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**Vice Versa: Domitian's Corruption in Suetonius and Statius**

Roman authors of the early imperial period had an extensive vocabulary of virtue and vice at their disposal for the representation of character, but artless application of such vocabulary could easily produce something closer to a statistical table than a vivid portrait. To avoid this hazard, Roman writers could choose to show virtues and vices as part of larger patterns of individual behavior. The biographer Suetonius and the poet Statius in different ways point to just such a pattern in the emperor Domitian's actions: a fearsome and somewhat paradoxical practice of controlled calculation in the exercise of unrestrained vice. Once we recognize this feature of Domitian's character in Suetonius' life of Domitian and in Statius' *Thebaid*, we can gain a perspective on how the generic conventions of each work inform the representation of this and other such patterns underlying vicious behavior.

As an imperial biographer, Suetonius demonstrates a special interest in virtues and vices. Among the variously virtuous and wicked Caesars whom Suetonius surveys, Domitian represents an intermediate case, demonstrating virtues before descending into sheer vice (3.2). The life of Domitian provides an exceptionally good example of how Suetonius presents Roman categories for vice in combination in order to suggest their formal similarities. Presented in tandem, Domitian's cruelty and greed reinforce one another as instances of immoderation, both of which are made more fearsome by meticulous execution. Nevertheless, Suetonius' biographical technique of summary analysis through categories of virtue and vice limits his exploration of this character trait to something of a tally.

The epic genre within which Statius composes allows for other possibilities. Although scholars dispute the extent to which Statius' *Thebaid* comments on contemporary political circumstances, when Statius uses the language of the very financial matters that so perversely interested Domitian to explore the theme of controlled immoderation among the kings and leaders of the *Thebaid*, we find a distinct, if subtle, reflection of the vices of the princes. Jupiter, a natural doublet for the divine emperor, claims that he suffers a loss (*iactura*, 7.205) when he has to repopulate the world after war. But the mortal Coroebus had already pointed out that the divinities saw human suffering and death as a cheap and acceptable cost (*iacturaque uilior*, 1.649) of fulfilling their desire to harm mortals. This they do by sending monsters, which are consequently more valuable to them (*monstra...cara adeo superis*, 1.648-9).

Here and elsewhere in the *Thebaid* Statius is able to explore a ruler's calculated indulgence of immoderate desires in greater detail than Suetonius due to different conventions of their respective genres. Statius has at his disposal not only the greater length of epic, but also the character-illuminating potential of narrative, a wider scope for invention and arrangement, and the potential for linguistic experimentation. This last possibility in particular allows him to overcome contravening obstacles which his choice of genre posed. Statius could not easily represent greed in a poetic tradition where zealous pursuit of goods is standard heroic behavior. Yet by using words like *iactura* that

had contemporary economic connotations, Statius manages to introduce into his epic a notion of calculation in the pursuit of excessive desire that resonates less with epic traditions than with the circumstances of Domitian's Rome.

Statius thus manages to achieve within his chosen genre a representation of calculated immoderation that is more complex, but also more diffuse than that of Suetonius. Such diffusion was of course necessary when touching on the vices of a reigning princeps. Fortunately in Suetonius we have an aid to discovering and interpreting this motif in Statius' epic poetry.