

RUTH PARKES (ed.), *Statius, Thebaid 4. Edited with an Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. XXXVIII + 357, ISBN 978-0-19-969525-6.

Even those of us who admire and enjoy the poetry of Statius can sometimes find the fourth book of his *Thebaid* a drain on our reserves of patience. Every time the action seems about to get going, something brings it to a halt. The first delay comes in the form of a catalogue of Argive troops, and among the readers of epic poetry perhaps it is only the scholars who can really be expected to take much pleasure in a catalogue. The second delay is caused by a long and elaborate necromancy, a large part of which is in fact another catalogue naming all the ghosts who are not actually required by the seer Tiresias for an interview. And the third delay is a drought that reduces the army to despair until an obliging nursemaid leads them to the one local river that has not dried up, a river which someone the poet does not trouble to name then thanks and honours in a speech which includes a (mercifully short) catalogue of other, famous rivers. True, there is a cute baby who is destined to meet with a grisly fate, and the nursemaid hints at an intriguingly mysterious past; but by the time we reach the end of the fourth book we find we have to accept that all this excitement is being kept in store for the fifth. Statius himself tells us that he spent twelve years writing the twelve books of his epic (*Theb.* 12.811-2), and so it is sometimes suggested that the popular poet (see *Iuv.* 7.82-87) may have presented the individual books to the public at annual recitations. If so, it rather looks as if he at least knew how to keep the audience guessing, and that is quite an achievement when your subject-matter is one of the best-known tales in the canon.

It is also quite an achievement to write a scholarly commentary on such a book that neither bores nor annoys, and Ruth Parkes is to be congratulated on having accomplished this feat, while also providing her readers with an astonishing quantity of rich and varied information, all laid out with clarity, care, and good sense. The introduction is especially valuable for the way it foregrounds the poet's strategies of narrative delay, as well as his self-conscious claim to a place in a long literary tradition. Attention is given in particular to Book Four's close rewriting of the first book of Lucan and the seventh of Virgil's *Aeneid*. Another section efficiently documents something of the ways in which Statius' poem 'had a deep and lasting impact upon later literature' (xxxiii), and both the introduction and the commentary show a marked interest in its influence on late antique and vernacular poetry that far

surpasses what is to be found in all but a very small proportion of modern commentaries on ancient authors.

Like most such commentaries on Statius and other Flavian authors, however, Parkes leaves the investigation of the manuscripts to the specialists. She essentially bases her text on that of Hill (1996) with its rich apparatus and appendix. Her text differs from Hill's in thirty-three places, listed on xxxviii; in truth, one would do better to say that there are twenty-nine differences, as four of those listed are in fact courteous corrections of misprints. A rate of one difference in every thirty lines or so of the Latin might mislead someone inspecting the introduction in a casual fashion to suspect a lack of interest in the text, or perhaps a lack of self-confidence in emending it, so let me stress that the notes quickly dispel any such thought. What distinguishes Parkes' approach is her respect for Statius' 'paradoxical and dense style', which, as she rightly says, 'emendations often seek to tame' (xxxvii, n. 126). The outrages which the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were willing to inflict on the text of Statius can be seen in, for instance, the note on lines 77-8, where *et haesit/ tristibus aucta fides* is calmly defended against Müller's *actis*, which reduces Statius' combination of psychological insight and concision of expression to deplorable banality. Again, a drily worded note on line 170 observes that the 'characteristically Statian compression of phrase' in the transmitted *arte reperta* has 'led to editorial frenzy', and then offers a long and depressing list of conjectures, some of them workmanlike and some of them, even if they miss the point, otherwise sensible enough in themselves, but there are also one or two that provide abundant proof of the conviction of some editors that authors have no business writing in a style that offends their taste or perplexes their brains. Similarly, sensitivity to Statius' love of boldness and paradox leads Parkes to defend *rudis armorum* (247), *uultum niger exiit aer* (585), and *solem radiis ignescere ferri* (665). In short, this is a conservative text, but one that is intelligently conservative, and we should note that Parkes is perfectly ready to accept conjectures, including very recent ones, where she despairs of making sense of the transmitted reading, and hence prints Hall's *felix* at line 185 (though she does so 'tentatively'). Nonetheless, it is in the notes demonstrating her feel for Statius' style that her judgement and ear for poetry make their most valuable contribution. Eighty years ago Housman observed that one reason why 'neither recension nor interpretation' had 'made strides proportionate to our knowledge of the MSS' was 'that modern scholars are disadvantaged by their remoteness and estrangement from the ways of thinking and writing which were most fashionable and admired in the silver age of Latin poetry' ('Notes on the *Thebais* of Statius', *CQ* 27, 1933, 1). We ourselves, of course, are still more remote in time, but much has been achieved in the last few decades in both understanding Statius and in cultivating our taste for him. Parkes' handling of the text, at any rate,

strongly suggests that her generation of scholars is far less estranged from Flavian poetics than, say, that of Garrod and Klotz.

The commentary is by no means primarily concerned with the text, however, but shows due attention to almost every interesting feature of lexical or literary-historical interest. It is also striking for its amplitude: Oxford University Press have been generous in granting its author space, and she has repaid that generosity by providing detailed notes in which lavish quotation will make life easier for readers. Quotations are far from being limited to the illustration of linguistic features or the indication of similar usages in authors whom Statius seems to be imitating (as some of us remain content to say; Parkes more usually says that such and such a passage 'looks to' or 'echoes' or on occasion 'engages with' the work of an earlier poet). Rather, notes repeatedly expound in detail how Parkes sees Statius as reacting to his predecessors, and also how his successors react to him: quotation of Virgil and Ovid and Lucan is abundant, that is, but so too is quotation of Claudian and Sidonius (e. g. 169-70, 253, 274, 550 nn.), of Dante and Ariosto and Boccaccio, and of Spenser and Joseph of Exeter (e. g. 1, 95-100, 166-8, 253, 494-9, 553-645 nn.). Frequently, the wide reading and the deep learning of the poet are matched by that of the commentator (e. g. 289-90 n.), and some old misapprehensions are clearly neatly away (e. g. 266 *nodis...Hiberis* n.). And yet no commentary can say everything that everyone will think worth saying, and if Parkes understands Statius' style better than the 'modern scholars' whose insensitivity Housman deplored, he would perhaps be disappointed at the lack of interest she shows in Statius' metre. And some deficiencies, if that is the correct word for them, are beyond any commentator's power to repair; if the *Hypsipyle* of Euripides is quoted more lavishly than the *Aetia* of Callimachus, and if the presence of Antimachus is barely felt as a ghost less substantial than any of those summoned in the necromancy, then that is hardly Parkes' fault. I make the point, however, in order to remind myself that some of the most interesting questions any of us could ask about Statius are precisely the ones that the ruined transmission of the Hellenistic poets has rendered unanswerable.

This is a handsome volume, beautifully produced and very clearly laid out. Occasional typographical errors are only to be expected in a work of such complexity, but there are very few indeed that are likely to confuse or seriously mislead anyone. In 528 *Mors atra* n., however, read '9.851 *nigrae... mortis* with Dewar', and in 587-92 n. read 'a loose use of *Argolici* at 588'. I append a list of additions and disagreements that, by its very shortness, will plainly declare how highly I esteem this fine contribution to the study of Statius.

2-3 *Phoebus....cogebat.../...diem* n. Add Verg. *georg.* 1.466-8 'ille etiam extincto miseratus Caesare Romam,/ cum caput obscura nitidum ferrugine

texit/ impiaque aeternam timuerunt saecula noctem', in effect an omen of civil war.

30 *dolent* perhaps means 'resent' rather than (or as well as) 'grieve': the loved ones left behind resent the treachery of winds that should show more loyalty and keep the travellers - their compatriots - safe at home.

151 *ductas* n. Note also Verg. *Aen.* 1.423 'pars ducere muros' (with Austin *ad loc.*), although there the reference is to the length of the walls rather than their height.

177 n. The enraged Ceres, a figure clearly meant to make us think of the Furies, uses two entire cypresses uprooted from a sacred grove as torches when she begins her own Gigantomachic rebellion at Claud. 36.370-91.

200-10 n. (p. 142). In this context the long quotation from Claudian's *Laus Serenae* (CM 30) will remind some readers that Serena, like Eriphyle, was known for coveting a necklace that was destined to bring about her own destruction: see Zosimus 5.38.

232-3 n. There seems to be no certain parallel for *ephebum* as a 'syncopated' genitive plural. It is perhaps better to follow Shackleton Bailey and take it as an accusative singular: the point would then lie in the pathos of death in youth.

243 *infando de more* n. We might also recall the flesh-eating horses of Diomedes of Thrace, and how Hercules punished the barbarous king by feeding him to his own horses: Ov. *her.* 9.89-90; Sen. *Tro.* 1108-9; Stat. *Theb.* 12.156.

288 *deo...alite felix* n. For *felix* of the blessed birthplaces of the famous note also *silv.* 2.7.24.

363-8 n. That Statius compares Eteocles to a wolf marks him as a tyrant; the good king, since Homer, had been a 'shepherd of the people' (*Il.* 2.243).

409-14 n. The interpretation of the syntax offered seems to me entirely correct, but note that the truth was discerned almost four centuries ago by Crucé. See *Mouseion* 53 (2009) 62-5.

528-9 n. *Mors* counting up the dead in order to check that none is missing may put us in mind of a shepherd. Compare Th. *Id.* 8.15-6 and Verg. *ecl.* 3.32-4 'de grege non ausim quicquam deponere tecum:/ est mihi namque domi pater, est iniusta nouerca,/ bisque die numerant ambo pecus, alter et haedos.' Those passages may also give weight to the reading *dominis* (who here would be Pluto and Proserpina). There is also perhaps some black humour in the thought of *Mors* attempting to count a flock that was conventionally so large as to be uncountable: Claud. 33.20-1 'innumerum...Averni/vulgus iners'.

614 *funere longo* n. The point is indeed that a long-drawn out death is a particularly nasty one. Compare the cruelty of Mezentius, who tortured his victims by tying them to corpses and so 'complexu in misero longa sic morte necabat' (Verg. *Aen.* 8.488).

625 *tingit...genas* n. Without an incontrovertible parallel it is hard to

believe that 'genas' means 'mouth'. We should perhaps imagine Laius as having lapped up the blood so greedily that he has splashed it over his cheeks or more generally his face.

630 *sacris...nefastis* n. The Romans' abhorrence of human sacrifice, especially when used as a means of consulting the gods, was no doubt useful in justifying the imperial project, as when Suetonius Paulinus stormed the druidic groves on Anglesey (Mona): Tac. *ann.* 14.30 'nam cruore captivo adolere aras et hominum fibris consulere deos fas habebant'. The state's severity towards black magic of all kinds is well discussed by Ramsay MacMullen in *Enemies of the Roman Order*, London - New York 1966, 95-127.

801 n. No doubt the infant Mars is tougher than human children, but here he seems to evoke, if oddly and only fleetingly, the elegiac *puella* who has run off with the poet's soldier-rival: Verg. *ecl.* 10.49 (Gallus) 'a, tibi ne teneras glacies secet aspera plantas'.

823-4 n. It may be logical to take *longus* with *a fontibus* to mean 'far from the source' on the grounds that 'as 839 shows, the Argives are not near the source of the Langia', but the position of *longus* in the word-order looks very pointed and Statius tends to care more for hyperbolic effect than for consistency in logic. The picture of the army's despoliation of the waters is more impressive if we imagine it as extending the whole length of the river, with Shackleton Bailey.

840-3 n. Although Dante of course knew Statius well, the passage quoted reminds me primarily of Lucretius' description of the blessed abode of the gods (3.18-22).

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