

## Exemplarity and Productive *Otium* in Statius' *Epistula ad Vitorium Marcellum* (*Silvae* 4.4)

Statius' *Epistula ad Vitorium Marcellum* (*Silvae* 4.4) is a complex mixture of metapoetic intertextuality, careful social manipulation, and philosophical dialogue. On the surface, Statius addresses the "letter" of caring friendship to the well-connected Marcellus (i.e., *Praetor* in 95 CE and recently appointed *Curator Viae Latinae*) as an exhortation to take time for a vacation and refresh his mind and body. But like many of his other "occasional" *Silvae*, Statius also uses this poem as an opportunity to solidify his social connections with Marcellus (Nauta, 2002), play with the symbolic possibilities of the "philosophical epistle" in the Horatian mode (Coleman, 1988; Newmyer 1979; Hardie, 1983), and perform a philosophical argument about the beneficial aspects of *otium* in an elite Roman context. The first two of these functions have been well discussed in the secondary scholarship. This paper looks to tease out the philosophical message that Statius weaves into this letter, arguing that Statius uses an eclectic mixture of Stoicism and Epicureanism as they pertain to the juxtaposition of action and *otium*.

Starting from a brief recognition of the *Silvae* 4.4's place with the tradition of the philosophically didactic epistolary (e.g., Seneca, Pliny, Horace), I will argue that Statius gradually makes an argument for the necessity of *otium* (in the guise of philosophical *quies*) for more efficient and productive *negotium*. Indeed, he argues that one must have a balanced and complementary integration of *otium* and action to live the most morally appropriate life with the greatest internal tranquility. I argue that Statius here presents to his addressee, Marcellus, that *otium* offers the most opportune circumstances for tranquility which, in turn, allows for effective development of virtue. Further, learning to *recte vivere* will allow a virtuous man to expend his free time in productive habits.

I show that he constructs the crux of this argument through careful allusion to Seneca's *De Tranquillitate Animi* and Horace's *Epistles*. His emphasis in these allusions on balance, which leads to tranquility of mind, shows that he views *otium* to be peaceful and restorative—just what a man of action like his addressee needs to become a more effective statesman.

The last piece of this argument shows that Statius, in presenting this argument for “productive *otium*,” makes Marcellus his philosophical disciple AND his example of *recte vivere* ethical principles in the same breath. He performs this feat by couching his philosophical arguments for “productive *otium*” within the poetic structure of an encomium for Marcellus. In this way, he is able to solidify his relationship with a superior man, flex his pedagogical muscles, and thereby gain some sort of symbolic capital in the process.

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