

## Statius *Silvae* 4. 9: *Libertas Decembris?*

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The last poem of Statius' 4th book of *Silvae* is generally taken to be a Saturnalia-inspired reproach directed at a well-connected *patronus* by a poet who has come off rather the worse in an exchange of gifts. The connections with Catullus' 14th poem—a poem in which Catullus commemorates a Saturnalia gift-book—and with Martial's complaints about meagre gifts from patrons have been noted.<sup>1</sup> It has even been argued that in *Silvae* 4. 9 Statius makes use of the license of the season to produce a poem in which "he accuses his addressee of a lack of literary taste."<sup>2</sup> A closer examination of the "parallels" in Martial, together with a glance at Statius' other poems in hendecasyllables (*Silvae* 1. 6, 2. 7, 4. 3), will reveal some of the problems which arise if one reads the poem this way. By defining the tone of *Silvae* 4. 9 in terms of the distance between it and the poems in which Catullus chaffs his literarily inclined friends one can get a better sense of the *délicatesse* that Statius applies in managing his relations with Plotius Grypus.

The epigrams in which Martial expresses a sense of injury at having received a gift of little market value, parallel to 4. 9 as they appear at first glance, are in fact all addressed to fictitious donors and celebrate the poet's ingenuity, not the receipt of real, if paltry, gifts. On the disappointing half-pound of pepper sent by the "Sextus" who had sent a pound of silver the

<sup>1</sup> In the commentaries of F. Vollmer (*P. Papini Stati Silvarum libri* [Leipzig 1898]) and K. M. Coleman (*Statius. Silvae IV* [Oxford 1988]), and in discussions by R. E. Colton ("Echoes of Catullus and Martial in Statius *Silvae* 4. 9," *AC* 46 [1977] 544–56) and H.-J. van Dam ("Statius, *Silvae*, Forschungsbericht 1974–84," in *ANRW* II.32.5, ed. by W. Haase [Berlin 1986] 2740 n. 50). References to Statius, Martial and Catullus are to the Oxford Classical Text editions by E. Courtney, W. M. Lindsay and R. A. B. Mynors, respectively.

<sup>2</sup> K. M. Coleman, "*Silvae* 4. 9: A Statian Name-Game," *PACA* 14 (1978) 9–10. She continues: "in addressing his accusation to a Grypus, Statius uses the associations of 'nasutus' to draw attention to sensibilities which are noticeably lacking in Plotius." In her more recent commentary (previous note) she is less precise about who the target of the poem, which she calls "a satire on poor literary taste and the absence of social graces," is. Her final remark on the tone of the poem, that "in all, the teasing note, familiar from Catullus (and also Cicero and Horace), is not meant to be taken seriously," is too much *ex cathedra*; it is my aim to show how Statius' teasing differs from that of Catullus.

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