Tempus edax has by no means been kind to P. Papinius Statius; although his poems have achieved the eternity which he, by convention, hoped and promised for them 1), critical opinion has fluctuated regarding their merits 2). In recent years there has been a limited revival of interest but he is still commonly neglected 3). Statius has suffered from a tendency to generalise about his work. As a contrast, in this paper, I intend to give detailed attention to some aspects of a single poem, the epithalamion for Stella and Violentilla (Silvae I 2) 4).

When Latin epithalamia are mentioned it is only natural to think first of the two exquisite poems of Catullus (61 and 62), just as in English of Edmund Spenser's Epithalamion and Prothalamion. There are parallels in technique between Catullus and Statius, as we should expect, for both are parts of an organic literary tradition. Both were highly conscious craftsmen-poets, seeking by means of a contrived artistry to achieve refined aesthetic effects in language, metre, imagery. Both were members of a poetic coterie: indeed the coterie is the natural habitat of poets and Maternus, in Tacitus' Dialogus, was right to mention illud felix contubernium as one of the advantages enjoyed by a poet 5). There are, however, obvious and radical differences between the neoteric groups and the groups

1) See, e.g., Silvae II 3, 63; III 3, 37 ff.; Thebaid XII 810 ff.
2) There is a useful discussion of critical opinions until his time in J. Danglard, De Stace et surtout de ses Silves (Lyon 1864), 7 ff.
3) In relation to the Silvae, special mention must be made of the useful and thorough investigations by H. Cancik, Untersuchungen zur lyrischen Kunst des P. Papinius Statius (diss. Tübingen 1965 [= Spasmata, 13]).
4) For commentaries on the epithalamion, see A. Herzog, Stati Epithalamion (Leipzig 1882) and F. Vollmer's edition of the Silvae (Leipzig 1898).
5) Tacitus Dialogus 13.
gathered round Maecenas, Pollio, Messalla; and the gulf is still greater when we reach the age of Domitian, a poetaster himself 1) and a patron of the art 2), and of the rich patroni who commissioned the Silvae. For the neoterics, the disillusion of a violent, revolutionary age led to a rejection of the old patriotic purposes of poetry in favour of a poetry of escapism and personal emotion 3). By the time of Statius, the renewed patriotic fervour of the respublica restituta had largely evaporated. The poet, compelled to pay literary homage to the established despotism, can hardly have felt complete enthusiasm for the status quo. The bald Nero, though professing modesty, expected and received adulation, gross and unfitting 4); in Statius' Silvae, although we still see a sense of Rome's historic greatness, it is subordinated to the more pressing duty of commemorating the triumphs and achievements of the emperor, of supporting the regime 5).

Denied freedom of thought, the poet had to turn to the dramatisation of the often trivial activities of his patrons and friends, or to epic based either on mythological themes, or on Roman history sufficiently remote to be non-controversial: hence the Punica of Silius, the Argonautica of Valerius, the Thebaid and Achilleid of Statius. The patriotic motive was no longer so much the glorification of res Romana or the Augustan settlement 6); it was now centred rather on praising the dominus and his public actions. In the Silvae, the Domitiangedichte have only too often been criticised; it was

1) Suetonius Vit. Dom. 12; Statius Achilleid I 14; Silius Italicus Punica III 618; Valerius Flaccus Argonautica I 12.
2) See H. Bardon, Les Empereurs et les lettres d'Auguste à Hadrien (Paris 1940), 308-335.
4) Calvus Nero: Juvenal Satires IV 38; on Domitian's apparent modesty, Suetonius Vit. Dom. 2.
5) Statius envisaged the imperator as the embodiment of Rome's greatness; see, esp., Silvae IV 1.
6) It is notable that Valerius Flaccus in his epic did make a number of references to Roman history and institutions (see W. C. Summers, A Study of the Argonautica of Valerius Flaccus [Cambridge 1894], 56-7); this is not paralleled in the Thebaid.