a bull inflamed with erotic passion in a simile that draws language and imagery from both Virgilian passages. Statius signals his dependence on *Georgics* 3 shortly beforehand, with an invocation of the custom of drinking blood mixed with milk (*Ach.* 1.307-308; cf. *Geo.* 3.461-466), and the simile itself employs language borrowed from Virgil. Statius' adaptation is learned and self-conscious: the situation nearly ends in violence due to a failure to follow the instructions of the *Georgics* to keep bull and heifer separate, and disaster is averted only by the divine intervention of Thetis. Further, while both Virgilian passages progress from erotic considerations to notably "epic" conclusions – the battle of the bulls in *Georgics* 3 and Aeneas' killing of Turnus in *Aeneid* 12 – Statius frustrates this development both in the simile itself (by the actions of the *magistri*) and in the main narrative (by the actions of Thetis). The ambiguous temporal language used by Statius

(*quondam... futurus*, 313) here signals on a metaliterary level his self-conscious halting of the progress the earlier Virgilian model, which is frozen in mid-narrative. And Statius' deferral of an "epic" resolution reflects his broader poetic program in the *Achilleid*: the generic shift from epic to erotic considerations in the Scyros episode that follows (*cf.* Aricò 1986; Heslin 2005; Sanna 2007) inverts the amatory-to-martial thematic shift of his models.

In his ode to Septimius Severus, Statius notes the absence of cattle and their love affairs as a part of his idealized construction of his estate at Alba Longa. These lines have been typically interpreted as a reminiscence of Horace, which emphasizes the simplicity of Statius' life in contrast with his patron's wealth (Hardie 1983, Coleman 1988; Nagel 2009). But the Virgilian intertext, previously unnoted, is equally important for Statius' presentation of both his environment at Alba and his poetic project in this ode. As in the *Achilleid*, Statius signals his dependence on the *Georgics* in advance by employing a key bit of Virgilian language (*lanugeri... greges*; *cf. Geo.* 3.286–287), and his description of the bull as an "adulterer" (*adultero*) evokes the bulls of *Georgics* 3 and their subsequent reception in Latin elegy and epic. But in the *Silvae* the offending animals are wholly excluded, and the absence of both the savage passions of the cattle and their epicizing outcome reinforces both the construction of Statius' estate as an ideal location of Epicurean *quies* (*cf.* Vessey 1970; Hardie 1983), spontaneously free from destructive forces of nature and destructive passions, and his self-presentation as an explicitly lyric, rather than epic, poet in the context of this poem.

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