



The Works Of Alexander Pope Esq.

In Nine Volumes Complete. With His Last Corrections, Additions, And Improvements; As they were delivered to the Editor a little before his Death

Containing The First of his Letters

Pope, Alexander

London, 1751

Letter VII. Criticisms on Statius.

Nutzungsbedingungen

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88 L E T T E R S T O A N D

which you are certainly in the right to be a profess'd enemy: tho', I confess, I could not think it possible at all times to be avoided by any writer, till I found by reading Malherbe lately, that there is scarce any throughout his poems. I thought your observation true enough to be pass'd into a rule, but not a rule without exceptions, nor that ever it had been reduced to practice: But this example of one of the most correct and best of their Poets has undeceived me, and confirms your opinion very strongly, and much more than Mr. Dryden's authority, who, tho' he made it a rule, seldom observ'd it.

Your, &c.

L E T T E R V I I .

June 10, 1709.

I Have receiv'd part of the version of Statius, and return you my thanks for your remarks, which I think to be just, except where you cry out (like one in Horace's Art of Poetry) *pulchre, bene, recte!* There I have some fears you are often, if not always, in the wrong.

One of your objections, namely on that passage,

The rest revolving years shall ripen into fate,
may

may be well grounded, in relation to its not being the exact sense of the words — ^a *Cætera reliquo ordine ducam*. But the duration of the Action of Statius's poem may as well be excepted against, as many things besides in him: (which I wonder Bossu ^b has not observ'd) for instead of confining his narration to *one year*, it is manifestly exceeded in the very first two books: The narration begins with Oedipus's prayer to the Fury to promote discord betwixt his sons; afterward the Poet expressly describes their entering into the agreement of reigning a year by turns; and Polynices takes his flight from Thebes on his brother's refusal to resign the throne. All this is in the first book; in the next Tydeus is sent ambassador to Eteocles, and demands his resignation in these terms,

*Astriferum velox jam circulus orbem
Torfit, & amissæ redierunt montibus umbræ,
Ex quo frater inops, ignota per oppida tristes
Exul agit casus.*

But Bossu himself is mistaken in one particular, relating to the commencement of the action; saying in book ii. cap. 8. that Statius

^a See the first book of Statius, v. 202.

P.

^b Bossu did not write a critique upon Statius, but only used him, as he did other

poets occasionally, for an example. So that it is no wonder there should be faults and beauties in Statius which he did not take notice of.

opens it with Europa's Rape, whereas the Poet at most only deliberates whether he should or not^c?

Unde jubetis

*Ire, Deæ? gentisne canam primordia diræ,
Sidonios raptus? &c.*

but then expressly passes all this with a *longa retro series*—and says

limes mihi carminis esto

Oedipodæ confusa domus.

Indeed there are numberless particulars blameworthy in our author, which I have try'd to soften in the version:

dubiamque jugo fragor impulit Oeten

In latus, & geminis vix fluctibus obstitit Isthmus,

is most extravagantly hyperbolical: Nor did I ever read a greater piece of tautology than

Vacua cum solus in aula

*Respiceres jus omne tuum, cunctosque minores,
Et nusquam par stare caput.*

In the journey of Polynices is some geographical error,

In mediis audit duo litora campis

^c That was the same to Bossu's purpose; which was only to shew, that there were epic Poets so ignorant, or

negligent of composition, as not to know where their subject should begin.

could

FROM H. CROMWELL, Esq. 91

could hardly be ; for the Isthmus of Corinth is full five miles over : And *caligantes abrupto sole Mycenæ*, is not consistent with what he tells us, in lib. iv. lin. 305. “ that those of
“ Mycenæ came not to the war at this time,
“ because they were then in confusion by the
“ divisions of the brothers, Atreus and Thy-
“ estes.” Now from the raising the Greek army against Thebes, back to the time of this journey of Polynices, is (according to Statius’s own account) three years.

Yours, &c.

L E T T E R VIII.

July 17, 1709.

THE morning after I parted from you, I found myself (as I had prophesied) all alone, in an uneasy Stage-coach ; a doleful change from that agreeable company I enjoy’d the night before ! without the least hope of entertainment but from my last recourse in such cases, a book. I then began to enter into acquaintance with your Moralists, and had just receiv’d from them some cold consolation for the inconveniencies of this life, and the uncertainty of human affairs ; when I perceiv’d my vehicle to stop, and heard from the side of it the dreadful