

Bernstein, N.W. 2008. *In the Image of the Ancestors: Narratives of Kinship in Flavian Epic* (Phoenix Supplementary Volumes). Toronto, University of Toronto Press. 281 pp. Pr. \$65.00 (hb). ISBN 9780802098795.

Attuned to a post-civil war society in the process of being refounded on a basis different from the Augustan model of history culminating in the glorious arrival of Augustus, the Flavian epics arguably stage in various ways how the world should be perceived after this 'end of history' and this includes, as Neil Bernstein persuasively suggests, a searching and critical engagement with notions of kinship. In the introduction to this book, Bernstein notes that the Flavian epicists "reverse the Homeric and Vergilian emphases on agnatic descent, positive ancestral example, and intrafamilial solidarity" (4). Its value at times questioned in the epics, agnatic descent (that is, descent through the male line) often has to share the stage, as it were, with other modes of kinship (cognatic [descent through the female] and elective) and with notions of social and political arrangements that are understood in kinship terms.

Chapter One, "Kinship as Narrative", first presents the emphasis on agnatic descent in epics antecedent to the Flavian epics. Bernstein then notes how the Flavian epics take up this important theme and handle it differently (in particular questioning the value of this descent). He sees this change as reflecting both the devaluation of descent in the late first-century CE (an undoubted effect of the decimation of the great families over the centuries and most recently in year 69) and the figuring of the emperor as a paternal figure (but whose position lacks, crucially, the glamour of the Julio-Claudians' ultimate divine origin in Venus). With the stakes of the analysis having correlates in both the realities of late first-century CE family structure and in the frequent complexion assumed by imperial power, four chapters, treating each of the surviving Flavian epics, follow.

In Chapter Two, "Valerius' *Argonautica*: Kinship and Power", Bernstein asserts that "an allegory of the anxieties of the contemporary Roman upper class emerges from Valerius' narrative of the effects of internal and external pressures on the family" (61). Valerius repeatedly problematizes paternal authority through the presentation of fathers (Pelias, Aeetes) who do not deserve the respect they expect. Indeed, the behavior of Pelias, who tries to restrain the virtuous Acastus from pursuing glory, "recall[s] the *quies* created by imperial domination of the political sphere" (41). The gods also contribute to this *de facto* devaluation of *patria potestas*; Juno and Venus leading Medea astray is cast as an infringement of Aeetes' paternal prerogatives. The *Argonautica* tells the story of Jason in such a way that it stages a debate on whether or not lineage has been overvalued. As Bernstein also shows his readers, Valerius reflects at the same time on the ambitions of the Flavian house, which was frequently casting itself in a paternal role vis-à-vis the state.

The following chapter, “Statius’ *Thebaid*”, is divided into two sections. The first section, “Kinship as Destiny”, focuses on the tragic figure Polynices and the way in which his dealings with various characters (Adrastus and Tydeus in particular) dramatize the contemporary debate about the value of lineage. In the second section, “Kinship and Gender”, Bernstein first focuses on Jocasta’s opposition to the action that the father (Oedipus) has set in motion through his curse. Bernstein then turns his attention to Argia and the “cruelly ironic” (95) situation that emerges through her support Polynices’ lineage-based claim to the throne of Thebes. She hastens a result that will break her heart. But the irony does not cease there. Her loyalty to her husband creates a bond that makes her “set aside her sex” (98), as it were, and ensure the burial of his remains in a display of devotion which shows the value that can accrue to relations that are not based in blood and lineage. The fourth chapter (“Statius’ *Achilleid*: Nature and Nurture”) canvasses the conflicting claims of descent and training in the story of Achilles. Born of a divine mother and almost, but not quite, the son of Zeus, Achilles has dire need of training and of masculine examples because of the considerable power of his mother. He receives it and his heroism is the triumphant result of a masculine intervention; but his divine lineage is nonetheless important, for it never ceases to matter that his mother is divine. The tension in the *Achilleid* between lineage, on the one hand, and accomplishments independent of it, on the other, is staged quite nicely in this chapter.

A discussion of the *Punica* (“Silius’ *Punica*: Kinship and the State”) follows. Bernstein sees in Silius’ epic repeated stagings of the competing claims of *patrial* education/nurture and *domus*/lineage/nature. Favoring lineage too much, Hannibal overvalues the *furor* that his father bequeathed to him and this ultimately harms Carthage. Silius contrasts Hannibal with Fabius and others like him who understand the importance of placing the state first. A discussion of the dispute between Pacuvius (the tyrant of Capua) and his son crystallizes this dynamic. Pacuvius’ son, citing Hannibal’s betrayal of treaties with Rome (11.321 *polluta... foedera*), wants to assassinate Hannibal when he is in Capua. Pacuvius demands that his son not do this (surely glorious) thing, asserting that it will result in the violation of hospitality (11.335 *polluta hospitium*). Dramatizing an overvaluation of lineage, Pacuvius orders his son to obey him rather than consider doing what should be his ultimate civic obligation to Rome. Scipio, the final figure from the *Punica* Bernstein analyzes, is in the end able to split the difference, as he is both devoted to his earthly father (his secret and most real father is Jove) and to the state. Bernstein rightly underscores that Scipio has a typological relationship to the Flavians instead of a genealogical one. Scipio provides an *exemplum* and is not a relative.

The final two chapters provide broader reflections on the role of descent in the epics. In Chapter Six, "From Family to Nation: Descent and Ethnicity in Flavian Epic," Bernstein focuses on the use of national descent narratives in the *Thebaid* and *Punica*. He begins with a discussion of the hybrid nature of the Romans' descent in the *Aeneid* (Trojan and Italian). Noting the persistence of a propensity to civil war and violence in Theban blood, Bernstein sensibly sees in the *Thebaid* a mirror of Roman history. I must say, however, that Bernstein perhaps overdoes the emphasis on the *spartoi* as the crucial moment in Theban descent. Statius after all often refers to the Thebans through nomenclature that connects them to Phoenicia. In any case, the racial inheritance of the *spartoi* and notions of civic obligation figure in a canny analysis of the Menoeceus episode from Book 10. Menoeceus understands his actions as service to the state, while his mother sees his behavior as a savage manifestation of his being a descendent of the violence-prone *spartoi*. The upshot of this debate is that the polity stands to benefit from civic behavior that disregards the demands of the *domus*. Still, given the prevailing darkness of the *Thebaid*, as Bernstein notes, this civic act merely leads to more bloodshed (176) and so "Statius' *Thebaid* explores the dangers inherent [even] in a monogenetic model of ethnic affiliation" (178). In the *Punica*, Bernstein focuses on the claims for help the Saguntines make to the Romans—help which was not forthcoming and which in turn "questions the ability of myths of common descent to serve as the charter uniting diverse ethnic communities" (192). In the end, it is a matter of the "the Flavian epics, following the example of the *Aeneid* [where Trojan identity is submerged into Italian], similarly suggest[ing] that descent is less important than cultural performance or individual aspiration in determining ethnic identity" (164). This in turn is to be associated both with the Flavians' lack of connection to primeval Trojan stock that was Julio-Claudians' pride and also with the nouveau nature of the Roman families at this time. In the final chapter, "The Poetics of Kinship", Bernstein considers the use of genealogy by Statius to guide the reception of his work. Present-day readers of the *Thebaid* must surely note the irony of Statius' energetic deployment of his father (*Silvae* 5.3) as an important accrediting factor for him, the author of the *Thebaid*. Bernstein sees Silius behaving differently from Statius in this regard. Silius finds exemplars in Ennius and Vergil; he is doing something similar to the best of his ability. By not claiming descent but endeavoring to emulate his predecessors, Silius recalls the Flavian dynasty's lack of connection to the past; a possible equation: Silius : Vergil :: the Flavian Emperors : Scipio. The book ends with a works cited, an *index locorum* and a general index.

Speaking in general terms about this book, I found it judicious in its readings and well-focused. The connection of the epics to post-69 society and the

contemporary need to rethink the measure of worth is well-done. Indeed, this book sits well along-side Charles McNelis' recent work on the *Thebaid* (2007. *Statius' Thebaid and the Poetics of Civil War* (Cambridge)) which likewise shows the way in which the particular moment in history affects one of the Flavian epics (and indeed the genre). Also, the sunnier climes of the *Silvae* are used to good effect to illuminate the *Thebaid* throughout. Bernstein's discussion of issues around the education and lineage of Achilles should be supplemented by P.J. Heslin's recent book (2005. *The Transvestite Achilles: Gender and Genre in Statius' Achilleid* (Cambridge)). At times, I wanted more detailed discussion and quotation of primary sources from outside the epics to concretize more securely the points being made about the relationship between the epics and Flavian society. On the whole, though, Bernstein succeeds in offering an approach to these four epics which features a thematics that the contemporary readership would have found important and meaningful.

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