

Statius, *Thebaid* 1.250: Conjecturing an Intertext

Juno's first words in the *Thebaid* (1.248-51) come in reply to Jupiter's announcement (214-47) of his plan to punish both Argives and Thebans for their various sins:

Sic pater omnipotens. ast illi saucia dictis
 flammato uersans inopinum corde dolorem
 talia Iuno refert: 'mene, o iustissime diuum, 250
 me bello certare iubes? . . .'

Her first adjective is surprisingly conciliatory and complimentary (and superlative) compared to the rest of her speech. I suspect that Statius in fact wrote *mene*, *iniustissime diuum*. Once the negative prefix was lost through reduction of minims (from 6 to 3) or Christian rewriting (a pious monk might well have thought that even a pagan divine ruler of the universe deserved more respect), *o* would have been the obvious metrical stopgap.

Of course, *iustissime* can be understood as sarcastic irony,¹ which would arguably suit Juno's rhetoric just as well as open insults, and the reader may well wonder what difference my conjecture makes. The answer is that it would restore (I hope) or introduce (I fear) an interesting intertext. In a tiny note in *Liverpool Classical Monthly* in 1993, William Levitan suggested that the first words of the first speech in the *Aeneid* contain a bilingual pun: Juno's *mene incepto* echo and allude to the first word of the *Iliad*, μῆνις.² If I am right, Statius noticed Vergil's pun and reproduced it in the first words of the first speech of Juno (the fourth in the epic) in his own Vergilian and wrath-soaked epic, a 'window allusion'. He certainly repeated the initial *mene*. He also closely modeled his preceding line, in which Statius introduces Juno's speech (*flammato uersans inopinum corde dolorem*, *Th.* 1.249) on the first line after Juno's speech in Vergil (*talia flammato secum de corde uolutans*, *A.* 1.50).³ It doesn't seem much of a stretch to believe that he also reproduced both μῆνις and *mene in-* by writing *mene, iniustissime diuum*.

¹ It might be unfair to adduce the remarks of Eduard Fraenkel (*Horace*, 46n2) on "that last expedient of a despairing commentator, the assumption of 'sarcastic irony'": it works tolerably well here.

² "Give up the beginning?: Juno's mindful wrath (*Aeneid* 1.37)", *LCM* 18.1 (Jan. 1993), 14. The whole thing is one longish sentence – is that a record?

³ So Randall T. Ganiban, *Statius and Virgil: The 'Thebaid' and the Reinterpretation of the 'Aeneid'*, Cambridge, 2007, 53, with further elaboration.