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Images of Virgil.

**Some examples of the creative approach to the Virgilian
biography in antiquity.**

James Edwin Powell.

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at Durham University
in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

2011

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Contents.

Abstract.	v
Acknowledgements	vi
Abbreviations.	vii
Introduction.	1
1. Virgilian careers: the problem of the <i>Culex</i> .	13
2. The cult of Virgil: the tomb and beyond.	67
3. Biographical readings of the <i>Eclogues</i> .	117
4. Virgil in Tacitus' <i>Dialogus de Oratoribus</i> .	177
Conclusion.	233
Bibliography.	237

Images of Virgil.

Some examples of the creative approach to the Virgilian biography in antiquity.

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Abstract.

This thesis explores the reception of the Virgilian biography in antiquity. The ancients were interested not only in the Virgilian oeuvre, but also in the man who created these works. The thesis will investigate the ways in which various authors respond to Virgil's life, with an especial emphasis on how the Virgilian biography is something amenable to creative appropriation and manipulation. The authors we will be studying both respond to, and contribute towards the construction of, the biographical tradition of Virgil. Chapter 1 seeks to complicate the idea of Virgil's poetic career by considering how certain writers broach the issue of the *Culex* as a putative piece of Virgilian juvenilia. The second chapter examines how Virgil's tomb and the cult which surrounded it play a part in the biographies and autobiographies of his epic successors. The third chapter offers a fresh look at biographical readings of the *Eclogues*, focusing on the different ways in which this practice is carried out, and the different purposes to which it is put. The final chapter looks at Tacitus' presentation of the Virgilian biography in the *Dialogus de Oratoribus*, examining how the historian raises the question of Virgil's political allegiances, and how he interrogates the idealization of Virgil's life.

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Abbreviations.

- AL F. Bücheler & A. Riese (eds.), *Anthologia Latina* 1.1-2 (Leipzig, 1894-1906).
- ANRW H. Temporini & W. Haase (eds.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung* (Berlin, 1972-).
- BNP H. Cancik & H. Schneider (eds.), *Brill's New Pauly: Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World* (Leiden, 2002-10).
- EV *Enciclopedia Virgiliana*, (Rome, 1984-91).
- GL H. Keil (ed.), *Grammatici Latini*, 7 vols. (Leipzig, 1855-80).
- IEG M. L. West (ed.), *Iambi et elegi Graeci ante Alexandrum cantati*, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1989-92).
- MGH AA *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi*, 15 vols. (Berlin, 1877-1919).
- OCD S. Hornblower & A. Spawforth (eds.), *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd edn. (Oxford, 1996).
- Pfeiffer R. Pfeiffer (ed.), *Callimachus*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1949-53).
- RE *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, (Stuttgart, 1893-).
- Skutsch O. Skutsch (ed.), *The Annals of Q. Ennius*, (Oxford, 1985).
- Thilo-Hagen *Servii grammatici qui feruntur in Vergilii carmina commentarii*, vol. 1: *Aeneidos librorum I-V commentarii* (Leipzig, 1881); vol. 2: *Aeneidos librorum VI-XII commentarii* (1884); vol. 3.1: *In Vergilii Bucolica et Georgica commentarii* (1887); vol. 3.2: *Appendix Serviana* (1902). Vols. 1-3.1, ed. G. Thilo; vol. 3.2, ed. H. Hagen.
- TLL *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, (Leipzig, 1900-).
- VMA D. Comparetti, *Vergil in the Middle Ages*, trans. E. F. M. Benecke, rept. edn., with introduction by J. Ziolkowski, (Princeton, 1997).
- VSD *Vita Suetoniana-Donatiana*.
- VVA G. Brugnoli & F. Stok (eds.), *Vitae Vergilianae Antiquae*, (Rome, 1997)

Introduction.

Who was Virgil? From one angle the answer seems simple enough: he was a Roman poet whose life spanned the demise of the Republic and the birth of the Empire; and he was the author of, most famously, the epic *Aeneid*. But viewed from another angle our question might not be so easily answered, for Virgil as a figure within cultural discourse has proven to be a slippery and protean entity: *quot lectores, tot Vergilii* might be an accurate summation of the issue.¹ For the emperor Constantine he was a prophet of Christ; for Dante a guiding beacon of light in the darkness; for T. S. Eliot he was simply *the* classic of all Europe: for two millennia Virgil has been an iconic figure in western culture.² The idea of Virgil has been endlessly appropriated, contested and reconfigured as different readers have moulded different Virgils to suit their own particular ends: Christian Virgils, fascist Virgils, imperial Virgils, anti-establishment Virgils, royalist Virgils, philosophical Virgils, magical Virgils – these are just some of the incarnations that this most fought-over of poets has borne over the centuries.

Themes and Approaches.

This thesis is about the biographical tradition surrounding Virgil. In one sense it thus seeks to address the question with which we started: who was Virgil? More specifically, however, this thesis has two broad concerns: firstly, it is concerned with

¹ Cf. Heyworth (2007a) lxxv on the task of editing Propertius: 'Housman described his editions of Juvenal and Lucan as *editorum in usum*; this text is rather *lectorum in usum*, but, in the case of Propertius at least, every reader needs to edit the text anew. *Quot editores, tot Propertii* is an inevitable truism, at least if editors are doing their job with conscientious independence. But it would be as true to say *quot lectores, tot Propertii*: just as the modern age celebrates diversity and openness of interpretation, so we should celebrate diversity and openness in textual choice'; the formulation *quot editores, tot Propertii*, quoted by most Propertian textual critics, is originally from Phillimore (1901) *praef.*

² Martindale (1997b) provides a succinct overview of Virgil's resonance in western culture; Kennedy (1997) looks at T. S. Eliot's conception of Virgil.

how the Virgilian life was (and still is) something which was constructed and contested by various readers, each of whom had a particular agenda or axe to grind; secondly, it examines how later authors engage *creatively* with moments from the Virgilian biography. In this sense my topic is not what the Virgilian life *was*, but rather what the Virgilian life *was made to be*. The questions this thesis aims to explore are not only concerned with *what* our sources tell us about the life of Virgil, but also with *how* they say it and *why*. In the sense that this thesis explores stories told about the life of Virgil rather than the life of Virgil itself, it might be said to have affinities with the approach which Maria Wyke, in a recent exploration of the reception of Julius Caesar in western culture, terms ‘metabiography’:

...this book constitutes a metabiography – that is, not an exploration of a life at its time of living but of key resonances of that life in subsequent periods.³

By examining key resonances of Virgil’s life in later periods, my aim is to elucidate how the Virgilian biography was not something passively handed down from generation to generation, but was rather something which was actively forged anew and renegotiated by different readers. Examining the processes of this refashioning sheds light not only on how subsequent readers thought about Virgil and his oeuvre, but can also tell us much about these receivers of Virgil themselves; a point made by Marjorie Garber in relation to Shakespearean studies:

The search for an author, like any other quest for parentage, reveals more about the searcher than about the sought.⁴

How later authors fashion Virgil’s life often reveals much about how they conceptualize their own lives and works. This last point will be a recurrent theme of this thesis.

³ Wyke (2007) 19.

⁴ Garber (1987) 27; quoted by Bennett (2005) 2.

The Virgilian biography as a theme is ripe for re-investigation for a number of reasons. Despite Barthes' (knowingly ironic) proclamation of the death of the author in 1967, interest in authors alongside their texts is as lively today as it ever has been.⁵ Academic critics and philosophers continue to try to answer the theoretical question memorably posed by Foucault: what is an author? In the introduction to that famous essay, Foucault suggested some lines of enquiry which might be worth pursuing in future studies:

Certainly it would be worth examining how the author became individualized in a culture like ours, what status he has been given, at what moment studies of authenticity and attribution began, in what kind of system of valorization the author was involved, at what point we began to recount the lives of authors rather than of heroes, and how this fundamental category of "the-man-and-his-work-criticism" began.⁶

In addition to these more theoretical investigations, the proliferation of mass-market biographies of literary figures attests to the enduring interest in authors' lives among the general public.⁷ Indeed it has become something of a cliché to remark (usually disapprovingly) that nowadays people are more likely to pick up a biography of Shakespeare (that most elusive of authors) than to read or watch one of his plays.⁸ The idea of the author and the biographies we construct for them are, then, still central issues in literary and cultural studies.

A further reason why a reassessment of the Virgilian biography is timely is because traditional approaches to this subject seem to have run their course. When looking at ancient material on the Virgilian biography, classical scholars have tended to limit

⁵ The first appearance of Barthes' essay 'The Death of the Author' is often erroneously dated to 1968, instead of 1967; see Bennett (2005) 9-10; it is widely printed in numerous anthologies, e.g. Barthes (1977): 142-48.

⁶ Foucault (1979) 141 (the essay was first published in 1969).

⁷ On the author-question generally, see Burke (1992), (1995); Irwin (2002); Bennett (2005).

⁸ New biographies of the bard seem to appear every year; from recent years see the following: Holden (1999), Ackroyd (2005), Bryson (2007), Weis (2007), Bate (2008), Shapiro (2010); Schoenbaum (1970) is a fascinating exploration of Shakespeare's myriad incarnations.

themselves to the following question: what do we know about the life of Virgil? While answers to this question have differed in radical ways, the question itself has remained a constant, as a brief survey of some of the material in this area will show. Older scholarship was readier to embrace the various biographical notices on Virgil which have come down to us, and also to make use of Virgil's own poetry as a mine of biographical information.⁹ Thus Sellar confidently composes a full biographical portrait of Virgil, charting his progress from the cradle to the grave.¹⁰ Frank, likewise, finds copious material to answer his own question, 'what do we know about Virgil?'¹¹ These are just two scholars plucked at random from a very large pool. More recently a large dose of scepticism has been injected into studies of the *vita Vergiliana* as the fictional nature of ancient poetic biographies has come to the forefront of critical investigation.¹² Several recent scholars have contended that the ancient biographical notices on Virgil have minimal historical value. The minimalist position's most recent and most forceful advocates have been Naumann and Horsfall, who argue that most of our biographical information on Virgil is of dubious historical value: it is largely the result of an over-literal exegesis of his oeuvre.¹³ For scholars such as these, then, our knowledge of 'Virgil the man' is actually very limited. Despite the radically different conclusions drawn by, for example, Sellar and Horsfall, they are both, nonetheless, engaged in the same endeavour: to sift the ancient *testimonia* on Virgil in order to reconstruct what they deem an historically

⁹ The biographical tradition surrounding Virgil is the richest we have for any Latin poet; the process of transmitting stories about him started early, if we believe the following words of the 2nd century philosopher Favorinus (as quoted by Aulus Gellius): "*Amici,*" *inquit* [sc. Favorinus], "*familiaresque P. Vergilii, in his quae de ingenio moribusque eius memoriae tradiderunt...*(*Noctes Atticae* 17.10.2); on Virgil in Aulus Gellius, see Baldwin (1973); Holford-Strevens (2003) has a useful index s.v. 'Vergil'. Ziolkowski (1993) 30-56 offers an insightful overview of the popular biographies of Virgil which appeared in the latter half of the nineteenth-century and first half of the twentieth-century, illustrating how they mirror various competing ideologies of the times (nationalism, conservatism, fascism, Christianity, Nazism etc.).

¹⁰ Sellar (1877) 93-129; see also e.g. Nettleship's account in Conington (1881) xvii-xxviii.

¹¹ Frank (1930-1); see also Frank (1922); these works by Frank are noteworthy for their dismissal of the ancient *vitae* as sources for Virgil's life – Frank is much keener to tap the resources of the *Appendix Vergiliana* and the *Eclogues* as biographical sources.

¹² Fairweather (1974) did much to set this ball rolling; also Lefkowitz (1981).

¹³ Naumann (1981a); Horsfall (1995) 1-25.

plausible biographical portrait. They are both after facts; the only difference being that Sellar finds a bountiful larder, Horsfall a bare cupboard.

But this quest for facts – legitimate as it is as one method of investigation – need not be our only approach to the Virgilian biography. Recent studies by Graziosi and Knöbl have demonstrated how we can take an alternative approach to biographical material on ancient writers.¹⁴ We can examine how ancient biographical traditions are revealing of how ancient readers thought about and responded to literature; and how biographical traditions are things which are created and contested, not things which are passively inherited. Concerning the Homeric biographical tradition, Graziosi makes the following observations:

I maintain that ancient (and, indeed, modern) discussions of the figure of Homer can be seen as testimonies to the significance and meaning of the Homeric poems for specific audiences...Precisely because they are fictional, early speculations about the author of the Homeric poems must ultimately derive from an encounter between the poems and their ancient audiences. For this reason they constitute evidence concerning the reception of the Homeric poems at a time in which their reputation was still in the making.¹⁵

The Homeric biographical tradition is very different from the Virgilian, but Graziosi's move away from a narrowly positivist approach to ancient biographical images of Homer is one replicated in this thesis: there is more to say about ancient biographies of Virgil than just whether they are true or false.

A re-investigation of the Virgilian biographical tradition is also needed in the light of recent scholarship on reception studies and new ways of thinking about the classical

¹⁴ Graziosi (2002); Knöbl (2008).

¹⁵ Graziosi (2002) 2-3.

tradition.¹⁶ It is now often asserted that the reader plays a fundamental role in creating meaning for a text: meaning is realized at the point of reception.¹⁷ The idea that a text contains an originary, unchanging and transcendental meaning which it is the reader's task to unveil has been replaced by a model which foregrounds the ways in which different readers impart different meanings to a text: meaning is not something to be uncovered, but rather something which is constructed. It is sometimes suggested that the concept of 'classical reception' should replace the older concept of the 'classical tradition':

The word "reception" ...often replaces terms like "tradition", "heritage", "influence" and so forth. Each of these key words carries within it its own implied agenda and metaphorical entailments; each to some extent determines in advance its different "findings". The etymology of "tradition", for example, from the Latin *tradere* suggests a – usually benign – handing down of material from the past to the present. "Reception", by contrast, at least on the model of the Constance school, operates with a different temporality, involving the *active* participation of readers (including readers who are themselves creative artists) in a two-way process, backward as well as forward, in which the present and past are in dialogue with each other.¹⁸

Reception, according to Martindale, attributes greater agency to the receiver in the interpretative process than does tradition; where reception might be termed an active process, tradition is thought of as something more passive. But this jettisoning of tradition in favour of reception is not actually necessary to preserve the reader's active role in the creation of meaning: all that is needed is a revised and more

¹⁶ On reception in the field of classics, see e.g. Martindale (1993) and (2007), Hardwick (2003); also the various essays collected in Martindale & Thomas (2006) and Hardwick & Stray (2008a).

¹⁷ Martindale (1993) 3.

¹⁸ Martindale (2007) 298, emphasis his; the Constance school mentioned by Martindale, refers to Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser – influential figures in the development of reception theory; see e.g. Jauss (1982), Iser (1980).

nanced understanding of what we mean by tradition.¹⁹ The older idea of the 'classical tradition' as something passively inherited down through the generations can be updated: traditions are things which are created or invented, not things uncomplicatedly passed from one age to the next.²⁰ In this updated sense the classical tradition and classical reception are really two sides of the same coin:

Sensitivity to the possibility of a more dialogic relation between ancient and modern has also focused attention on the interface between tradition and reception. If it is accepted that tradition is not something merely inherited but is constantly made and remade, then reception and tradition may be seen as related parts of an extended process.²¹

All these traditions are of course also cases of reception, usually of whole strings of reception. Tradition and reception tend to overlap, though the precise relationship between the two terms, and their implications in any given area of study, is not always easy to pin down.²²

The fundamental point to cling onto is the idea that readers are involved in a constructive and creative process in relation to their literary and cultural heritage. Any conception of either 'reception' or 'tradition' which fails to address the dynamism and creative aspects of these terms necessarily misses out on a large and interesting part of the story. Given these provisos, this thesis aims to do the following: to investigate not how various readers passively inherited an idea of the Virgilian biography, but rather how different readers actively constructed different images of this biography in a creative process.

¹⁹ For examples of older approaches to the classical tradition, see Murray (1927), Highet (1949).

²⁰ On the invented nature of traditions in a different historical context (nineteenth / early twentieth-century Europe), see Hobsbawm & Ranger (1983).

²¹ Hardwick & Stray (2008b) 5.

²² Budelmann & Haubold (2008) 14.

The Scope.

This thesis will concentrate on creative engagements with the Virgilian biography from Virgil's own time up until the turn of the first and second centuries AD.

Attention has been concentrated on this earlier material rather than on, for instance, the copious *Virgiliana* from late antiquity for two main reasons: first, this thesis will demonstrate how the constructive spins put on the Virgilian life in these early years were formative for many of the later conceptions of Virgil which appear in late antiquity and the medieval period;²³ and second, some sort of limiting parameters had to be found to make the project feasible. It is for these reasons that this thesis focuses on the time-span which it does. But it needs to be stated at the start that few, if any, studies of Virgilian reception can claim to be comprehensive. Even if narrow temporal, thematic or generic boundaries are set, the field is usually too vast for all furrows to be adequately ploughed.²⁴ This thesis makes no claims, therefore, to be anything other than a partial approach to the idea of the Virgilian biography up until around AD 100: much material that one might have included has necessarily been

²³ Comparetti's *VMA* is still the best study of Virgil in the middle ages, despite its flaws (see next note).

²⁴ See the criticisms levelled at Wilson-Okamura (2010) in Fratantuono (2011), who concludes: 'One gets the odd sense that the book is militating against comprehensive coverage of the reception of Virgil in Europe's varied Renaissances, yet this is exactly what the book's title [sc. *Virgil in the Renaissance*] and introduction lead us to expect (and what the Virgilian community has long needed)...by its close we are still left searching for a Comparetti for the Renaissances.' While Fratantuono is right to point out that Wilson-Okamura falls far short of the comprehensiveness to which he aspires, I remain sceptical as to whether his wish for a truly comprehensive study of Virgil in the Renaissance is either possible or, indeed, desirable. Furthermore, despite Comparetti's claim that the object of his work is 'to give a complete history of the medieval conception of Vergil' (*VMA* xxxix), it is itself far from being comprehensive or beyond criticism; Ziolkowski (1997) is a judicious appraisal of Comparetti's seminal work; see also the apposite remarks of Kallendorf (1989) 174: 'Comparetti's work is marred by a surprising dislike of the Middle Ages and by an intense Italian nationalism...but no student of Virgil's *Nachleben* can afford to neglect the mass of material collected and analyzed here.'

omitted to prevent the thesis from swelling into an unmanageable behemoth. It should also be noted that, despite the temporal limits which broadly define the project, later sources are, on fairly frequent occasion, considered (principally Donatus and Servius), especially when they provide instructive comparative material: later formulations of the Virgilian life can often throw into sharper relief aspects of earlier formulations, and vice versa – the process is dialogic and dynamic.

Before we proceed, a brief word is perhaps needed to justify why there is no chapter specifically dedicated to what is our longest and most influential ancient *vita* of Virgil, the so-called *vita Suetoniana-Donatiana* (henceforth *VSD*). The problem with this *vita* is encapsulated in its rather cumbersome name: is it the work of Suetonius, or of Donatus, or a combination of the two? The problem has generated vast swathes of scholarship; it has indeed proved to be a *quaestio annosa, Iuppiter, et laboriosa!*²⁵ The *opinio communis* is that the *vita* ultimately derives from Suetonius' entry in his *de poetis*; the argument is over the extent to which the *vita* has suffered from interpolation or otherwise. Naumann has argued strongly that the *vita* is virtually unchanged from what Suetonius wrote; many others, such as Paratore, are willing to admit a Suetonian kernel, but argue that much non-Suetonian material has found its way into the *vita* in the process of its transmission.²⁶ If Naumann were correct, then the *VSD* would surely merit its own chapter in this thesis, as it would fall within the chronological parameters I have set.²⁷ Naumann's zealous certainty is, however, unfounded, and most scholars take the more cautious view that although the *VSD* ultimately derives from the Suetonian *vita*, it is not identical with it: numerous

²⁵ This is the summation of Brugnoli & Stok (1997) xiv; so also Baldwin (1983) 385: 'And there is the matter of authorship, that eternal Suetonius-Donatus business.'

²⁶ From a sizable bibliography, see esp. Naumann (1938), (1974), (1981b); Paratore (1946) ch. 4, (1977); Geer (1926); Baldwin (1983) 385-93; Stok (1991a).

²⁷ Suetonius' *de poetis* (which formed a part of the larger *de viris illustribus*) appeared some time around the end of the first century and the start of the second, but it cannot be securely dated; for the issue of dating, see Rostagni (1944) viii-xi, Kaster (1995) xxi, Stok (2006); for a general analysis of the *de viris illustribus*, see Baldwin (1983) 379-466, Wallace-Hadrill (1983) 50-72.

interpolations and re-mouldings have been made in the transmission process.²⁸ The comments of Baldwin are judicious:

It may still be the mark of a sober man to see the biography as Suetonian, rather than by Suetonius. Donatus may well have compounded several critical and biographical traditions into the work we possess today...In fine, there is no way of deciding from whose pen the biography of Vergil emanates...In the words of [Horace], *adhuc sub iudice lis est*.²⁹

Given the broad consensus that the *VSD* represents a 'fourth-century re-elaboration' of the grammarian Donatus made of the *Life* contained in Suetonius' *De Poetis*, it therefore falls outside the chronological limits which define the main focus of this thesis.³⁰ But although the *VSD* does not receive a chapter to itself, its presence will be felt on frequent occasions throughout the thesis.

An overview of the chapters.

In the first chapter our focus will be on material concerning Virgil's early poetic career. Concentrating on the *Culex* as a putative piece of Virgilian juvenilia – specifically the responses of Lucan, Statius and Martial to this work – this chapter will examine how the 'Virgilian career' is not a predetermined and fixed notion, but rather something which is constructed and contested by self-interested readers. Lucan, Statius and Martial all construe the *Culex* as an early work by Virgil, and thus their construction of the Virgilian career is different from that promulgated by Propertius and Ovid (among others); but each of these three poets uses the *Culex* in different ways and for different purposes. Furthermore, in their use of the *Culex* as

²⁸ Brugnoli & Stok (1997) xv-xviii usefully sets out passages in the *VSD* which various scholars have adjudged to be non-Suetonian; one can see how large the list is!

²⁹ Baldwin (1983) 390 and 393-94.

³⁰ The quotation is from Stok (1994) 16.

emblematic of Virgil's poetic debut, each of these poets reveals something about how they want themselves to be perceived as post-Virgilian poets: the Virgilian career becomes a useful tool with which (and against which) to construct one's own poetic identity.

The second chapter constitutes a continuation of some of the themes explored in chapter one, only now our focus shifts from the start of Virgil's career (the *Culex*) to the end as we consider the resonance of Virgil's tomb among some later writers and the development of what we might label the cult of Virgil.³¹ This chapter begins by briefly considering Virgil's own play with sepulchral themes, before proceeding to examine how the Virgilian tomb features in the biographies of Virgil's poetic heirs: Lucan, Statius and Silius Italicus. The final resting place of Virgil becomes powerfully symbolic in the construction of the (auto-)biographies of these later poets: encounters with the Virgilian tomb reveal much about how successor poets are conceptualized in relation to Virgil. Furthermore, these early encounters with the Virgilian tomb play a fundamental role in forging the defining image of Virgil as a kind of semi-divine poet worthy of an almost sacred veneration. But the construction of this image is far from straightforward: pious veneration at the tomb of the master is but one thread of a more complex tapestry.

The third chapter reconsiders biographical readings of the *Eclogues*. Reading the *Eclogues* in a biographical manner was par for the course in antiquity; and its popularity continued unabated until well into the twentieth-century. Nowadays, however, the biographical approach is out of vogue, condemned as a blunt and reductive interpretative approach.³² I will argue that this need not be the case by examining some examples of biographical exegesis of the *Eclogues* from antiquity. The focus will not be on what biographical material ancient readers extrapolated

³¹ Cf. the comments of Ziolkowski (1997) vii: 'Revered in tandem with his poem, Vergil was not just the master of Latin poetic style but also the poet whose creation at once described and enacted the founding of a nation and a dynasty. He was a culture hero, the cynosure of a cult that sometimes bordered on a mania – Vergiliomania.'

³² This is true not just of the *Eclogues*, but of poetry more generally; see e.g. Cameron (1995) 3: 'Biographical readings of ancient poetry have been generally discredited in recent times.'

from the *Eclogues*: that ground has been amply covered already. Attention will rather be focused on unpicking in some detail precisely *how* certain ancient readers read the *Eclogues* biographically, *why* they might have pursued this type of interpretation, and what they do with their biographical readings. We shall explore how the *processes* of biographical interpretation are bound up with the personal agendas of different readers: the three authors I consider all read the *Eclogues* biographically in different ways and with different motivations. This investigation will highlight how ancient biographical readings of the *Eclogues* reveal as much about the seeker (i.e. the reader performing the biographical exegesis) as the sought (i.e. Virgil).

In the fourth chapter we will analyse Tacitus' treatment of the Virgilian biography in the *Dialogus de Oratoribus*, unpicking various strands of interpretation along the way, especially those of a political nature. One important point to emerge will be the importance of looking at treatments of the Virgilian biography in their literary context: the image of Virgil which Tacitus paints in this work cannot be divorced or easily excerpted from the wider context of the *Dialogus* in which it is embedded. Another point of discussion will be the idealization of the Virgilian life and its status as something exemplary: in what ways, to what extent and why does Tacitus idealize Virgil's life, if indeed this is actually what he is doing? The malleable nature of the Virgilian life makes it a useful rhetorical tool. We will, finally, also consider in this chapter how Tacitus' discourse on the Virgilian life can be seen to prefigure certain trends in more recent scholarship: the nature of Virgil's relationship with Augustus was something which intrigued Tacitus as much as it does scholars of the modern age.

Chapter 1.

Virgilian careers: the problem of the *Culex*.

Introduction.

It is often stated that the Virgilian poetic career has an exemplary status in the western literary tradition; that it functions as a paradigm for later writers who plot their own literary careers according to the definitive template set out by Virgil. Lipking, for instance, in his study of poetic careers comments that it was Virgil 'who supplied the pattern of a career to so many later poets';³³ likewise, Farrell begins an essay on the classical *vita* tradition with the assertion that for 'later ages, Virgil's gradual ascent from humbler to grander genres was generally regarded as defining the ideal poetic career'.³⁴ Given these widely held assumptions about the centrality of the Virgilian career in western literature, it is unsurprising that in a recent volume of essays on classical literary careers and their reception edited by Philip Hardie and Helen Moore, the figure of Virgil exerts a pervasive influence.³⁵

The Roman literary career finds its fullest and most influential manifestation in the three major works of Virgil: the *Eclogues*, *Georgics* and *Aeneid*...Partly because of its seeming inevitability, and partly because its products immediately established themselves as the central classics of Latin literature, the Virgilian career has become an enduring temptation, challenge or reproach to later poets.³⁶

³³ Lipking (1981) xi.

³⁴ Farrell (2002) 24; Farrell also suggests that 'Virgil not only provides our chief paradigm of the ideal poetic career, he is in fact the first poet of classical antiquity who claimed or was acknowledged to have had a career in the usual sense of the word' (24).

³⁵ Hardie & Moore (2010a).

³⁶ Hardie & Moore (2010b) 4-5.

The volume under consideration thus includes penetrating analyses of how later writers such as Ovid, Dante, Petrarch and Milton construct their own poetic careers and autobiographies against the Virgilian template.³⁷ But this immediately raises a question: what is this Virgilian career through and against which later poets define themselves? And what about its 'seeming inevitability'? In the Hardie and Moore volume the dominant model of the Virgilian career is the tripartite body of work comprising the *Eclogues*, *Georgics* and *Aeneid*. It is the image of Virgil ascending through three genres: lowly pastoral gives way to agricultural didactic which, in turn, gives way to lofty epic.³⁸ The tripartite structure finds its most famous expression in the medieval *rota Virgilii* – a 'memory diagram' which schematizes the corresponding subject matter and style appropriate to each of the three Virgilian genres.³⁹ But in a suggestive footnote to the passage quoted above, Hardie and Moore acknowledge that this tripartite schematization is not the only model for the Virgilian career available to us:

Very little, if any, of the *Appendix Vergiliana*, a body of works attributed to the young Virgil, is considered these days to be authentic; the situation was different from antiquity through to the early modern period, so yielding a more complex picture of the development of Virgil's career.⁴⁰

³⁷ On Ovid, Hardie & Barchiesi (2010); on Dante and Petrarch, Laird (2010); on Milton, Kilgour (2010).

³⁸ For analyses of Virgil's tripartite career, see e.g. Theodorakopoulos (1997), Putnam (2010).

³⁹ 'This memory diagram lists corresponding features of three modes: heroic, georgic, and pastoral. But it does so in such a way as to claim a comprehensive inclusion, or at least ordonnance, of the whole of literature – not to say its social and natural matrix. As has often been pointed out, the *rota* develops the Ciceronian system of three style heights, which indeed it refers to', Fowler (1981) 241; see also Houghton (2008) 99.

⁴⁰ Hardie & Moore (2010b) 4 n.9; cf. Martindale (1997b) 12 on the scope of the *Cambridge Companion to Virgil*: 'Partly for reasons of space "Virgil" here means the author of the three canonical "authentic" works accepted as such by modern scholarship, though the poems collected by J. C. Scaliger in 1572 as the *Appendix Vergiliana* and particularly the *Culex* (which Lucan, for example, apparently thought genuine and which Spenser in his Virgilian progress Englished as "Virgil's Gnat") have their significance from the perspective of reception and for the construction of "Virgil".'

It is this 'more complex picture' of Virgil's poetic development involving the *Appendix Vergiliana* – a topic which is not covered in the Hardie and Moore volume – as well as the 'seeming inevitability' of the Virgilian career which is my focus. In this chapter I will, therefore, examine the use of the *Culex* in the biographical tradition surrounding Virgil and other ancient poets. My focus is especially on how later poets use the *Culex* as the archetypal piece of Virgilian juvenilia to broach issues surrounding Virgil's development as a poet; and also how they use the *Culex* as a tool with which to think about poetic biographies and careers – their own as well as those of others.

The use made of the *Culex* by these later poets reveals a fascination with the start of the Virgilian career: how Rome's greatest poet begins, and how his early work relates to his epic climax are questions upon which these successor poets find it insightful to ponder. But the interest in the early stages of Virgil's career is not something unique to Neronian and Flavian Rome (the areas we shall be concentrating on); already in the Augustan period poets were intrigued by the seeming chasm between Virgil's start and his end. The key difference, however, is that for the Augustan poets the start of Virgil's career is represented by the *Eclogues*, not the *Culex*. Before we reach the *Culex*, then, it will be useful to examine what Propertius and Ovid do with the initial stages of the Virgilian career. These two poets both work with the idea of the *Eclogues* as Virgil's poetic debut; and in this configuration they can be seen to be adopting, and aiding in the construction of, the tripartite career pattern authorized by Virgil himself in his oeuvre. However, their presentation of the Virgilian career, especially how the beginning relates to the end, is far from straightforward: both of these poets have vested interests in this process and their creative games in this area lay the foundations for later re-imaginings of the Virgilian career involving the *Culex*.

Throughout this chapter it will become apparent how the conception of a Virgilian career is not something inevitable, but is rather something which is constructed and contested by different readers in different ways and for different reasons: it is not some sort of monolithic and unchanging entity passively handed down from one

literary generation to the next. Indeed, it might be wiser to talk of Virgilian careers rather than of *the* Virgilian career.

1. A Virgilian career: in the beginning were the *Eclogues*.

Later in this chapter we shall consider how the intrusion of the *Culex* into the Virgilian career complicates responses to Virgil's development as a poet. But that is not to suggest that articulations of the start of the Virgilian career which do not include the *Culex* are in any way simplistic or lacking in creativity. In the first part of this chapter we shall, then, examine how even those accounts of the beginning of the Virgilian career which accept the 'authorized' version – by which I simply mean the version apparently promulgated by Virgil himself – do not simply parrot this received material, but rather engage with it in interesting and creative ways.

Before we see how other sources portray the start of the Virgilian career, we must look at what Virgil himself tells us in this regard. In the *sphragis* to the *Georgics* – the only point in his oeuvre where Virgil names himself – Virgil proclaims his authorship of that work and also of the *Eclogues*:

Haec super arborum cultu pecorumque canebar
et super arboribus, Caesar dum magnus ad altum 560
fulminat Euphraten bello victorque volentis
per populos dat iura viamque adfectat Olympo.
Illo Vergilium me tempore dulcis alebat
Parthenope, studiis florentem ignobilis oti,
carmina qui lusi pastorum audaxque iuventa, 565
Tityre, te patulae cecini sub tegmine fagi.

(G.4.559-66)

'I sang these things concerning the cultivation of fields, of cattle and of trees while great Caesar thundered in war by the deep Euphrates and, victorious, dispensed justice among willing peoples and made a path to Olympus. At that time sweet Parthenope was nurturing me, Virgil, as I flourished in the pursuit of ignoble leisure; I who sported with the songs of shepherds and, bold in my youth, sang of you, Tityrus, underneath your covering of a spreading beech tree.'

The *Eclogues* – whose opening line is quoted nearly verbatim – are here authorized as Virgil's youthful poetic production: they – and they alone – are validated as the work of his *iuventa*.⁴¹

Virgil's construction of the start of his poetic career is, unsurprisingly, often repeated in other sources; sources which place the *Eclogues* at the beginning of a tripartite body of works. The tersest articulation of this tripartite career beginning with the *Eclogues* is perhaps the Virgilian epitaph:⁴²

Mantua me genuit, Calabri rapuere, tenet nunc
Parthenope. cecini pascua rura duces.

(VSD 36)

'Mantua produces me, the Calabrians snatched me away, Parthenope now holds me. I sang of pastures, fields, leaders.'

⁴¹ *Ec.* 1.1: *Tityre, tu patulae recubans sub tegmine fagi*. It is common ancient practice to refer to works by quoting their incipits; see e.g. Ovid, *Amores* 1.15.25: *Tityrus et segetes Aeneiaque arma legentur* – here the opening words of Virgil's three canonical works replace the names of the said poems (for the reading *segetes* here, see n. 47 below); *Tristia* 2.261: *sumpsit Aeneadum genetrix ubi prima*, quoting the opening of Lucretius' *de rerum natura* (Ingleheart (2010) *ad loc.* has a useful note); see also Martial 8.55.19: *protinus Italiam concepit et arma virumque*, with Schöffel (2002) *ad loc.* On the *sphragis* to the *Georgics*, see Morgan (1999) 213-18.

⁴² On the Virgilian epitaph, see Pease (1940), who provides copious evidence for the influence of this epitaph on other epitaph-writers; also Frings (1998).

Here we encounter the familiar three-part conceptualization of the Virgilian career: the *Eclogues* (*pascua*), the *Georgics* (*rura*) and the *Aeneid* (*duces*) are presented as the definitive Virgilian canon. The works are, furthermore, presented in chronological order of composition, mirroring the chronologically arranged staging posts of Virgil's life (birthplace – place of death – place of burial).

For a more creative spin on Virgil's beginnings as a poet, we can turn to Propertius, who offers us an early encapsulation of the canonical Virgilian career *in toto*:

me iuvat hesternis positum languere corollis,
quem tetigit iactu certus ad ossa deus; 60
Actia Vergilio est custodis litora Phoebi
Caesaris et fortes dicere posse rates,
qui nunc Aeneae Troiani suscitatur arma
iactaque Lavinis moenia litoribus.
cedite, Romani scriptores; cedite, Grai: 65
nescioquid maius nascitur Iliade.
tu canis umbrosi subter pineta Galaesi
Thyrsin et attritis Daphnin harundinibus,
utque decem possint corrumpere mala puellas
missus et impressis haedus ab uberibus. 70
felix, qui vilis pomis mercaris amores!
huic licet ingratae Tityrus ipse canat.
felix intactum Corydon qui temptat Alexin
agricolae domini carpere delicias!
quamvis ille sua lassus requiescat avena, 75
laudatur facilis inter Hamadryadas.
tu canis Ascraei veteris praecepta poetae,
quo seges in campo, quo viret uva iuvo;
tale facis carmen docta testudine quale

(2.34.59-80)

‘I like to languish amidst yesterday’s garlands – I whom the accurate god has struck to the bone. It is for Virgil to be able to tell of the Actian shores of the guardian Apollo and the brave ships of Caesar – Virgil who is now rousing the arms of Trojan Aeneas and the walls thrown up on Lavinian shores. Make way, Roman writers, make way Greek writers: something greater than the *Iliad* is being born. You sing of Thyrsis and Daphnis with worn-out pipes underneath the pine-groves of shady Galaesus, and of how ten apples and a kid sent fresh from the teat can seduce girls. Happy you, who buy your love cheaply with apples! Tityrus himself may sing to this girl, although she is ungrateful. Happy is Corydon who tries to woo the untouched Alexis – the toy-boy of his master the farmer. Although tired out he takes a rest from his piping, he is praised by the compliant Hamadryads. You sing the precepts of the old poet of Ascrea: in which field the corn flourishes, on what ridge the vine flourishes. You make a song on your leaned lyre such as Apollo does when he has put his fingers to the task.’

Propertius here works with the tripartite conception authorized by Virgil himself: he lists the *Aeneid* (2.34.61-66), the *Eclogues* (2.34.67-76) and the *Georgics* (2.34.77-80) as the constituent parts of Virgil’s poetic career. But the precise way in which he articulates this tripartite model reveals how it is a model which can be engaged with in a creative manner.⁴³ For instance, Propertius’ presentation of the three Virgilian

⁴³ The same sort of play with the tripartite Virgilian career can be found in Propertius 2.10, albeit here the point is made much more implicitly than in 2.34. In this elegy Propertius hints at Virgil’s career as a tripartite ascent by means of various *recherché* allusions to *Eclogues* 6. 64-73. Propertius flirts with the possibility of writing an imperial epic (1-20) before backing down (21-6). He claims that he is unable to undertake such a huge task because he is still on the bottom rung of the poetic ladder and has yet to make the necessary ascent. As many readers have noted, Propertius is here playing with the idea of the Virgilian career: the ascent from amatory verse (*sed modo Permessi flumine lavit Amor*, 26) to epic (*bella canam*, 8) via didactic (*Ascraeos...fontes*, 25) is the Virgilian foil which throws Propertius’ self-definition into

works disrupts the canonical order of the career and upsets the individual weighting of its constituent parts: Propertius disrupts the received ordering by dealing with the *Aeneid* first, then the *Eclogues*, and finally the *Georgics*; and he upsets the weighting of the constituent parts by giving the *Eclogues* – Virgil’s ‘lowest’ work in a generic sense – far greater attention and emphasis than his ‘highest’ work, the *Aeneid*. One effect of the disruption of the inherited order is to juxtapose the epic *Aeneid* with the amatory *Eclogues*: the bombastic couplet announcing the *Aeneid* as a work to supersede the *Iliad* flows immediately into a long section on Virgil’s lighter amatory work. This stark juxtaposition of two very different types of poetic production might be seen to raise a number of issues pertaining to Propertius’ conception of Virgil and of himself. For instance, the juxtaposition of the *Aeneid* with the *Eclogues* might be seen to undercut the political gravitas of the projected Augustan epic: emphasising Virgil’s status as a love poet immediately after introducing his epic pretensions might be seen as calling those pretensions into question – how can an erotic poet write fittingly of Caesar’s wars? And does the image of Virgil as a love poet infect the image of him as a poet of political epic? Barchiesi suggests that the effect of these lines is ‘to detach from the project of the *Aeneid* Virgil’s youthful poetry, viewed in terms of an eroticism related to elegy’; but it seems more plausible that rather than separating the Virgil of the *Aeneid* from the Virgil of the *Eclogues*, the juxtaposition created by Propertius actually serves to blur the dividing line between the two.⁴⁴

Another perspective on Propertius’ presentation of the Virgilian career in 2.34 is possible if, following Ribbeck, we transpose lines 77-80 to come after line 66. If we accept this transposition, the text runs as follows:

sharper relief. Propertius is (happily) stuck on the bottom rung of the poetic ladder (i.e. amatory poetry), unwilling to follow Virgil up to the epic level. For Propertius the Virgilian career is conceptualized, in this instance, as an ascent through the genres in three movements: Virgil began with the *Eclogues* and ends with the *Aeneid*, with the *Georgics* coming in between. Once again we can note how Propertius’ engagement with the Virgilian career is far from sterile or monolithic: he uses the Virgilian model as a prism through which to filter his own poetic self-fashioning. See Camps (1967) *ad loc.* and Fedeli (2005) *ad loc.* for the Virgilian intertextuality at play here, especially in lines 25-6; Stahl (1985) 160-1 for Propertius’ engagement with the Virgilian poetic career; also Bowditch (2003).

⁴⁴ Barchiesi (2001) 94.

Actia Vergilio est custodis litora Phoebi
 Caesaris et fortes dicere posse rates,
 qui nunc Aeneae Troiani suscitatur arma
 iactaque Lavinis moenia litoribus.
 cedite, Romani scriptores; cedite, Graeci: 65
 nescioquid maius nascitur Iliade.
 tu canis Ascraei veteris praecepta poetae, 77
 quo seges in campo, quo viret uva iuvo; 78
 tale facis carmen docta testudine quale 79
 Cynthius impositis temperat articulis. 80
 tu canis umbrosi subter pineta Galaesi 67
 Thyrsin et attritis Daphnin harundinibus,
 utque decem possint corrumpere mala puellas
 missus et impressis haedus ab uberibus. 70
 felix, qui vilis pomis mercaris amores!
 huic licet ingratae Tityrus ipse canat.
 felix intactum Corydon qui temptat Alexin
 agricolae domini carpere delicias!
 quamvis ille sua lassus requiescat avena, 75
 laudatur facilis inter Hamadryadas.

The Virgilian career is now presented in the following order: first the *Aeneid* (61-66), then the *Georgics* (77-80), and finally the *Eclogues* 67-76).⁴⁵ In this case we see that Propertius presents the Virgilian career in reverse order: the *Aeneid* comes first, followed by the *Georgics*, before we climax with the *Eclogues*. And we can, of course, read meaning into this reversal: Propertius, the champion of erotic verse, privileges the erotic segment of the Virgilian oeuvre by placing it in the emphatic position at the end of a tricolon; and he dedicates far more lines to the amatory component of

⁴⁵ The transposition is widely accepted, and is found, for example, in the *OCT* of Heyworth (2007a) and the Loeb edition of Goold (1990). See Heyworth (2007b) for a justification of the transposition. For a contrary view, see Fedeli (2005) *ad loc.*, who rejects the transposition; Camps (1967) also maintains the order of the manuscripts, although he notes that Ribbeck's transposition is certainly possible.

Virgil's career than to the others. Here, then, we can see an illustration of how authors can engage creatively with the Virgilian career: Virgil had fashioned his career as one of ascent to an epic pinnacle, but here Propertius runs the process in reverse and makes Virgil descend from epic to erotic poetry (a descent which is, in Propertius' eyes, more akin to an ascent – elegy is the pinnacle in the Propertian scheme of things). Propertius casts Virgil's poetic debut – the *Eclogues* – as the premature climax of his poetic career.

Let us now turn to Ovid, a poet who 'played an important part in objectifying Virgil's career and in making it a point of comparison for later poets';⁴⁶ and a poet who, like Propertius, is fascinated by Virgil's poetic debut. Ovid's most explicit engagement with the Virgilian career clearly conforms to the tripartite patterning, beginning with the *Eclogues*, which we have so far been looking at:

Tityrus et segetes Aeneiaque arma legentur

Roma triumphati dum caput orbis erit.

(1.15.25-6)

'Tityrus and crops and the arms of Aeneas shall be read as long as Rome is the head of a conquered world.'

The reference to the three canonical works is clear, and Ovid, unlike Propertius in 2.34, presents them in the correct chronological order: the *Eclogues* come first, are followed by the *Georgics*, and the *Aeneid* completes the picture.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Farrell (2004) 53; see also Tarrant (2002) 23-27, Barchiesi & Hardie (2010) 59-65.

⁴⁷ *Tityrus* = *Eclogues*; *segetes* = *Georgics*; *Aeneiaque arma* = *Aeneid*. In line 25 the better attested manuscript reading is *fruges* for *segetes*; it ultimately makes little difference to how we understand the line: *fruges* would also clearly allude to the *Georgics*. I prefer reading *segetes* because then we have a clear allusion to the opening lines of the three Virgilian works: *Ecl.* 1.1: *Tityre, tu ...*; *G.* 1.1: *Quid faciat laetas segetes...*; *Aen.* 1.1: *arma virumque...*; see Goold (1965) 29-30 for *segetes* as the preferable reading; McKeown (1989) *ad loc.* usefully surveys the problem.

A more implicit engagement with the Virgilian career comes in *Amores* 1.1. Farrell has recently analysed this poem, showing how Ovid artfully engages with the notion of a Virgilian career.⁴⁸ In this poem – which is explicitly the beginning of the Ovidian poetic career – Ovid amusingly alludes to the culmination of the Virgilian career, the *Aeneid*, by beginning with the word *arma*.⁴⁹ While the *Aeneid* connection is often commented upon, Farrell reminds us of the other major intertext for this Ovidian debut: *Eclogues* 6. Cupid turning Ovid’s poetic endeavours from epic to elegy replays the scenario in *Eclogues* 6, where Apollo does the same for Tityrus (a thinly disguised Virgil).⁵⁰ Farrell concludes: ‘the *Amores* begin by asserting a contrast between Ovid at the beginning of his career, and Virgil at the end of his, but also a similarity between both poets when they were just starting out’.⁵¹ In other words, *Amores* 1.1 engages with both the beginning and the end of the Virgilian career by its playful allusions to *Eclogues* 6 and the *Aeneid*.

Our final piece of evidence from Ovid is the following passage from *Tristia* 2:

et tamen ille tuae felix Aeneidos auctor
 contulit in Tyrios arma uirumque toros,
 nec legitur pars ulla magis de corpore toto, 535
 quam non legitimo foedere iunctus amor.
 Phyllidis hic idem teneraeque Amaryllidis ignes
 bucolicis iuuenis luserat ante modis.
 nos quoque iam pridem scripto peccavimus isto:
 supplicium patitur non nova culpa novum. 540

⁴⁸ Farrell (2004) 42-43; this article generally is interesting on Ovid’s playful / mournful ruminations on the relationship of his own poetic career to the Virgilian model.

⁴⁹ McKeown (1989) *ad loc.*: ‘[Ovid] is...alluding specifically to the *Aeneid*.’ Finding the ‘true’ beginning of Ovid’s poetic career is complicated by Ovid’s claim that the three book edition of the *Amores* represents a pared-down second edition (the first edition, he tells us in the opening epigram, comprised five books); on this thorny issue, see McKeown (1987) 75-78.

⁵⁰ Ovid’s ‘correction’ of Virgil’s Callimachean reworking at the start of *Eclogues* 6 is well noted by Farrell (2004) 43: ‘It is in the middle of his *Eclogue* book that Virgil alludes to the beginning of Callimachus’ poem: Ovid then “restores” the passage to its “proper” place at the beginning of his own *Amores*’; on the opening lines of *Eclogues* 6, see also Farrell (1991a) 291-300.

⁵¹ Farrell (2004) 43

(*Tristia* 2.533-40)

‘However, that blessed author of your *Aeneid* also brought his arms and the man to Tyrian couches, nor is any portion from the whole work more read than the love joined by an illegitimate pact. This same man, when young, had toyed with the passions of Phyllis and tender Amaryllis in bucolic strains. I also, long ago, sinned in this type of writing: a sin which is not novel is suffering a novel punishment.’

The play with the Virgilian career in these lines is typically Ovidian in its latent wit and ironic subtext.⁵² On the surface we have a simple reference to the bookends of the Virgilian career: in lines 533-36 we have a reference to the *Aeneid*; and in lines 537-38 Ovid again makes the point that Virgil’s early work – the poetry of his *iuventa* – was the *Eclogues* (*bucolicis...modis*). Critics have, understandably, concentrated their attention on the poetic works explicitly alluded to in these lines, explicating multiple ironies. For instance, it is often observed how Ovid reduces the *Aeneid* to an erotic episode, and how the assimilation of his own *Ars Amatoria* (clearly alluded to in lines 539-40) to the *Eclogues* is disingenuous: the *Ars* is a didactic work, the *Eclogues* are not.⁵³ Ovid here is trying to denude his *Ars* of its didactic dimension by assimilating it to a patently un-didactic work of erotic poetry, namely the *Eclogues*. On the other hand, however, Ovid can cheekily be seen to be imputing a didactic thrust to the *Eclogues*: by suggesting that the *Ars Amatoria* is like the *Eclogues*, Ovid suggests that this early work of Virgil might also function as a manual for lovers.⁵⁴

⁵² See Barchiesi (2001) 93-94; Gibson (1999) 35-36; Thomas (2001) 74-78.

⁵³ Ingleheart (2010) *ad loc.*

⁵⁴ Elsewhere in *Tristia* 2 Ovid explicitly portrays various love poets as didactic: Anacreon and Sappho (363-366), Tibullus (447-64), Propertius (465); on which, see Gibson (1999) 28 and 32-34: ‘...by misrepresenting [Tibullus’ and Propertius’] compositions as being more didactic than they really are, [Ovid] is able to argue that such writings did not result in their punishment’ (34); see also Ingleheart (2010) 295, who provides references for ‘the general belief in antiquity that poetry offered lessons.’

For a final instantiation of the tripartite model which begins with the *Eclogues* we might broaden our horizons and consider the following passage from Donatus' preface to his commentary on the *Eclogues*; Donatus has been discussing the various explanations given for the origins of pastoral poetry:

quae cum omnia dicantur, illud erit probabilissimum, bucolicum carmen originem ducere a priscis temporibus, quibus vita pastoralis exercita <est>, et ideo aurei saeculi speciem in huiusmodi personarum simplicitate cognosci, et merito Vergilium processurum ad alia carmina non aliunde coepisse nisi ab ea vita, quae prima in teriis fuit. nam postea rura culta et ad postremum pro cultis et feracibus terris bella suscepta, quod videtur Vergilius in ipso ordine operum suorum voluisse monstrare, cum pastores primo, deinde agricolas canit, et ad ultimum bellatores.

(Donatus, *Praef. in Ecl.*)⁵⁵

'Although all of these explanations are suggested, this one will be the most likely: bucolic song originated in ancient times when a pastoral way of life was lived, and for this reason the appearance of the golden age is discerned in the simplicity of the characters of this sort. And it is fitting that Virgil, who was about to progress to others songs, did not begin from anywhere else than from that type of life which was first lived on earth. For afterwards fields were tilled and lastly wars were embarked upon on account of the tilled and fertile fields – Virgil seems to have wanted to show this in the very order of his works, since he first sings of shepherds, then of farmers, and finally of warriors.'

Once again we witness the three-fold patterning, as Donatus draws a connection between Virgil's tripartite oeuvre and a tripartite conception of the development of human civilization itself. In this passage the status of the *Eclogues* as Virgil's first work is given a kind of philosophical or cosmological underpinning: the primacy of

⁵⁵ VVA 45.10-46.9.

the *Eclogues* in Virgil's canon mirrors the primacy of the pastoral way of life in the progress of the universe and man's part in that universe.⁵⁶ But despite this evolutionary explanation for why the *Eclogues* come first, there is still some room for Donatus to complicate matters a little; for while the *Eclogues* as a whole are Virgil's first work, which poem within the collection stands first is a matter for debate:

Quod ad ordinem spectat, illud scire debemus, in prima tantum et in ultima ecloga poetam voluisse ordinem reservare, quando in altera principium constituerit, ut in Georgicis ait:

Tityre, te patulae cecini sub tegmini fagi,

in altera ostenderit finem, quippe cum dicat:

Extremum hunc, Arethusa, mihi concede laborem.

verum inter ipsas eclogas naturalem consertumque ordinem nullum esse certissimum est. sed sunt qui dicant, initium Bucolici carminis non 'Tityre' esse, sed:

Prima Syracusio dignata est ludere versu.

(VSD 69)

⁵⁶ Donatus' emphasis in this passage on the primacy of the *Eclogues* would appear to contradict what he says in his *vita* (VSD 17-18) concerning Virgil's poetic development. For in the *vita* he accepts the works we nowadays label the *Appendix Vergiliana* as genuine (with the exception of the *Aetna*, where there is cause for scepticism), and he presents them as works produced *prior* to the *Eclogues*. Three possible responses to this problem present themselves: one, Donatus might simply be contradicting himself and displaying inconsistency – he would not be the first scholar to do this; two, he might be thinking of the *Eclogues* as Virgil's first 'official' or published work – the juvenilia are merely inconsequential preludes to the 'proper' start which are the *Eclogues*; three, we might attribute the inconsistency to the nature of ancient exegetical works, which often comprise an agglomeration of material drawn from different sources by several hands.

‘Concerning the order, we should know that the poet wished to maintain an order only in the first *Eclogue* and the last, since in one he established the beginning – as he says in the *Georgics*:

I sang of you, Tityrus, underneath your covering of a spreading beech tree.

and in the other he indicates the end when he says:

Concede to me, Arethusa, this final labour.

But among the remaining *Eclogues* it is most certain that there is no natural, connected order. But there are those who say that the beginning of this bucolic song is not ‘Tityrus’, but:

[My Thalea] first deigned to play with Syracusan verse’.

Donatus suggests that while *Eclogues* 1 is usually identified as the first poem in the collection, there are those who would start with *Eclogues* 6. The same point is also found in Servius, who comments: *de eclogis multi dubitant, quae licet decem sint, incertum tamen est, quo ordine scriptae sint*. Servius then goes on to make the same point as Donatus concerning the debate over the primacy of *Eclogues* 1 or *Eclogues* 6.⁵⁷ For some ancient (and indeed many modern) exegetes, then, simply placing the *Eclogues* as a group at the start of the Virgilian career is insufficient as an attempt to fix the beginning of Virgil’s poetic progress; greater precision is deemed necessary, and this means trying to create a sequential order for the individual poems.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ *Praef. in Buc.* Thilo-Hagen p. 3.

⁵⁸ Coleman (1977) 14-21 for a more modern discussion of the chronology and arrangement of the *Eclogues*.

2. An alternative Virgilian career.

I have been emphasising the fact that for Propertius, Ovid and the other sources we have been considering the *Eclogues* come first in Virgil's poetic career for a reason: it is actually a rather odd thing to do. Not odd for many modern readers, who have become used to the canonical trinity of Virgilian works, but odd if we view things from an ancient perspective.⁵⁹ To many ancient readers the Virgilian career appeared rather differently. Before Virgil even started upon the *Eclogues* he had, it was thought, already worked-up a sizable corpus of juvenilia. Here is the relevant section of the *VSD*:

Poeticam puer adhuc auspicatus in Ballistam ludi magistrum ob infamiam
latriciniorum coopertum lapidibus distichon fecit;

Monte sub hoc lapidum tegitur Ballista sepultus.

nocte die tutum carpe, viator, iter.

deinde Catalepton et Priapea et Epigrammata et Diras, item Cirim et
Culicem, cum esset annorum XXXVI. cuius materia talis est: pastor fatigatus
aestu, cum sub arbore condormisset et serpens ad eum proreperet e palude,
Culex provolavit atque inter duo tempora aculeum fixit pastori. at ille continuo
Culicem contrivit et serpentem interemit ac sepulcrum culici statuit et distichon
fecit:

Parve Culex, pecudum custos, tibi tale merenti

funeris officium vitae pro munere reddit.

⁵⁹ Odd also for medieval readers and Renaissance readers, as Burrow (1997) 79 suggests: 'A medieval *Companion to Virgil* would not have presented him as the author of a tightly limited canon... It might well have included discussion of the *Appendix Vergiliana*...'; for the *Appendix Vergiliana* in the Renaissance, see Burrow (2008).

scripsit etiam, de qua ambigitur, Aetnam. mox, cum res Romanas inchoasset, offensus materia ad Bucolica transiit...

(VSD 17-19)

'While still a boy he made his start in poetry by writing a distich on Ballista, the school teacher who was buried beneath rocks for the disgrace of robbery:

Under this mountain of stones Ballista lies buried.

Have a safe journey by night and day, traveller.

Then he wrote the *Catalepton*, the *Priapea*, the epigrams, and the *Dirae*, and likewise the *Ciris* and the *Culex* when he was twenty six years old. The story of the *Culex* is as follows. A shepherd was tired out by the heat and had fallen asleep under a tree. When a snake began to slither towards him from the swamp a gnat flew out and stung the shepherd between the temples. At once the shepherd squished the gnat and killed the snake; and he built a tomb for the gnat and composed this distich:

Little gnat, the guardian of the flock offers to you who are so deserving this rite of death in exchange for the gift of life.

He also wrote the *Aetna* – although this is debated. Soon, after he had made a start on Roman subjects, put off by the material he changed to the *Bucolics*.'

Some doubt is expressed concerning the authenticity of the *Aetna*, but otherwise these early poems – what we nowadays label the *Appendix Vergiliana* – are accepted by the VSD as authentic early compositions.⁶⁰ For some ancient readers, then, and

⁶⁰ Cf. the similar material in the Servian *Vita*: *primum ab hoc distichon factum est in Ballistam latronem: 'Monte sub hoc...' Scripsit etiam septem sive octo libros hos: Cirin Aetnam Culicem Priapeia Catalepton Epigrammata Copam Diras* (VVA 150-51).

also for modern readers who accept the *VSD*'s evidence, Virgil's first composition turns out not to be the *Eclogues*, but rather the distich on Ballista.

But although the Ballista epigram comes first in strictly chronological terms, the most important early work, according to the emphasis of the *VSD*, would appear to be the *Culex*. It is this poem which receives by far the fullest treatment from the biographer: it receives a full summary and its final two lines are quoted verbatim. Its elevated status among Virgil's juvenilia would appear to be corroborated by other literary evidence: Martial, Statius and the Suetonian *Vita Lucani* all mention the *Culex* as an early Virgilian poem, but do not mention any other work from the catalogue provided by the *VSD*.⁶¹ For Martial, Statius and Lucan, the *Culex* stands first in a chronological catalogue of Virgil's poetry – whether or not they thought it was the very first thing he wrote is a moot point, but what is clear is that they considered it his first poem worth mentioning – the first step proper on his poetic ascent as they conceived it. In this respect they clearly diverge from the image projected by the sources surveyed in part 1 (above) – sources in which the *Eclogues* started the ball rolling.⁶²

The recognition by Neronian and Flavian poets of the *Culex* as Virgil's debut piece requires more investigation than it has hitherto received. While much work has been devoted to the *Culex*, this has predominantly been concerned with the question of authenticity: is this poem really the work of Virgil, or is it a post-Virgilian forgery?⁶³ In these debates the references to the *Culex* made by Lucan, Martial and Statius have,

⁶¹ Martial 8.55.20 and 14.185; Statius, *Silvae* preface to Book 1 and 2.7.74; *Vita Lucani* 332.6 (references to the *Vita Lucani* are to the page and line number in Hosius (1905)); Janka (2005) 30-35 surveys how the ancient sources present the *Culex* as a *prolusio* – a prelude to Virgil's greater works.

⁶² See also Pliny *Ep.* 5.3.6 for a reference to Virgil's light-hearted early poetry (*lusus*) – whether Pliny is here thinking of the *Eclogues* or rather of something from the *Appendix* is impossible to determine; Sherwin White (1966) *ad loc.*

⁶³ Bibliography for the debate concerning the authenticity or otherwise of the *Culex* is vast. For a survey, see Richmond (1981) 1125-1130; for arguments against authenticity, see e.g. Fraenkel (1952); Ross (1975); Most (1987), who supplies exhaustive references on the topic; arguments for Virgilian authorship can be found in e.g. Jackson (1911); Barrett (1970); Berg (1974) 94-102.

naturally, been discussed, but only in a restricted sense. Critics either use the testimony of these later poets to bolster claims for Virgilian authenticity, or else they introduce this testimony only to dismiss it as unreliable and inaccurate. So although scholars have shown interest in the fact that these imperial poets thought the *Culex* genuine, they have not been interested in analysing *how* these later poets actually use the *Culex* as a useful tool with which to construct various aspects of poetic biographies – their own and that of Virgil. And they have not been interested in how these later poets riff on the idea of the *Culex* as the beginning of Virgil's stellar career, and how this opens up new avenues from those explored by Ovid and Propertius – poets for whom the *Eclogues* signalled the beginning. In the following paragraphs I want to explore some of these areas, suggesting a new approach to the *Culex* which moves us away from the intractable conundrum of authenticity. Above all I want to suggest that in these poets' acceptance of the *Culex* we can discern an original spin on the Virgilian career and creative emulation of the Virgilian model.

3. Lucan and the *Culex*.

In recent years we have seen a reassessment of imperial Latin epic. The image of second-rate poets slavishly following in the footsteps of Virgil has been replaced by a more charitable view in which the originality and dynamism of these epigoni is stressed:

In literary terms the source of this dynamism is Virgil's *Aeneid*. One of the greatneses of this apparently definitive Roman epic is its ability to spawn a vigorous progeny. The successors to Virgil, at once respectful and rebellious, constructed a space for themselves through a 'creative imitation' that exploited the energies and tensions called up but not finally expended or resolved in the *Aeneid*.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Hardie (1993) xi.

The heirs of Virgil, according to this new interpretation, are shrewd manipulators and moulders of their literary heritage; their poems rework and re-imagine themes and ideas thrown up by the *Aeneid*, often contesting and rewriting their model.⁶⁵ Critical studies based on this premise have proliferated in the last couple of decades, with the result that these post-Virgilian epicists – save Silius alone - have been thoroughly rehabilitated: they might still come second, but they are not second-rate anymore.⁶⁶

Studies of how post-Virgilian epics creatively engage with the *Aeneid* continue apace; but that is not our theme. What we shall be considering in the following sections is how the (auto-) biographies of these poetic successors engage with the biographical tradition surrounding Virgil and his poetic career. I am especially interested in transferring Hardie's concept of simultaneous respect and rebellion on the literary plane (instantiated in the above quotation) to the biographical plane. I will be arguing for two broad points: first, that elements in the biographies of these successor poets mould themselves to the Virgilian pattern in a dynamic process that is simultaneously respectful and rebellious; second, that the concept of a Virgilian poetic career is something which is initially constructed by Virgil himself, but which is then contested and re-shaped by his literary successors.

Before we consider Lucan's interaction with the *Culex* in detail, it will be useful to look more generally at the biographical tradition surrounding him, especially at elements which might be argued to show an interaction with the Virgilian paradigm.

⁶⁵ As an illustration of this trend, consider the following remarks from the introduction to a recent monograph on Statius: 'In this book, I will explore the relationship between the epics of Statius and Virgil, and argue that Statius' *Thebaid* offers a critical reinterpretation of the politics and moral virtues of kingship in the *Aeneid*. The *Thebaid* uses the literary resources Virgil provides to examine the inadequacy of his presentation of one-man rule, as idealized in the figures of Aeneas and Augustus, the first *princeps* of Rome', Ganiban (2007) 2.

⁶⁶ Pliny's mud (*scribebat carmina maiore cura quam ingenio*, Ep. 3.7) still sticks to Silius, perhaps unfairly. Duff's comments are worth repeating: '...scholars would think better of the poem if they would condescend to read it', (1934) xiii. But perhaps the times are changing: the essays in Agoustakis (2010) are indicative of a growing interest in Silius.

At first sight the lives of Virgil and Lucan seem radically different.⁶⁷ Lucan was a precocious and fast-working talent. Although he died aged only 25, the curriculum vitae provided by one of the ancient biographies is impressively large: *Iliacon, Saturnalia, Catachthonion, Silvarum X, tragoedia Medea imperfecta, salticae fabulae XIII et epigrammata, prosa oratione in Octavium et pro eo, de incendio urbis, epistolarum ex Campania* (VV 336.17-21) – all this in addition to the ten books of the *Bellum Civile*.⁶⁸ In contrast, at a similar age Virgil was still engaged in his juvenilia (VSD 17-18) – the *Eclogues* were not published until he was around the age of thirty – and his rate of composition was notoriously slow.⁶⁹ Such precociousness was not lost on Lucan himself, who prefaced a recitation of the *Bellum Civile* with the following quip: *et quantum mihi restat ad Culicem?* (SVL 332.4-6) At this stage we might paraphrase this quip as follows: ‘How much younger am I than Virgil was when he wrote the *Culex*?’ Virgil had published his minor composition, the *Culex*, at the age of 26 (VSD 17);⁷⁰ at age 25 Lucan was already issuing books from his epic, his juvenilia done and dusted. The competitive young poet stresses his difference from Virgil: he is more precocious

⁶⁷ Numerical references to the *Suetoni Vita Lucani* (henceforth SVL) and the *Vita Vaccae* (VV) are to page and line number of the Hosius (1905) edition.

⁶⁸ Statius, *Silvae* 2.7.54-80 provides further evidence of Lucan’s literary output.

⁶⁹ On Virgil’s slow rate of composition, see VSD 22: *cum Georgica scriberet, traditur quotidie meditato mane plurimos versus dictare solitus ac per totum diem retractando ad paucissimos redigere, non absurde carmen se more ursae parere dicens et lambendo demum effingere*. The *communis opinio* concerning the publication date for the *Eclogues* is 39-38 B.C., making Virgil (born 15th October 70 B.C.) 31 or 32 at the time; some have tried to date the *Eclogues* to a later point in the 30s B.C., making Virgil even older at the time of publication. For a summary of the dating issues, see Perutelli *apud* Horsfall (1995) 28-31; Bowersock (1971) and (1978) argues for termini of 42-35 B.C. on the grounds that the addressee of the eighth *Eclogue* is Octavian, not Pollio (as usually assumed); Tarrant (1978) upholds the Pollio identification.

⁷⁰ There is a textual crux here. At VSD 17 the best manuscripts actually read XVI (16) for the age at which Virgil published the *Culex* (XV and XVII are also recorded). However, most scholars emend this to XXVI, citing this episode from the SVL, and also Statius, *Silvae* 2.7.73-4, where again the point is made that Lucan’s *Bellum Civile* was written when Lucan was younger than Virgil was when he wrote the *Culex*. If we retain the reading XVI, then Lucan would have to have written his entire back-catalogue and begun (at the very least) the *Bellum Civile* before the age of 16, which really does seem to strain the bounds of credulity, even for so precocious a talent. Frank (1920) 26-27 and Rostagni (1944) 82 emend to XXI and offer some persuasive arguments, although not many have followed them. Anderson (1916) would keep the XVI of the manuscripts, arguing that Lucan had indeed begun on the *Bellum Civile* before his sixteenth birthday. In the end, it matters little for our purposes at what age Virgil actually composed the *Culex* (if indeed he ever wrote such a poem!); it does not materially affect any of the ensuing arguments.

and more productive. Continuing in this vein, we can note that Lucan was a fabulous orator (*VV* 2.4-5) and politically active, serving as a *quaestor* in Nero's government (*SVL* 332.9-10), whereas Virgil was a hopeless public speaker (*VSD* 16)⁷¹ and preferred to remove himself from the public gaze by retiring to his retreats in Campania and Sicily (*VSD* 11-13). Furthermore, the spectacular falling out between Lucan and Nero (*SVL* 332.10-333.15) contrasts strongly with the more cordial relationship which existed between Virgil and Augustus. We can add to our list of contrasts the fact that Lucan was, and still is, strongly associated with the Stoic school of philosophy, whereas Virgil tended more to the Epicurean.⁷² Finally, Lucan's enforced suicide after joining the Pisonian conspiracy against Nero (*SVL* 333.6-18) contrasts with Virgil's death from natural causes while loyally following in Augustus' imperial train (*VSD* 35).

In many ways, then, Lucan's biography seems to have little or anything Virgilian about it. If we delve a little deeper, however, we might begin to perceive some similarities between these two seemingly different lives. Masters has tentatively suggested that several elements in the Lucanian biographical tradition stem from a desire to make Lucan's life similar to Virgil's life.⁷³ He speculates that the story that three books of the *Bellum Civile* were read in advance of the others (*VV* 335.25 and 336.12-17; *SVL* 332.3-4) replays Virgil's advance reading of three books to Augustus (*VSD* 32). He suggests that the 'detachable prologue' of the *Aeneid* (*ille ego...*, *VSD* 42) finds a corollary in the story that the first seven lines of the *Bellum Civile* were added by Seneca.⁷⁴ Finally, he mentions how in both biographical traditions a premature death leaves an unpolished poem which requires a posthumous edition. According

⁷¹ Although skilled at reciting his own poetry (*VSD* 28-29).

⁷² Lucan was, of course, the nephew of the younger Seneca, and was also a pupil, along with Persius, of the Stoic philosopher Annaeus Cornutus (as the Suetonian *Vita Persi* informs us); virtually all treatments of Lucan have something to say on the Stoic elements in the *Bellum Civile*: see e.g. Dick (1967); Lapidge (1979); George (1991). For Virgil's Epicurean connections see e.g. *Vita Probiana*: '*vixit pluribus annis liberali in otio secutus Epicuri sectam*', *VVA* 198; also Armstrong, Fish & Johnston (2004) *passim*.

⁷³ Masters (1992) 216-34.

⁷⁴ *Commenta Bernensia ad Bellum Civile* 1.8; the same story is also found in the *Vita Vossiana*, which can be found in Hosius (1905) 337. The prologue is nowadays universally accepted as authentic; see e.g. Conte (1966).

to Masters we can, therefore, perceive in the Lucanian biographical tradition a process of 'distorting Lucan's story to fit the same [sc. Virgilian] model'.⁷⁵

If, for the time being and for the sake of argument, we accept Masters' detection of assimilation of the Lucanian biography to the Virgilian model, can we take his observations further? The answer is yes if we think about how the biographies of ancient poets were often made to fit certain set patterns. Fairweather has demonstrated how a prominent feature of ancient literary biography is 'the way that similar circumstances attend the lives of different exponents of the same genre'.⁷⁶ For example, Bion of Borysthenes, a writer of diatribes, was said to have been the son of a fishmonger who wiped his nose on his sleeve;⁷⁷ the Suetonian Life reports the same story about Horace who was an 'imitator of Bion's satirical manner'.⁷⁸ The similarities in the Lucanian biography to the Virgilian biography might, therefore, be seen to conform to this tacit convention of literary biography.

The assimilation of one poet's life to that of another might, then, simply be a trick of the literary biographers. Alternatively, we might credit greater agency to the poets themselves: they might self-consciously imitate in their own lives famous deeds associated with poets with whom they are hoping to be connected. In other words, it might not be the biographers (Suetonius and Vacca) who are making Lucan's life conform to the Virgilian pattern, but rather Lucan himself who is playing this game – he himself consciously makes his life trace the Virgilian pattern.⁷⁹ Along these lines Graziosi has recently analysed how Horace moulds his own poetic biography around the stock material found in Hellenistic *Lives* of the poets.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Masters (1992) 220.

⁷⁶ Fairweather (1974) 259.

⁷⁷ Diogenes Laertius 4.46.

⁷⁸ Fairweather (1974) 259.

⁷⁹ On this point Fairweather (1974) 260-61 notes that 'we have to take into account the possibility that a man could have consciously imitated a famous predecessor'.

⁸⁰ Graziosi (2009).

Whether we attribute the Virgilian touches Masters perceives in the Lucanian biography to the conceits of Lucan himself or to his ancient biographers is a moot and, ultimately, insoluble question. A more pressing question at this stage, however, is whether Masters is actually right to see conscious imitation of the Virgilian life in these Lucanian episodes. I would suggest that the similarities posited by Masters are not especially convincing. Let us look at his points one by one. Masters suggests that Lucan's preliminary recital of three books replays Virgil's preliminary recital of three books; but recitations of work-in-progress were a standard feature of Roman poetic production, and I am not sure we want to build too much upon the repetition of the number three.⁸¹ The argument about the 'detachable prologue' also appears somewhat speculative: as Masters himself admits, the scenarios are not the same – in the Virgilian case we have lines supposedly written by Virgil but removed by his posthumous editor; in the Lucanian case we have lines supposedly written by a third party (Seneca) which are added to the start of the poem.⁸² I would suggest that a more likely cause of this story about the prologue is the criticism the prologue received from certain grammarians. Fronto lambasts the tautological nature of the prologue to the *Bellum Civile*;⁸³ so the suggestion that the prologue was added by Seneca might have arisen from a desire to defend Lucan from such attacks by laying the blame at his uncle's door. Finally, what of the fact that both the *Aeneid* and the *Bellum Civile* lacked the *ultima manus* of their respective authors and required a posthumous edition? Well, that scenario applies to numerous poems from antiquity and cannot, therefore, be seen as something uniquely Virgilian.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Masters (1992) 221-22. See e.g. Juvenal 7.82-87 for Statius reciting sections from his *Thebaid*; the preface to *Silvae* 1, where Statius talks about how the poems here being published have been recited previously; the *OCD* has a useful entry s.v. *recitatio*.

⁸² Masters (1992) 229-32.

⁸³ *Ad M. Antoninum de Oratoribus Liber* 6 (van den Hout (1988) 155).

⁸⁴ Consider e.g. the life of Persius: we are told that he left his book of satires 'unfinished' (*imperfectum*); that certain verses were removed from the last book to achieve the semblance of completion; that Cornutus edited the work and removed lines disparaging of Nero; and that Cornutus handed the work over to Caesius Bassus to publish (all incidents mentioned in the *Vita Persi*, conveniently printed in Rolfe (1997) 470-75). Consider also the case of Lucretius: the *de rerum natura* is unfinished and was published posthumously (possibly by Cicero) – Smith (1992) x-xiv provides a potted summary of these events.

Masters' suggestions are not, therefore, overly convincing, although they remain an interesting possibility. If we dismiss Masters' alleged similarities, it seems to me that in the ancient *vitae* we only have one definite interaction between the life of Lucan and that of Virgil: the quip about the *Culex* reported by Suetonius. Masters has a cursory discussion of this episode, which he characterizes, along with many others, as an instance of boastful emulation by Lucan of Virgil.⁸⁵ It is this quip which I want to spend some time upon in the following paragraphs. It can, I think, open up some intriguing angles on the way in which the Lucanian biography does engage with the Virgilian biography. Moreover, it is a clear case of Lucan-Virgil interaction, rather than the more speculative instances we have hitherto been examining.

Lucan's quip about the *Culex* is recorded by Suetonius in his *vita Lucani*:

M. Annaeus Lucanus Cordubensis... prima ingenii experimenta in Neronis laudibus dedit quinquennali certamine. dein... civile bellum, quod a Pompeio et Caesare gestum est, recitavit... ut praefatione quadam aetatem et initia sua cum Vergilio comparans ausus sit dicere: 'et quantum mihi restat ad Culicem'.

(SVL 332.1-6)⁸⁶

'Marcus Annaeus Lucan, from Corduba... he gave the first evidence of his genius in his 'Eulogy of Nero' at the Quinquennial competition. Then... he recited his poem on the civil war which was fought between Pompey and Caesar... in a sort of preface, comparing his age and his first forays in poetry with those of Virgil, he dared to say: 'et quantum mihi restat ad Culicem.'⁸⁷

Before which of Lucan's works was the preface with the *Culex* quip recited? The *communis opinio* is that the *praefatio* preceded a recitation of the *Bellum Civile*; I share

⁸⁵ Masters (1992) 217, 222; so also, e.g. Rostagni (1944) 144.

⁸⁶ References to the *Suetoni vita Lucani* (SVL) are to page and line number in Hosius (1905).

⁸⁷ I have deliberately left the quip un-translated at this stage.

this view.⁸⁸ The lacuna posited after *recitavit* which seems to divorce the reference to the *Bellum Civile* from the information about the *praefatio* should not deter us. The lacuna is posited by some modern editors because something additional seems necessary to explain the *ut* + subjunctive (*ausus sit*) result clause; but although something does seem to have gone wrong with the text at this point, that does not mean that we have to imagine a large lacuna and that Suetonius is no longer talking about the *Bellum Civile*.⁸⁹ Furthermore, we have other powerful evidence that the quip was connected with the *Bellum Civile*:

haec primo iuvenis canes sub aevo
ante annos Culicis Maroniani.

(*Silvae*, 2.7.73-4)

‘You [sc. Lucan] shall sing these things [sc. the *Bellum Civile*] as a young man in early life before you reach the age at which Virgil wrote the *Culex*.’

Here Statius clearly alludes to Lucan’s celebrated quip on the *Culex*; and he clearly links it to the *Bellum Civile*.⁹⁰

Lucan’s quip about the *Culex* came, therefore, before a recitation of the *Bellum Civile*. But how should one translate the quip? And how should one interpret it? The range of possible translations is usefully set out by Barrett, who follows Suetonius’ cue that

⁸⁸ For the *praefatio* belonging to the *Bellum Civile*, see e.g. Rose (1966) 394 n.36; Masters (1992) 217.

⁸⁹ A view shared by whoever wrote in the margin of *Codex Berolinensis* 35 ‘*sub tantae levitatis et inmoderatae linguae fuit*’, which entered the vulgate tradition in the slightly modified form: *qui tantae levitatis et tam inmoderatae linguae fuit* – in both cases the supplements work to join the preface containing the *Culex* quip to a recitation of the *Bellum Civile*.

⁹⁰ *haec* in line 73 refers only to the *Bellum Civile*, and not to the other works of Lucan mentioned in lines 54-63, as van Dam (1984) *ad loc.* rightly argues (against the position of e.g. Vollmer (1898) *ad loc.*). The point is succinctly explained by Anderson (1916) 226: ‘Some take *haec* to refer to all the subjects of Lucan’s poetry which have been mentioned in Calliope’s prophecy. This is quite without justification. The use of the word *iuvenis* rules out all the works said to have been composed *teneris in annis* and leaves us only the *De Bello Civili*, which is given as the one work of the poet’s *iuventa* (v. 64).’

the quip has to do with chronology (*aetas*) and the artistic value of poetic beginnings (*initia*):

In the first place, it is not clear whether we have a question or an assertion. Nor is it clear whether the difference between Lucan and the *Culex* is chronological (“What a long time it will be before I am at an age when the *Culex* was written!” – “How long will it be before I am at an age when the *Culex* was written?”) or artistic (“What a difference lies between me and the artistry of the *Culex*!” – “What difference is there between me and the artistry of the *Culex*?”) or a combination of both (“What a long time it will be before I have attained the artistry of the *Culex*!” – “how long will it be before I have attained the artistry of the *Culex*?”).⁹¹

This problem of translation morphs inexorably into a problem of interpretation: for how we translate the quip cannot be separated from how we interpret its thrust. But how we should interpret the thrust of the quip is just as problematic as how we should translate it! That is to say, is the quip to be interpreted as a deferential and modest ceding of supremacy to Virgil (so translate: ‘Even my epic poem isn’t as good as Virgil’s lowly poetic debut, the *Culex*’), or is it rather a daring claim for superiority over Virgil (two possible translations available here, the first focusing on *aetas*, the second on *initia*: ‘I’m already on an epic composition at an age when that laggard, Virgil, hadn’t even written the *Culex*!’; or else: ‘Compare the brilliance of my poetic beginnings, which include an epic, with Virgil’s beginnings, which comprised the trivial *Culex*!’). There is little doubt that Suetonius himself wants to interpret the quip as an instantiation of Lucan’s arrogance and hubristic attitude to his Virgilian model; his use of *ausus sit dicere* to introduce the quip makes this plain, and his critical tone here fits in with the rest of his biography which demonstrates that he was no great admirer of Lucan.⁹² But modern scholars have, in general, been divided on this

⁹¹ Barrett (1972) 282 n.17.

⁹² The Suetonian *Vita* presents a decidedly negative portrait of Lucan, especially when it is contrasted with the much more eulogistic *Vita Vaccae*. Take, for instance, the account of Lucan’s demise in these respective biographies: Suetonius revels in Lucan’s cowardly

problem of determining the tone of the *Culex* quip when divorced from its Suetonian frame: some interpret the quip as boastful emulation; others interpret it as a deferential acknowledgement from Lucan of his inferiority to Virgil.⁹³

The scholarly debate over the tone of the *Culex* quip cannot, I think, be decided conclusively either way. How we translate the *Culex* quip (when shorn of its Suetonian frame) will depend to a large extent upon how we interpret Lucan's *magnum opus*, the *Bellum Civile*. For instance, a prevalent strand in modern criticism of the *Bellum Civile* paints Lucan's epic as a radically subversive un-doing of the *Aeneid* – indeed, even as an anti-*Aeneid*, to repeat a ubiquitous phrase. If we favour a reading such as this, then we might prefer to translate the *Culex* quip as an arrogant claim to superiority over Virgil. For then Lucan's biography would mirror his literary output: both life and work would reflect a radical anti-Virgilian tendency. Alternatively, we might prefer a rather more old-fashioned, though equally valid, interpretation of the *Bellum Civile* which sees it *not* as a revolutionary over-turning of the *Aeneid*, but rather as a complement or supplement to its exalted predecessor.⁹⁴ If we accept this interpretation then we might favour a translation of the *Culex* quip which brings out Lucan's deference to Virgil: Lucan is not competing with Virgil, but humbly trying to follow in his footsteps. Whichever option we prefer, the general point here is that literary criticism and biography are not so easily separated: how we interpret the work will colour how we construct a biography of the poet; and how we construct a biography of the poet will colour how we interpret his work.

There is, however, an alternative way of approaching the conundrum of tone in the *Culex* quip. For rather than feeling impelled to make a decision for either Lucanian

attempts to save his own skin by incriminating his own mother in the Pisonian conspiracy (SVL 333.10-15), whereas Vacca has absolutely nothing to say on this matter (VV 336.5-12). See further Ahl (1976) 344-5.

⁹³ For boastful emulation, see e.g. Rose (1966) 394 n.36 Masters (1992) 217; for modest deference, see e.g. Anderson (1916) 227 n.1; van Dam (1984) 486 n.22

⁹⁴ See e.g. Nock (1926) 18; see also Mayer (1982) 311-12: 'It may however be hesitantly suggested that Lucan's original plan was complementary to the *Aeneid*...it may be suggested that Lucan intended, at least when he was beginning his poem, not an anti-*Aeneid*, such as we now find in parts of the *Pharsalia*, but rather a complement to Virgil's mythological poem, set in historical times, and praising another Augustus.'

superiority or inferiority vis-à-vis Virgil, we can instead revel in the ambiguity. That is to say, we can see in Lucan's quip both deference to his Virgilian model and also boastful emulation; we do not need to choose one or the other. We can do this if we view Lucan as a poet who is both in thrall to his epic ancestry (a form of modesty or deference), but also manic in his desire to overturn that ancestry and replace it (a form of hubristic superiority).⁹⁵ It is the idea of a schizophrenic Lucan developed so compellingly by Masters; the idea of Lucan as a poet 'at war with himself, torn between a tradition his *pietas* demands that he respect, and the requirement of innovation, whose price is the *nefas* of parricide, of destroying what gave him birth.'⁹⁶ The conflict between Pompey - who stands for the past, for age and for tradition - and Caesar - who stands for the present, for youth, for novelty - is played out also in Lucan's poetics:

Young opposes old; novelty opposes tradition; and in this dualism we see the conflict at the heart of Lucan's relation to the epic tradition. To write epic at all involves some allegiance to the tradition, and for that reason Pompey, the symbolic embodiment of Lucan's poetic heritage (one thinks of Virgil in particular), is what Lucan would like to be. But in this admiration there is always an 'anxiety of influence'; and to use Bloom's terms, the 'strong' poet, the 'ephebe', must represent the past as corrupt, dead, tottering - must, indeed, destroy it, in order to earn the honour that the past will not relinquish; the new poet standing at the end of a tradition must be a Caesar.⁹⁷

We can map these tensions onto Lucan's quip about the *Culex*. For by the very fact of comparing his life to Virgil's, Lucan reveals an allegiance to his epic tradition, his

⁹⁵ Cf. the comments of Hardie (1993) 109: 'Violence and death characterize Lucan's dealings with the past, as they are also the characteristic events of civil war. Lucan takes control of his predecessors' material not as a respectful son entering into a father's inheritance, but as a rebel, yet unable to escape from the paradigms and values of his society, which he angrily seizes for his own and reverses into a negative parody of themselves, galvanizing the words and forms of the past into a furious appearance of life whose subsidence leaves, apparently, only death.'

⁹⁶ Masters (1992) 215.

⁹⁷ Masters (1992) 9-10.

epic ancestry: he conceptualizes his own life around Virgilian coordinates, and this inevitably carries with it a sense of deference and *pietas*. But this very act of deference is, at the same time, an act of parricide: for Lucan can be seen to be trying to surpass and replace the Virgilian template, casting the Virgilian career as a pale and trivial forerunner of his own greatness.

Lucan's ambivalent relationship to Virgil is instantiated, therefore, in the ambiguity of the *Culex* quip; a quip which contains strands of both inferiority and superiority vis-à-vis the Virgilian model. There is, however, another observation I would like to make on this theme, and it has to do with the concepts of decline and excess, and Lucan's choice of the *Culex* as a point of comparison in his self-fashioning as an epic poet. Lucan's choice of the *Culex* as a point of comparison serves to exaggerate the strands of decline and excess (or inferiority and superiority) we have been examining. Let us take decline first: for Lucan to concede that his epic does not match the *Aeneid* would be one thing, but to concede that it does not even match the *Culex* is quite another – the sense of decline is hyper-exaggerated. Now let us turn to excess: to claim to exceed Virgil is one thing, but to belittle Virgil by comparing your poetic *initia* (an epic poem) with Virgil's poetic *initia* (the *Culex*) is another thing – Lucan's boast here is, again, hyper-exaggerated and excessive by dint of his use of the *Culex*. This insistence on the concepts of decline and excess is especially interesting in a Lucanian context, because Lucan is a poet in thrall to these ideas: his *Bellum Civile* is, in one sense, a poem about decline and about excess. In modern discourse, Lucan is not a poet in decline, but a poet of "decline". As Hinds has compellingly argued, the traditional models for assessing 'Silver' writers need modifying: both those who argue that 'Silver' Latin literature really does mark a decline, and those who argue that there is no such decline do not come to grips with the way in which the *idea of decline* becomes an enabling trope in post-Augustan poetry:

What is missing here [Hinds is discussing Williams' *Change and Decline* (1978)]...is any sense of the poets' own self-conscious participation in these analyses, and hence of the *discursive* approach to decline which their work often

demands. In Williams's account the Elder Seneca and the Elder Pliny theorize decline; Lucan simply declines. But Lucan himself can be argued to be one of the most powerful of all post-Augustan theorists of decline and decadence. To miss this may be to miss the crux of the matter...Decline for Lucan is now understood to be a *trope*, a trope central to his epic project: to put it in a postmodern nutshell, no analysis of Lucanian decline can get far without considering Lucanian "decline". To a chronicler of change and decline, *De Bello Civili* constitutes a falling away from Virgilian perfection of epic technique; to a chronicler of change and "decline", *De Bello Civili* embraces the idea of a falling away from Virgilian perfection of epic technique as a powerful enabling trope.⁹⁸

If we follow Hinds in his conviction that the *Bellum Civile* is 'an epic of (self-conscious) "decline"', our reading of Lucan's quip about the *Culex* might have to be modified.⁹⁹ For we now have the possibility that Lucan is self-consciously moulding his poetic autobiography around the trope of "decline". That is to say, he is not simplistically expressing his inferiority vis-à-vis Virgil, but self-consciously constructing an image of himself as a poet who cannot match a Virgilian model which has become an image of idealized perfection. This self-consciously constructed image of himself as a *poeta degener* – one who has fallen away from the heights of his ancestors – reflects, therefore, the literary texture of his epic poem: Lucan moulds his biography to match an essential feature of his verse, as he insistently plays with the idea of decline and fall.

But Lucan is not only a relentless negotiator of the meaning of decline; he is also merciless in his interrogation of excess in all its myriad guises; his poem is about excess (*bella per Emathios plus quam civilia campos*, BC 1.1), but it is also a poem in excess – Lucan's poetics are a poetics of excess.¹⁰⁰ This tendency is most extremely felt in Lucan, but it is also a feature of much poetry of the imperial period:

⁹⁸ Hinds (1998) 85-86, emphasis his.

⁹⁹ Quotation from Hinds (1998) 87.

¹⁰⁰ Henderson (1988); also Masters (1992) *passim*.

The traditional problem of Silver Latin poetry, and Silver Latin epic especially, has been its attraction to the extravagant, the grotesque, the infinite, the absurd, in other words, its propensity for excess... Recent criticism, however, has tended to see Silver Latin poetry not simply as being excessive, but as being deeply concerned with excess – cultural, ideological, and poetic.¹⁰¹

Once again, therefore, we can see how Lucan's quip about the *Culex* might be read as an instance of Lucan self-consciously constructing his poetic persona around the concept of excess; he moulds his autobiographical presentation to make it align with the texture of his poetic oeuvre: all is excessive and straining to reach beyond the limits of acceptability. Lucan compares himself with the *Culex* because such a comparison serves to magnify his poetic persona to colossal proportions; for if Lucan's poetic *initia* already include an epic poem, then what will his years of poetic maturity produce? Something unimaginably great, we are led to imagine.

4. Statius and the *Culex*.

Investigations into Statius' relationship with Virgil almost inevitably begin by considering the epilogue to the *Thebaid*:

uiue, precor; nec tu diuinam Aeneida tempta,
sed longe sequere et uestigia semper adora.
mox, tibi si quis adhuc praetendit nubila liuor,
occidet, et meriti post me referentur honores.

¹⁰¹ Hershkowitz (1995) 52; cf. the comments (?) of Henderson (1991) 31: 'With Statius' cover-version of 'The Guilt of Thebes', Epic, conceivably, reverts here to type, / recovers the type, / finds its pre-made *form*. to present its essay on Flavian Man, its bid to show up to the imperial gaze a Humanity, if but for the secondariness, belatedness and consequential agitated excess of its time, then so be it; in any case, an if necessary gargantuan bid to capture the colossal dimensions of Power play in the World State: Epic's destiny to voice megalography for its culture – a massive onslaught, past-saturation literary bombing.'

(*Thebaid* 12.816-19)

‘Live, I pray; and do not rival the divine *Aeneid*, but follow from a distance and always worship her footprints. Soon, if any envy still casts shadows over you, it will fall away, and after my death deserved honours will be apportioned you.’

These lines were once used as simple evidence for Statius’ sub-Virgilian quality and his status as a self-confessed second-rater; they are now, more often than not, seen as containing strong elements of competition and creativity, as Statius revels in his ‘belatedness’ and ‘secondariness’ in relation to the *Aeneid*.¹⁰² But it is not only the Virgilian presence which is felt in this epilogue: strains of Pindar, Apollonius, Callimachus, Ennius, Catullus, Horace and Ovid have also been detected.¹⁰³ But it is the presence of Lucan in these lines which we can home in on; for Lucan will lead us back to the *Culex* and Statius’ interaction with this early Virgilian work.

The presence of Lucan in the epilogue to the *Thebaid* is suggested by Hardie. He notes how Statius’ presentation of his own modesty in this epilogue contrasts with the image of haughtiness which Statius constructs for Lucan in *Silvae* 2.7:

Statius’ respectful distance from Virgil here contrasts with Calliope’s prophecy to the infant Lucan in Statius’ birthday poem in honour of the dead Lucan (*Silvae* 2.7), that (79-80) ‘the *Aeneid* itself will worship you as you sing to the Latins’, *ipsa te Latinis / Aeneis venerabitur canentem*. Even allowing for the conventions of panegyric, there may be in this a recognition of Lucan’s immodest challenge to the authority of Virgil. Statius’ own attitude to the

¹⁰² It’s probably more of a challenge to find something on Statius which *doesn’t* include discussion of these lines than something which does; for a succinct survey, see Pollmann (2004) 288-99; the new orthodoxy on the epilogue can be found in e.g. Feeney (1991) 340; Henderson (1993) 163-4; Braund (1996) *passim*; Hardie (1997) *passim*, but esp. 156-58; Hinds (1998) 91-98; Dominik (2003) *passim*; for the old orthodoxy, see e.g. Williams (1978) 150.

¹⁰³ Dominik (2003) 94.

Aeneid may rather be compared with that of Silius, paying his respects to the tomb of Virgil and celebrating his birthday.¹⁰⁴

Stattius' modesty is, of course, only skin-deep. As Hardie notes, 'to follow is to imitate' and Stattius is implying, according to Hardie, that 'the *Thebaid*'s successful imitation of the *Aeneid* may result in a measure of self-divinization' and that 'the future holds *honores* that might well be those of a god'.¹⁰⁵ But it is the contrast which Stattius draws here between his own modesty (ingenuous or otherwise) and Lucanian arrogance which interests me, because I think we can map it on to Stattius' treatment of the *Culex*. For this we need now to turn to the two places where Stattius mentions the *Culex*: the preface to *Silvae* 1 and *Silvae* 2.7.

In the preface to the first book of the *Silvae*, Stattius draws an analogy between himself and Virgil:

Diu multumque dubitavi, Stella, iuvenis optime et in studiis nostris eminentissime, qua parte [et] voluisti, an hos libellos, qui mihi subito calore et quadam festinandi voluptate fluxerunt, cum singuli de sinu meo pro<dierint>, congregatos ipse dimitterem. quid enim <opus eo tempore hos> quoque auctoritate editionis onerari, quo adhuc pro Thebaide mea, quamvis me reliquerit, timeo? sed et Culicem legimus et Batrachomachiam etiam agnoscimus, nec quisquam est illustrium poetarum qui non aliquid operibus suis stilo remissiore praeluserit. quid quod haec serum erat continere, cum illa vos certe quorum honori data sunt haberetis? sed apud ceteros necesse est multum illis pereat ex venia, cum amiserint quam solam habuerunt gratiam celeritatis. nullum enim ex illis biduo longius tractum, quaedam et in singulis diebus effusa. quam timeo ne verum istuc versus quoque ipsi de se probent!

¹⁰⁴ Hardie (1993) 110.

¹⁰⁵ Hardie (1993) 110-11.

'Much and long have I hesitated, my excellent Stella, distinguished as you are in your chosen area of our pursuits, whether I should assemble these little pieces, which streamed from my pen in the heat of the moment, a sort of pleasurable haste, emerging from my bosom one by one, and send them out myself. For why <should they too> be burdened with the authority of publication <at a time> when I am still anxious for my *Thebaid*, although it has left my hands? But we read the *Culex* and even recognise the *Batrachomachia*; and there is not one of our illustrious poets who has not precluded his works with something in lighter vein. Moreover, it was too late to keep them back, since you at least and the others in whose honour they were produced already had them. But with the general public they must necessarily forfeit much of its indulgence since they have lost their only commendation, that of celerity. For none of them took longer than a couple of days to compose, some were turned out in a single day. How I fear that the verses themselves will testify on their own behalf to the truth of what I say.'¹⁰⁷

Statius here draws an explicit analogy between his *Silvae* and Virgil's *Culex* (as well as Homer's early ludic work, the *Batrachomachia*), describing them both as lighter works compared to their epic siblings (the *Thebaid* and *Aeneid*).¹⁰⁸ The surface tone in this preface is one of modesty, diffidence and anxiety: Statius is worried about publishing these light compositions and has to reassure himself by recollecting that Virgil too had published a trivial work in the *Culex*. On the surface, Statius uses Virgil's *Culex* as a justification and authoritative precedent for the publication of the *Silvae*: Statius suggests that he can publish the *Silvae* because he is simply following the example laid down by Virgil – it is the image of Statius as a dutiful disciple and reverend follower in Virgilian footsteps. Such an interpretation is, of course, only

¹⁰⁶ For the *Silvae* I have used the text of Shackleton Bailey (2003).

¹⁰⁷ The translation here is from Shackleton Bailey (2003), slightly adapted.

¹⁰⁸ For a general analysis of the preface to *Silvae* 1, see Johannsen (2006) 241-61; on the prose prefaces to the *Silvae*, see also Vessey (1973) 36-40; Newlands (2009).

half the story, but before we delve deeper into this preface we need to introduce Statius' conceptualization of Lucan's relationship with the *Culex* which is delineated in *Silvae* 2.7.

Some introductory remarks on *Silvae* 2.7 will be useful before we proceed.¹⁰⁹ *Silvae* 2.7 is the *genethliacon Lucani*: a birthday poem written for Argentaria Polla, at her request (see the prefatory letter to Book 2), in honour of her dead husband, Lucan. Statius begins by invoking various figures connected with poetry (inspired poets, Mercury, Bacchus, the Muses) to attend the celebration of Lucan's birthday (1-23). This is followed by reference to Spain and the pride it must take in having given Lucan to the world (24-35). In the next section Calliope, the Muse of epic, takes the infant Lucan up into her bosom, forgets about her grief for her dead son, Orpheus, and makes a prophecy about Lucan's future poetic greatness (36-80). In lines 81-88 Calliope continues her prophecy by describing Lucan's future marriage to the incomparable Argentaria Polla. Calliope's concludes her prophetic vision by describing, with tears in her eyes, Lucan's untimely and premature end (89-106). In the final segment of the poem Statius muses on the current whereabouts of Lucan's spirit – he might inhabit the vault of heaven or else be in Elysium – and asks him to return from the great beyond in order to visit, for this day only, his ever faithful widow who still cultivates his memory (107-35).

This poem has always proved fascinating to Lucan scholars: not only does it provide copious biographical details – some of which tally with what the ancient *Lives* tell us, and some of which do not – but it is also the product of a man who personally knew Lucan's wife. This personal link has often led scholars to privilege the biographical evidence contained in 2.7 over and above other biographical sources: for Statius must be reporting accurately, so the argument runs, since the poem is destined for a reader who would be able to tell fact from fiction. This is obviously wrong-headed, since people rarely speak the whole truth and nothing but the truth to someone mourning

¹⁰⁹ On *Silvae* 2.7 generally, see e.g. Buchheit (1960); Vessey (1973) 46-49; Newmyer (1979) 75-80; Malamud (1995); Newlands (2006); and now also Newlands (2011), which appeared after this chapter was completed.

a loss: *de mortuis nil nisi bonum dicendum est*. We should, therefore, not be too hasty in reading this poem as a simple and transparent document of Lucan's life, as Masters rightly cautions: 'We are, let it be said, dealing with a poem, not a document, and we are dealing with a birthday eulogy which is an early attempt at making Lucan's life into a myth; this being the case, we cannot base our reading of the poem on the assumption that Statius is entirely innocent of the sort of tricks familiar to us from the biographers.'¹¹⁰ This is, I think, the right way to approach the poem: rather than simply mining 2.7 for historical factoids, we should instead dig a little beneath the surface to reveal the complexities of this biographical engagement.

We can now proceed to look at the *Culex* in this poem. In lines 54-72 Statius offers us a summary of Lucan's poetic career – a career which culminates in the *Bellum Civile*. Having reached this climactic point in Lucan's career, we are then told the following:

haec primo iuvenis canes sub aevo
ante annos Culicis Maroniani.¹¹¹
cedet Musa rudis ferocis Enni 75
et docti furor arduus Lucreti
et qui per freta duxit Argonautas
et qui corpora prima transfigurat.
quin maius loquar: ipsa te Latinis
Aeneis venerabitur canentem. 80

(2.7.73-80)

'You shall sing these things as a young man in early life before the age of Maro's *Culex*. The uncultured Muse of fierce Ennius will give way, as will the lofty ardour of learned Lucretius, as will he who led the Argonauts across the

¹¹⁰ Masters (1992) 223.

¹¹¹ *haec* in 73 refers only to the *Bellum Civile*, and not to the other works of Lucan mentioned in lines 54-63, as van Dam *ad loc.* rightly argues (against the position of e.g. Vollmer (1898) *ad loc.*).

seas, as will he who transforms first bodies. I shall indeed say a greater thing:
the *Aeneid* herself will worship you as you sing to the Latins.¹¹²

Statius' use of the *Culex* here seems, *prima facie*, similar to that of Suetonius in his *Vita Lucani*: in both cases Lucan's precocious and prodigious poetic output is contrasted with the Virgilian precedent consisting of the *Culex*. There is, however, a major difference in the rhetorical thrust: where Suetonius is negative and condemnatory in his presentation of the *Culex* comparison (*ausus sit...*), Statius includes the anecdote as part of an encomium. That is to say, the surface meaning of what Statius says must be that Lucan is all the more to be lauded precisely because he wrote his epic poem at a younger age than that at which Virgil wrote the *Culex*. The *Culex* comparison, which was used by Suetonius as a means of criticizing Lucan's presumption, is here flipped on its head and made a vehicle for praise.

But the point I particularly want to focus on is how Statius' presentation of Lucan vis-à-vis the *Culex* contrasts with his own self-presentation vis-à-vis the *Culex* which we have looked at in the preface to *Silvae* 1. That is to say, in the book 1 preface Statius uses the *Culex* as a point of comparison for his own career, but he does so in a way which is, on the surface, modest and deferential: he does not present himself as explicitly competing with Virgil or trying to outdo him. In *Silvae* 2.7, however, Statius uses the *Culex* as a point of comparison for Lucan's poetic career in a way which suggests Lucanian boastfulness and immoderate competition: Lucan, as Statius presents him, is very much a poet who strives to outdo and surpass his Virgilian model. The contrast could not, therefore, be clearer: Statius presents himself modestly in relation to the Virgilian career; but he presents Lucan as an immoderate challenger of the Virgilian paradigm.

This play with alternative approaches to the *Culex* can, then, be seen to add a further dimension to Hardie's contention (set out above) that Statius' surface modesty with

¹¹² The poet of the Argonauts in v.77 is Varro of Atax, not Valerius Flaccus; see van Dam (1984) *ad loc.* The poet alluded to in v.78 is, naturally, Ovid.

regard to the *Aeneid* in the epilogue to the *Thebaid* (*uiue, precor; nec tu diuinam Aeneida tempta*, 12.816) is contrasted with his picture of Lucanian hubris with regard to the *Aeneid* in *Silvae* 2.7 (*ipsa te Latinis / Aeneis venerabitur canentem*, 2.7.79-80). We have, it would appear, a further illustration of how Statius constructs his own poetic career not only in relation to the Virgilian blueprint, but also via the prism of Lucan and this Neronian poet's own interaction with Virgil. Statius, in a sense, is compelled to look at Virgil through a Lucanian lens. But as Hardie also notes, along with many others, the surface modesty of the epilogue to the *Thebaid* masks more ambitious sentiments, and the same is also true of the surface modesty to the *Culex* expressed by Statius in the preface to *Silvae* 1. For by publishing the *Silvae* – which are likened to the *Culex* – Statius suggests that his poetic career is similar to Virgil's, in that both have composed lighter compositions in addition to their weightier epics. By making his career fit the Virgilian model, Statius can be seen to be claiming a kind of equality with Virgil: Statius presents himself as a poet on the same level as Virgil (and, indeed, Homer) – they are all, so to speak, in the same club: *nec quisquam est illustrium poetarum qui non aliquid operibus suis stilo remissiore praeluserit* – the *poetae illustres* are not only Virgil and Homer but also, so runs the implication, Statius himself.¹¹³ Statius here exhibits that subtle blend of respect and competition vis-à-vis Virgil which many critics have seen operating in the epilogue to the *Thebaid*: respect, in that he holds up Virgil as an authoritative model worthy to imitated with due deference; competition, in that Statius suggests that as a poet he is potentially on a par with Virgil.

Statius' use of the *Culex* shows him to be a creative inheritor of the Virgilian career. This is especially evident in his characterization of Virgil's *Culex* as a *praelusio* – a

¹¹³ So also Vessey (1973) 36, Johannsen (2006) 244, 331-332 and Gibson (2006a) xix; Gibson (2006a) xxi and (2006b) 165-66 make an interesting further point concerning Statius' self-fashioning vis-à-vis Lucan. In the preface to *Silvae* 2, Statius explains his choice of the hendecasyllabic meter for the *genethliacon Lucani* (2.7) by saying that he 'feared his hexameters' (*hexametros meos timui*) in a poem designed to praise Lucan. Gibson suggests that Statius, by using the construction *timeo* + acc. rather than *timeo pro* + abl. or *timeo* + dat., does not fear that his hexameters might not do Lucan justice (the position of Hardie (1983) 85 and Morgan (2000) 120), but rather fears that his hexameters might surpass Lucan's own; Statius is subtly suggesting his superiority to Lucan.

prelude to greater works to come. In Virgil's case the *Culex* does indeed function as a prelude; this early work of Virgil is succeeded by incomparably greater poetic productions. This insistence on the *Culex* as a poetic *praelusio* has, however, odd consequences for Statius' presentation of his own poetic career. For Statius' *Silvae* – the poems which he explicitly equates with the Virgilian *Culex* – are not poetic preludes at all; indeed, Statius emphatically tells us in the preface to *Silvae* 1 that he has already published his epic *Thebaid*: *quid enim <opus eo tempore hos> quoque auctoritate editionis onerari, quo adhuc pro Thebaide mea, quamvis me reliquerit, timeo?* The *Silvae*, as a body of published work, actually post-date the *Thebaid* – far from being Statius' *praelusio poetica*, they are more akin to some sort of poetic postscript.¹¹⁴ Statius seems to be playing around here with the sense of chronological and generic progression inherited from the Virgilian model; he, in one sense, reverses the Virgilian pattern by presenting his "*Culex*" (i.e. the *Silvae*) after his "*Aeneid*" (i.e. the *Thebaid*) – he creatively adopts the Virgilian career patterning by living it in reverse.

5. An epigrammatic digression: Martial on the *Culex*.

Alongside Lucan and Statius, Martial too recognized the *Culex* as an early Virgilian work. Martial is not, of course, an epic poet; but for the sake of completeness I think his contribution to the *Culex* story is well worth investigating as a coda to this chapter. For in Martial, just like in Lucan and Statius, we can discern a cunning approach to the *Culex* which goes beyond merely recording it as a piece of Virgilian juvenilia. Martial, I will show, wittily deploys the *Culex* as a vehicle for thinking about two poetic careers: Virgil's career, of course, but also Martial's sense of his own poetic career.

To begin we need to look at an epigram which is not about the *Culex*:

¹¹⁴ Newlands (2009) 236 suggests Statius here presents the *Silvae* as 'foreplay to a second epic', i.e. the *Achilleid*.

Vergilius in membranis

Quam brevis immensum cepit membrana Maronem!

ipsius vultus prima tabella gerit. 2

(14.186)

'Virgil on parchment

How small an amount of parchment has contained immense Maro! The first page bears his portrait.'

This epigram is a putative gift-tag to accompany the gift of a codex (*in membranis*) which contains the complete works of Virgil (*immensum...Maronem*).¹¹⁵ There is a pleasing ambiguity about the concept of a *Maro immensus*: the immensity of Virgil refers both to the fact that we are here dealing with his entire oeuvre (which is chunky, containing an epic as it does), and also to the idea of Virgil's great stature in Roman literary culture – Virgil is the immense figure of the Roman arts.¹¹⁶ But the point I really want to stress is how Martial here 'epigrammatizes' the Virgilian career: all of great Virgil (*immensum Maronem*) is contained within a tiny compass (*brevis membrana*): the greatness of Virgil has been reduced to a two-line epigram. As Luke Roman astutely notes: 'he [Martial] reduces great works by the same authors [he is discussing both Homer and Virgil] to a compact format – he epigrammatically

¹¹⁵ 'as is made plain in line 1, the whole of the Virgilian *corpus* is intended...that this small codex (note "prima tabella", line 2) contains all of Virgil is remarkable', Leary (1996) *ad loc.* That we are here dealing with the complete works of Virgil is also suggested by the lemma 'Vergilius in membranis' – the use of the name 'Virgil' without any further specification means that we are dealing with all of Virgil, not with a specific work. The lemmata in 14.183-196 generally make it clear whether we are dealing with complete works or specific works.

¹¹⁶ Leary (1996) *ad loc.* comments: '*Inmensum* could refer to Virgil's greatness as well as to the bulk of his collected works...but given that *brevis* refers to physical size, any suggestion of Virgil's greatness here must be secondary.' Leary's desire to downplay the sense of Virgil's cultural greatness is misguided: the whole point of the epigram derives from the double sense of 'great' in this context.

compresses them (*artat*, 14.190). Virgil and Homer do indeed form part of Martial's text, but the complex texture of meaning of these classics works has been reduced to the compass of a gift tag, set aside distichs about monkeys and lapdogs.¹¹⁷ Roman's point about Martial's love of compressing great works of poetry to epigrammatic proportions is an interesting one; in the following paragraphs I want to build upon and expand this idea by considering how Martial not only epigrammatizes great works of art, but also how he epigrammatizes Virgil's life.

In *Epigrams* 8.55 Martial offers a tendentious version of the Virgilian biography.¹¹⁸ He begins by suggesting that it was the patronage of Maecenas which enabled Virgil to excel as poet, but that such patronage is lacking in contemporary society (1-6). He then describes how Virgil was dispossessed in the civil wars (7-8), gained the patronage of Maecenas (9-11), received the pretty slave-boy, Alexis, as a gift (12-16), and was thus inspired to produce the *Aeneid* (17-20). After suggesting that Maecenas patronized many other poets too (21-22), Martial concludes by saying that even if he enjoyed the patronage of a Maecenas, he would not write epic verse, but would stick with epigram (23-24). The section which interests me in the context of the Virgilian career is the following, which describes the immediate aftermath of Virgil's first encounter with Alexis:

excidit attonito pinguis Galatea poetae
 Thestylis et rubras messibus usta genas; 18
 protinus Italiam concepit et arma virumque,
 qui modo vix Culicem fleverat ore rudi. 20

(8.55.17-20)

'Plump Galatea and Thestylis (ruddy cheeked from the harvests) fell from the astonished mind of the poet [sc. Virgil]; immediately he conceived Italy and

¹¹⁷ Roman (2001) 134-35.

¹¹⁸ On 8.55, see e.g. Citroni (1968) 287-89 and (1987); Nauta (2002) 82-7; Schöffel (2002) *ad loc.*; Gold (2003); Watson & Watson (2003) *ad loc.*

Arms and the Man – he who had only recently, and with difficulty, mourned the Gnat with his immature voice.’

Here we have a bizarre compression of the Virgilian career as Virgil’s literary output, according to the strict logic of the poem, is reduced to just two works: the *Culex* and the *Aeneid*. For the *Eclogues* no longer feature as one of Virgil’s poetic compositions – the characters and situations of these pastoral poems are presented as Virgil’s actual biography, not as a set of poems he wrote. And the *Georgics* are omitted entirely.¹¹⁹ Virgil jumps straight from a trivial epyllion, the *Culex*, to a massive epic, the *Aeneid*, all thanks to the charms of a pretty slave boy. Where Lucan and Statius had expanded the parameters of the Virgilian career by including the *Culex*, Martial’s inclusion of the *Culex* actually forms part of his diminution of the Virgilian career.

This paring down of the Virgilian career from three works to two is accompanied by a sense of chronological compression; we get the feeling that Martial has squashed the Virgilian career into an absurdly short time-frame. Virgil, the immature poet (*ore rudi*) who has only just (*modo*) written the *Culex* – a task he found difficult (*vix*) – is suddenly depicted as the poet of the *Aeneid*. Any sense of duration or slow and painful progression in Virgil’s poetic development is absent as the *Aeneid* is presented as the almost instantaneous successor to the *Culex*: epigrammatic *brevitas* has shrunk the Virgilian career to tiny proportions. Such chronological compression is, in fact, a feature which pervades the entire epigram; indeed, the first word is time, and the first sentence is chronologically oriented (*temporibus nostris aetas cum cedat avorum*, 8.55.1). Throughout this epigram, action results in immediate consequence: if there are Maecenases, then there will be Virgils (5); Virgil is dispossessed, then Maecenas makes him rich (7-11); Virgil claps eyes on Alexis, and immediately

¹¹⁹ Some have argued that *Italiam* in line 19 refers to the *Georgics*; see e.g. Watson & Watson (2003) *ad loc.*, who think the *Georgics* are meant and argue that *Italiam* points to the *laudes Italiae* of G. 2.136-76; but as Schöffel (2002) *ad loc.* demonstrates, it is much more probable that the *Aeneid* is meant (*Italiam* thus forms a double allusion to the *Aeneid* with *arma virumque*); Housman (1919) 74 raises the issue but suspends judgment. Even if *Italiam* does refer to the *Georgics*, it would not matter a great deal for the arguments I am making: the emphasis would be slightly different, but Martial would still be epigrammatizing the Virgilian career.

(*protinus*) conceives the *Aeneid*, even though he has only just now (*modo*) completed the *Culex*. Everything happens just like that, in quick-fire succession: stump up the cash, says Martial, and the Virgilian career path is a piece of cake – from basement hovel to penthouse apartment in the twinkle of an eye. It is a humorous, ironic version of the Virgilian biography; the ease and speed of Martial’s version of the Virgilian career contrasts strongly with other versions doing the rounds: the Suetonian *vita* records the agonisingly slow rate at which Virgil composed;¹²⁰ and a fragment of a letter written by Virgil to Augustus reveals the poet suffering from a crisis of confidence as he frets over the epic task which he considers himself mad (*vitio mentis*) to have ever taken on.¹²¹ We also recall Virgil’s own reference to Maecenas’ *haud mollia iussa*.¹²² Martial, therefore, epigrammatizes and trivializes the Virgilian career; indeed, it barely resembles a career at all, as the whole Virgilian canon appears, as if by magic, in the blink of an eye, inspired by a pretty slave boy.

There is one final point I would like to make on Martial’s use of the *Culex* in 8.55 before we move on. I want to suggest that Martial draws an analogy between his own epigrams and the Virgilian *Culex*. How does he do this? Well, the whole thrust of 8.55 is that Maecenas, through his patronage, facilitated Virgil’s poetic ascent from the *Culex* to the *Aeneid*; the *Culex* sees Virgil on the bottom rung of the generic ladder, but Maecenas’ intervention allows him to climb up the ladder to the *Aeneid*. Now, in the conclusion to 8.55, Martial says that even if he had his own Maecenas, he would choose not to make the poetic ascent to epic:

ergo ego Vergilius, si munera Maecenatis
des mihi? Vergilius non ero, Marsus ero.

(8.55.23-24)

¹²⁰ Three years for the *Eclogues*, seven for the *Georgics*, and 11 and counting for the unfinished *Aeneid*, *VSD*, 25.

¹²¹ Preserved in Macrobius, *Saturnalia*. 1.24.10-12.

¹²² *Georgics*, 3.41.

‘If, therefore, you were to give me the gifts of a Maecenas, would I be a Virgil? I will not be a Virgil, I will be a Marsus.’

Martial says here that, even if he had a Maecenas, he would remain an epigrammatist (*Marsus ero* is a reference to the Augustan epigrammatist, Domitius Marsus) and would not make the generic ascent to the epic poetry desired by the poem’s addressee, Flaccus (1-6). Martial is, therefore drawing his own poetic career into comparison with Virgil’s. There are two strands to this. On the one hand we see Martial differentiating his career from Virgil’s: Maecenas’ patronage prompted an elevation in Virgil’s poetic output; Maecenas-like patronage would not effect any elevation in Martial’s poetic output. But on the other hand we see Martial equating his career with the first part of Virgil’s career: Virgil’s ascent is from the platform of the *Culex*; Martial does not make the same ascent, but the implication is that he is on the same lowly poetic platform. Virgil’s *Culex* is, by analogy, the equivalent of Martial’s epigrams: both represent nugatory, low-level, generically insignificant poetic productions. But while Virgil breaks free from the *Culex* and progresses to epic, Martial is quite happy to stay in his *Culex* stage: he remains in his nugatory chrysalis and has no ambitions to unfold into an epic poet after the Virgilian model.

In addition to 8.55, Martial also mentions the Virgilian *Culex* in *Epigrams* 14.185:

Vergili Culex

Accipe facundi Culicem, studiose, Maronis,
ne nucibus positis ‘arma virumque’ legas. 2

‘Virgil’s *Culex*.

Receive, studious reader, the *Culex* of eloquent Maro so that you do not have to read ‘Arms and the Man’ when you have put your nuts away.’

Here again we have a putative gift-tag designed to accompany a Saturnalian gift comprising Virgil's *Culex*. The studious reader is advised that the *Culex* is more suitable reading material for the raucous festival of the Saturnalia – a time when gambling for nuts was a popular pastime (hence the reference to nuts in line 2) – than Virgil's serious epic work, the *Aeneid*.¹²³ The epigram is not without humour, especially in its characterization of the recipient of the *Culex*: '*studiose* is ironic: the addressee is clearly not an avid reader, having been lightly occupied with nuts, and his literature cannot be too heavy.'¹²⁴ What interests me, however, is the concept of value in this epigram. To explain what I mean we need to look at the surrounding context of this epigram and also at the structure of the *Apophoreta* (i.e. Book 14) more generally.

The *Apophoreta* is a collection of tags to accompany gifts given during the Saturnalia.¹²⁵ In the introductory poem to the collection Martial says that he will present alternately gifts suitable for a rich man to give and gifts suitable for a poor man to give:

divitis alternas et pauperis accipe sortes:
praemia convivae det sua quisque suo.

(14.1.5-6)

¹²³ On gambling with nuts as a common Saturnalian pastime, see e.g. *Epigrams* 5.30:

Varro, *Sophocleo non infitiande cothurno*
nec minus in Calabria suspiciende lyra,
differ opus nec te facundi scaena Catulli
detineat cultis aut elegia comis;
sed lege fumoso non aspernanda Decembri 5
carmina, mittuntur quae tibi mense suo:
commodius nisi forte tibi potiusque uidetur
Saturnalicias perdere, Varro, nuces.

On which poem, see Howell (1995) *ad loc*; for more on *nuces Saturnaliciae*, see 14.1.12, with Leary (1996) *ad loc*.

¹²⁴ Leary (1996) *ad loc*.

¹²⁵ On the *Apophoreta*, see Citroni (1989) 206-12; Sullivan (1991) 12-15; Leary (1996) 1-28; Roman (2001) 130-38; Barchiesi (2005) 326-30; Stroup (2006); Hinds (2007) 139-46.

‘Receive the alternate lots of the rich man and the poor man: let each man give to his guest the reward he deserves.’

Throughout the *Apophoreta* we see, therefore, an alternation between expensive gifts and cheaper gifts; the former are the gifts suitable to be given by the rich man (R), the latter suitable to be given by the poor man (P).¹²⁶ So, for instance, a statuette of Hercules in Corinthian bronze (14.177) is expensive, thus R, and contrasts with a statuette of Hercules made of clay (14.178) which is cheap, and thus P; or, to pick another random example, an ivory cashbox (14.12) is expensive, thus R, while a wooden cashbox (14.13) is cheap, thus P.

This alternation between expensive and cheap versions of the same sort of object becomes intriguing when we turn to the gifts which comprise literary works. It is important to present all of the literary gifts mentioned by Martial for an understanding of what is going on here; but rather than clog up the page with the complete epigrams for each entry, I will simply provide the lemmata to each of the epigrams. I will, furthermore, group the gifts into their respective blocks of expensive and cheap:

Gift of rich man - R

Gift of poor man - P

14.183: Homeri Batrachomachia

14.184: Homerus in pugillaribus membranis

14.185: Vergili Culex.

14.186: Vergilius in membranis

14.187: Μενάνδρου Θαίς

14.188: Cicero in membranis.

14.189: Monobyblos Properti.

14.190: Titus Livius in membranis.

¹²⁶ In the use of (R) and (P) I follow Leary (1996) 13-21, who usefully arranges the epigrams into the two camps, following mainly the views of Birt (1882) and Friedländer (1886).

14.191: Sallustius.

14.192: Ovidi Metamorphosis in membranis.

14.193: Tibullus.

14.194: Lucanus.

14.195: Catullus.

14.196: Calvi de aquae frigidae usu.

The scheme I have reproduced here is that provided by Leary; he justifies his schematization of epigrams 14.183-14.196 as follows: 'Since the received order of epigrams and the RP sequence [sc. rich man / poor man alternation] agree both before and after this section, we can assume provisionally that they do here too.'¹²⁷ But the end result looks rather odd; again, I quote from Leary's commentary: 'Such an assumption yields surprising results, however. Why is it that major works like the Homeric epics, Virgil, Cicero, Livy and the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid are P while trifles such as the *Batrachomachia*, the *Culex*, Menander's *Thais* and Propertius Book 1 are not?'¹²⁸ Why indeed? A range of explanations has been offered:¹²⁹ perhaps parchment (the material of the majority of the items in P) was cheaper than papyrus (the material of the items in R); perhaps the works listed under P were more popular and easier to produce, and thus cheaper; perhaps the items under R were rare pieces or collectors' items, and thus accrued additional expense; or perhaps the text itself is unreliable – items might have dropped out, or become jumbled up, so that items listed under R above might belong under P and vice versa.¹³⁰ Or perhaps we would do better to hold fire with our judgments, as Leary suggests: 'Rather than indulge in

¹²⁷ Leary (1996) 19.

¹²⁸ Leary (1996) 19. Cf. the comments of Roman (2001) 134 n.70: 'This alternation of light and serious is interestingly juxtaposed with the collection's central motif of alternation between poor and rich gifts...Literary weight and seriousness may be reduced to the scope of a modest codex, while a relatively trivial work may be granted the honour of a deluxe edition.'

¹²⁹ Leary (1996) 19-20 usefully surveys the range of opinions.

¹³⁰ Friedländer (1886) 299-300 (vol. 2), for instance, thinks that the items on parchment – listed under P by Leary – are in fact the expensive gifts, while the gifts on papyrus are the cheap gifts; he also thinks several items have dropped out of the text, which explains the somewhat odd couplings like Menander and Cicero, and Propertius and Livy.

such speculative explanation, I prefer to say that at present there is no sure way of valuing these literary works and that therefore an open verdict is best.¹³¹

But if we do allow the groupings set out above to stand – if only for the sake of argument – we might tentatively suggest an interpretation which has to do with literary polemic and self-positioning. For we can see that the gifts under R are nearly all what one would label slender or small-scale works: the *Batrachomyomachia*, the *Culex*, Menander's *Thais*, Propertius' *Monobiblos*, Tibullus and Catullus are all works of diminutive stature.¹³² These diminutive works are, nonetheless, presented as the expensive gifts. On the other hand, the gifts under P are nearly all what one would label tumescent, large-scale works: Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the complete Virgil, Cicero, Livy, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Lucan all represent grand compositions of epic proportions.¹³³ These large-scale works are presented as cheap gifts. Is it possible that Martial is here ascribing material value to works of literature that he values for certain literary principles? That is to say, he ascribes greater material value to small-scale works like the *Culex* by presenting them as gifts of the rich man; but this ascription of material value is also a reflection of literary value – Martial, the relentless champion of the diminutive epigrammatic form, mischievously makes a bunch of trivial works appear more valuable than their grander literary cousins in order to score a hit for small-scale poetry. Needless to say, none of this should be taken *too* seriously; making the *Culex* seem more valuable than the *Aeneid* might carry undertones of literary polemic, but it is also meant to be a humorous inversion of received values.

¹³¹ Leary (1996) 20.

¹³² Sallust is obviously a problem here; if he belongs in this grouping at all, perhaps we have a reference to his truncated, proto-Tacitean style – in contrast to the luxuriant periods of the prolix Livy?

¹³³ Calvus (presumably the neoteric poet of the epyllion *Io* and friend of Catullus) is a problem here, but the reading is by no means certain. The poet L. Iulius Calidus has been suggested, with support from some manuscripts; and Calidus would provide a neat pun in the context of a work on the uses of cold water; on reading Calidus here, see Hermann (1968). In any case, textual corruption or a lacuna seems highly probable; see Leary (1996) *ad loc.*

6. A final ambiguity.

We began this chapter by looking at authors who locate the beginning of the Virgilian career in the *Eclogues*; we then progressed to authors who find a new beginning in the *Culex*. In the light of these two distinct starting points for the Virgilian career, I want now briefly to consider the following notorious passage:

Ille ego qui quondam gracili modulatus avena
carmina et egressus silvis vicina coegi,
ut quamvis avido parerent arva colono,
gratum opus agricolis, at nunc horrentia Martis...

(VSD 42)

'I am he who once sang my tunes on a slender pipe; having left the woods I compelled the neighbouring fields to obey the farmer (although he was greedy) – a work pleasing to farmers; and now the bristling [arms] of Mars...'

This is, of course, the alternative opening to the *Aeneid*; an opening which the grammarian Nisus claimed was removed from the poem by Virgil's posthumous editor, Varius.¹³⁴ Debate has raged over the authenticity or otherwise of these famous lines; to this debate I have nothing new to add.¹³⁵ What I would point out is that the presentation of the Virgilian career in these lines is not as clear-cut as it is usually

¹³⁴ VSD 42: *Nisus grammaticus audisse se a senioribus aiebat, Varium duorum librorum ordinem commutasse, et qui nunc secundus sit in tertium locum transtulisse, etiam primi libri correxisse principium, his versibus demptis: ille ego qui quondam....*

¹³⁵ The case against Virgilian authorship is forcefully argued by Austin (1968); Hansen (1972) is a systematic response to Austin arguing for authenticity; see also e.g. Koster (1988) 31-47 (arguing for authenticity); Brandt (1927-28) suggests the lines (which he does not consider to be Virgil's) were placed under a portrait of Virgil in a deluxe edition of his works; Farrell (2004) 46-53 argues that Ovid knew of this alternative opening, and that his frequent use of the *ille ego (qui)* formulation is an allusion to it; Farrell is here building upon Conte (1986) 84-87, who reads the epigram at the beginning of the *Amores (Qui modo Nasonis...)* as a riff on the alternative *Aeneid* opening.

made out to be. That is to say, the default reading of these lines is to see transparent references to the three canonical works: the *Eclogues* (*quondam...carmina*) are followed by the *Georgics* (*vicina...agricolis*), which are capped by the work about to begin, namely the *Aeneid* (*at nunc horrentia Martis...*).¹³⁶ The allusions to the *Eclogues* in the first two lines are well-known: the phrase *gracili modulatus avena* and the emphasis on the sylvan setting (*egressus silvis*) have clear analogues in the *Eclogues*.¹³⁷ But what is seldom remarked upon is the clear similarity between the opening line of this proem and the first line of the *Culex*:

Lusimus, Octavi, gracili modulante Thalia...

(*Culex* 1)

Fraenkel does note the similarity and comments as follows: 'Unfortunately we cannot say whether the first line of the *Culex* depends on the first line of the faked proem to the *Aeneid*... or whether this proem draws on the *Culex*'.¹³⁸ Pearce, however, argues that it is the unknown author of the *Culex* who is here drawing on the faked proem, and not the other way around. He comments:

... it seems quite likely that the author of the *Culex* was drawing on *ille ego*... the author of the *Culex* may have been led to use the unusual construction in his efforts to fit what lay before him into his own composition. And it is possible that he was influenced by the *Eclogues* directly, his *Thalia* being prompted by *E.* 6.2.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ See e.g. Putnam (2010) 17-18.

¹³⁷ Cf. *Ec.* 10.71: *gracili fiscellam textit hibisco*, with Servius *ad loc.* on the resonance of *gracilis* as a term denoting poetic style; *Ec.* 10.51: *carmina pastoris Siculi modulabor avena*; *Ec.* 1.2: *silvestrem tenui musam meditaris avena*; *Ec.* 4.3: *si canimus silvas, silvae sint consule dignae*; *Ec.* 6.2: *nostra nec erubuit silvas habitare Thalea*.

¹³⁸ Fraenkel (1952) 8, as part of an article which argues that the *Culex* is a forgery.

¹³⁹ Pearce (1970) 338.

Pearce sees the first line of the *Culex* as referencing the start of *Eclogues* 6, as well as the part of the faked proem which details the *Eclogues*. That is one possibility. But it is the other possibility which interests me: this is the possibility, mentioned but not developed by Fraenkel, that it is the author of the proem who is in fact referencing the start of the *Culex*. For if we read the opening two lines of the proem as alluding to both the *Eclogues* and the *Culex*, we might speculate that the author of this proem is cunningly nodding towards the 'double' start of the Virgilian career which we have been detailing in this chapter. In other words, the allusions in the proem to both the *Eclogues* and the *Culex* remind us that the start of Virgil's poetic career was a contested and unstable entity in antiquity; either of these two poems could be made to stand for Virgil's poetic initiation.

Conclusion.

In this chapter we have considered how later writers found the 'Virgilian career' a useful construct with which to think. How they configure Virgil's poetic development tells us not only how they read and respond to the Virgilian oeuvre, but also how they delineate aspects of their own poetic autobiographies against the Virgilian precedent. Our focus has been on Virgil's poetic initiation and how this was a contested area within antiquity. While Propertius and Ovid concentrate their attentions on the *Eclogues* as Virgil's poetic debut, their configuration was not accepted chapter and verse by later writers: Lucan, Statius and Martial expand the range of responses to the Virgilian career by thinking about how the *Culex* fits into this scheme. In the case of Lucan we have considered how the (self-)portrayal of this poet against the precedent of the *Culex* is full of nuance and interpretative uncertainty. The *Culex* quip is not a simple articulation of Lucan's Virgilian heritage: Lucan (who uttered the quip), Suetonius (who reports it) and Statius (who alludes to

it) each provide their own unique spin on this point of comparison with Virgil's early career, illustrating in the process the malleability of the Virgilian life as a tool with which to construct other poetic identities. In the case of Statius we further considered how his particular response to the *Culex* as the Virgilian debut is filtered through a Lucanian lens; and how his response to the *Culex* forms an analogue to his response to the *Aeneid*. In the next section we looked at Martial's unique take on the *Culex*: how he uses it in 8.55 as a tool with which to trivialize and make light of the Virgilian achievement in a way which combines light-hearted ribaldry with literary polemic; and how the *Culex*'s appearance in the *Apophoreta* can be fitted into a wider programme of attributing greater value to trivial works than to loftier compositions. Finally, we considered the possibility that the alternative opening to the *Aeneid* cunningly alludes to the double start of the Virgilian career by nodding towards both the *Eclogues* and the *Culex* as the first works in Virgil's canon.

Chapter 2.

The cult of Virgil: the tomb and beyond.

1. Preamble.

The Underworld is well-known as a place where epic heroes encounter their pasts and, indeed, their futures: we need only think of Odysseus in the eleventh book of the *Odyssey*, or of Aeneas in the sixth book of the *Aeneid*, or of Dante in the *Divine Comedy*. But it is not only these epic heroes who are afforded an opportunity to review their pasts by such *katabaseis*; for it is also well-known that the underworld is a place where poets encounter their own poetic ancestry – their own forefathers in the epic tradition. As Hardie puts it, ‘within an epic poem the epic Underworld is especially privileged as a repository of tradition: the world of the dead is a storehouse of the past of a family, and of the past of a society, and to travel to the house of the dead is to reconnect with that past.’¹⁴⁰ In his essay Hardie ‘explores some of the uses to which the Virgilian Underworld, as a place of tradition and memory, is put within the later tradition of epic poetry, as poets use this traditional epic *topos* to define their own poems’ relationship both to the Virgilian epic tradition and to the traditions of their own cultures.’¹⁴¹

The Underworld is one manifestation of the idea of a house of the dead – in this instance it is a house of *all* the dead. But another manifestation of this idea of a house of the dead can be seen in the construction of a tomb; a house of the dead on a smaller scale, containing as it does the remains of an individual (or family grouping).¹⁴² In this chapter it is Virgil’s tomb and the cult which grew up in connection with it which will provide the connective thread as we continue to

¹⁴⁰ Hardie (2004) 143.

¹⁴¹ Hardie (2004) 143.

¹⁴² On Roman burial practices, see Toynbee (1971).

explore the reception of the Virgilian biography by his poetic successors. After some introductory material I shall narrow the focus to two poets, Statius and Silius Italicus, investigating how they use the tomb of Virgil as a useful tool with which to configure their relationship to that poet and also to fashion themselves as poets. In the case of Silius, his interaction with Virgil's tomb will serve as a platform from which to launch a detailed exploration of his characterization in the epigrams of Martial as the devotee of a Virgilian cult.

Virgil's tomb has a colourful history.¹⁴³ Situated a couple of miles outside Naples on the Via Puteolana (*VSD* 36), it has exerted a magnetic influence on literary figures throughout the centuries, with Petrarch and Boccaccio being among the more illustrious visitors. Even St Paul was said to have made a pilgrimage to Virgil's final resting place, addressing him as *maxime poetarum* and lamenting the fact that he lived before the coming of Christ:

Ad Maronis mausoleum
Ductus fudit super eum
Piae rorem lacrimae;

"Quem te, inquit, redidissem,
Si te vivum invenissem,
Poetarum maxime!"

'When to Virgil's tomb they brought him,
Tender grief and pity wrought him,
To bedew the tomb with tears;

"What a saint I might have crowned thee,

¹⁴³ See Trapp (1984) for a wide-ranging survey of the theme; also Trapp (1986); *VMA* 273-79, in which Comparetti discusses the intriguing legend of 'an eccentric Englishman [who] got into his head the idea of procuring the bones of Vergil and of extracting from them by some magical means that treasure of hidden knowledge which the world attributed to the poet' (275).

Had I only living found thee,
Poet first and without peers!''''¹⁴⁴

But even within antiquity itself the tomb of Virgil received the attention of the literati. Lucan, Statius and Silius are all, for instance, in some way connected with the tomb of Virgil. Before we investigate these sepulchral engagements it will, however, be useful to lay down some Virgilian foundations; for the interest of later epic poets in Virgil's tomb might be seen to replay – and, indeed, to play with – Virgil's own play with the sepulchral associations of his poetic forebears.

In the proem to *Georgics* 3 (1-48) Virgil contemplates the epic poem he is preparing to write in the near future; an epic poem which is metaphorically figured as a temple housing Caesar in its inner sanctum. The conceit of the poem as building or monument is an ancient one, going back at least as far as Pindar.¹⁴⁵ In the build-up to this temple conceit, Virgil expresses a desire to find an original path to poetic immortality; an original path which will avoid the trite themes of hackneyed literature (*omnia iam vulgata*, 3.4). Here is Virgil's expression of that desire:

temptanda via est, qua me quoque possim
8
tollere humo victorque virum volitare per ora.

¹⁴⁴ The text can be found in Capasso (1983) 136 n.40; the translation is by J.A. Symonds, reprinted in Putnam & Ziolkowski (2008) 413. Trapp (1984) 4 comments: 'The visit is apocryphal. The verses, or at least the tale they tell, probably belong to the late twelfth or thirteenth century, the time when other Vergil legends were fabricated. They were current by the mid-fourteenth century at the latest, for Petrarch records them in his prized manuscript of Vergil, decorated to his order by Simone Martini soon after 1338, into which he transcribed memoranda of his literary, spiritual and amatory experience.'

¹⁴⁵ Pindar, *Ol.* 6.1-4: χρυσέας ὑποστάσαντες εὐτειχεῖ προθύρῳ θαλάμου / κίονας, ὡς ὅτε θαητὸν μέγαρον / πάξομεν: ἀρχομένου δ' ἔργου πρόσωπον / χρῆθ' ἔμεν τηλαυγές; *Pyth.* 6.5-18: Πυθιονίκος ἔνθ' ὀλβίοισιν Ἐμμενίδαϊς / ποταμία τ' Ἀκράγαντι καὶ μὲν Ξενοκράτει / ἔτοιμος ὕμνων / θησαυρὸς ἐν πολυχρύσῳ / Ἀπολλωνία τετείχισται νάπα, / τὸν οὔτε χειμέριος ὄμβρος ἐπακτὸς ἐλθὼν, / ἐριβρόμου νεφέλας / στρατὸς ἀμείλιχος, οὔτ' ἄνεμος ἐς μυχοῦς / ἀλὸς ἄξιοισι παμφόρῳ χεράδει / τυπτόμενον. φάει δὲ πρόσωπον ἐν καθαρῷ / πατρὶ τεῶ, Θρασύβουλε, κοινὰν τε γενεᾶ / λόγοισι θνατῶν / εὐδοξὸν ἄρματι νίκαν / Κρισιαίαισιν ἐν πτυχαῖς ἀπαγγελεῖ; see also Mynors (1990) *ad* G.3.13. For the influence of Pindar on the proem to *Georgics* 3, see Wilkinson (1970); for the possibility of a Callimachean precedent in the *Victoria Berenices*, see Thomas (1983b) 97-99.

primus ego in patriam mecum, modo vita supersit,	10
Aonio rediens deducam vertice Musas;	
primus Idumaeas referam tibi, Mantua, palmas	12
et viridi in campo templum de marmore ponam...	

(G.3.8-13)

‘A path must be tried by which I might be able to raise myself also from the ground and fly victoriously on the lips of men. If only I survive, I shall be the first, returning to my homeland, to lead the Muses with me from the Aonian peak; I shall be the first to bring back to you, Mantua, the Idumaeen palms and to set-up a marble temple on the verdant plain...’

On the one hand we have a strong claim for poetic originality and trail-blazing: the *via* which must be essayed (*temptanda est*) contrasts with the trite literature which has gone before (*omnia iam vulgata*); the emphasis on primacy (*primus...primus*) could not be stronger. But on the other hand the dense literariness of this passage belies its claims to pure originality; the allusions to Pindar, to Callimachus, to Ennius and to Lucretius (among others) reveal how embedded Virgil is in a rich poetic tradition which cannot simply be ignored.¹⁴⁶ For our purposes, the most important intertextual reference comes in lines 8-9, where Virgil clearly alludes to Ennius’ self-penned epitaph:

Nemo me lacrimis deceat nec funera fletu
faxit. cur? voluto vivos per ora virum.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ For the dense intertextuality of these lines, see Thomas (1988) *ad loc.*

¹⁴⁷ Enn., *varia* 17-18 V²; the epitaph was known to Cicero, who quotes it at *Tusc. Disp.* 1.34: *Loquor de principibus: quid poetae? nonne post mortem nobilitari volunt? Unde ergo illud? "Aspicite, o cives, senis Enni imaginis formam: / his vestrum panxit maxuma facta partum."* Mercedem gloriae flagitat ab iis, quorum patres adfecerat gloria, idemque: "Nemo me lacrimis. Cur? voluto vivos per ora virum"; also *Tusc. Disp.* 1. 117: *Quod si fiat, melior Ennii quam Solonis oratio. Hic enim noster: "Nemo me lacrimis deceat" inquit, "nec funera fletu faxit".*

‘Let nobody honour me with tears nor bury me with lamentation. Why? Alive I fly on the lips of men.’

Whether this epitaph actually adorned the tomb of Ennius, or whether it is simply one more example of the literary conceit of the funerary epigram is beside the point here.¹⁴⁸ If this epitaph really did adorn the tomb of Ennius, then we witness Virgil playing with an allusion to a real, physically inscribed sepulchral epigram; but if the epitaph is a literary conceit which did not exist as something actually chiselled into stone, then we simply have to modify our terms of reference: Virgil is now playing with an allusion to a text which presents itself as a physical sepulchral inscription.¹⁴⁹ In either scenario the important point remains the same: Virgil uses the Ennian epitaph (be it something physical or ‘literary’) – an epitaph which functions as Ennius’ summation of his poetic glory – as a medium through which to construct a pivotal moment in his own poetic autobiography, and also to think about his own ambivalent status as a successor of Ennius. Virgil’s allusion to the Ennian epitaph is ambivalent for the following reasons: the very fact that Virgil’s presents his own poetic autobiography in Ennian terms suggests a kind of deference to the Ennian model, as he follows in his epic predecessor’s footsteps; but the adoption of the Ennian epitaph, along with the powerful assertions of originality in the proem as a whole (the repeated use of *primus* and so forth), can also be read as an attempt by Virgil to supplant Ennius – to take his place in the Latin canon.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ The literary genre of epigram developed, of course, out of physical inscriptions such as epitaphs, dedications etc. The Hellenistic era witnessed a flourishing of the literary epigram (i.e. epigrams which were non-inscriptional), and imagined epitaphs (often for writers) were an especially popular field. On Hellenistic epigram generally, see Fantuzzi & Hunter (2004) 283-349; for discussion of Hellenistic epigrams on various Greek authors, see e.g. Fantuzzi (2007) and Rosen (2007); for discussion of Hellenistic epigrams dealing specifically with Euripides, especially matters concerning his death and tomb (including epitaphs), see Knöbl (2008) 86-121. See Aulus Gellius, *NA* 1.24 for the supposedly self-penned epitaphs of Naevius, Plautus and Pacuvius.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. the comments of Thomas (1998b): ‘I shall use the terms ‘functional’ and ‘literary’ to distinguish epigrams that are destined for epigraphical ends from those that at best only pose as doing so. *Often it will be hard to tell the difference since the fiction of functionality is part of the essence of the developing epigrammatic genre*’ (my emphasis).

¹⁵⁰ For Virgil’s ‘undoing’ of Ennius, see Goldenhard (2007a).

Virgil's engagement with the Ennian epitaph illustrates how tombs, along with their associated paraphernalia (epitaphs, commemorative rites, cult practices, statues and so forth), are useful things with which to think about one's past and one's place in a tradition, be it literary or historical, or a combination of the two. Tombs are locations which provoke thought in those who observe them: thoughts about the deceased and what they represent, naturally; but also thoughts about the observer's own relationship with the departed. We need only think of Alexander at the tomb of Achilles:

Quam multos scriptores rerum suarum magnus ille Alexander secum habuisse dicitur! Atque is tamen, cum in Sigeo ad Achillis tumulum astitisset: 'O fortunate' inquit 'adulescens, qui tuae virtutis Homerum praeconem inveneris!' Et vere. Nam nisi Ilias illa exstisset, idem tumulus, qui corpus eius contexerat, nomen etiam obruisset.

(Cicero, *Pro Archia* 10.24)

'How many chroniclers of his own deeds is Alexander said to have kept with him! However, when he stood before the tomb of Achilles at Sigeum, he said: "O lucky youth, since you had Homer as the teller of your heroism!" And he spoke truthfully. For if the *Iliad* had not existed, the tomb which covered Achilles' body would also have obliterated his fame.'

2. The *Epitaphium Lucani*.

Although we have no story in the biographical tradition about Lucan ever visiting the tomb of Virgil, we are told that Lucan's own tomb featured a (putatively) self-penned epitaph which very consciously reworks the famous Virgilian epitaph. Here are the respective epitaphs:

Mantua me genuit, Calabri rapuere, tenet nunc
Parthenope. cecini pascua rura duces.

(VSD 36)

‘Mantua gave me birth, the Calabrians snatched me away, Parthenope now holds me. I sang of pastures, fields and leaders.’

Corduba me genuit, rapuit Nero, proelia dixi,
 quae gessere pares hinc socer, inde gener. 2
Continuo numquam direxi carmina ductu,
 quae tractim serpant: plus mihi comma placet. 4
[Fulminis in morem, quae sunt miranda, citentur:
 Haec vere sapiet dictio, quae feriet.]¹⁵¹

‘Corduba gave me birth, Nero snatched me away, I told of the wars which a father-in-law and son-in-law waged equally. I never composed my poems with a continuous flow that they might slip along fluently: the short clause pleases me more. Things which are to be marvelled at must be stirred into life like a thunderbolt: the phrase which blasts you is the one which truly has savour.’

The opening line of the *epitaphium Lucani* is clearly playing on the Virgilian epitaph: the place of birth + *me genuit* + a form of the verb *rapere*, and the identical scansion make this evident. We need not concern ourselves here with lines 2-6 of the *epitaphium Lucani*: they have no precedent in the Virgilian epitaph, although it is worth noting, with Heitland, that ‘as a description of Lucan’s style lines 3-6 are good’.¹⁵² In the first line of the *epitaphium Lucani*, then, is an example of how the Lucanian biography has been moulded to come into contact with the Virgilian

¹⁵¹ Hosius (1905) 338; *AL* 668 Riese.

¹⁵² From Heitland’s introduction to Haskins (1887) xx.

model. But what sort of contact is this supposed to be? Are we dealing with pious reverence, with imitation being the sincerest form of flattery? Or are we dealing with bolshy competitiveness and a desire to overtop and replace one's forebears? The problem is the same as that which we encountered when looking at the *Culex* quip: the interaction with a Virgilian precedent is capable of being interpreted in two opposed ways. Can any of the ancient sources for this epitaph help us to judge its tone? The majority of them cannot: the epitaph is found in manuscripts of the *Bellum Civile*, but in none of these instances are we told how to judge the tone of the epitaph. There is, however, one interesting exception: Aldhelm, abbot of Malmesbury and later of Sherborne, preserves the first line of the epitaph and he does comment on its rhetorical thrust:¹⁵³

Chronica Eusebii Vergilium imminente metu mortis cecinisse tradunt et
epigramma, quod epitaphium vocatur, ad suprema exequiarum funera
composuisse dicendo

Mantua me genuit, Calabri rapuere, tenet nunc;

...Quem Lucanus aemulans his verbis imitabatur dicens

Corduba me genuit, rapuit Nero, proelia dixi...

(Aldhelm, *de metris* 10)¹⁵⁴

'The *Chronica* of Eusebius report that Virgil, under the fear of imminent death, sang some poetry and composed an epigram – which is called an epitaph – for

¹⁵³ Aldhelm dates are c.639-709. For a reconstruction of Aldhelm's career and a revised chronology of his various writings, see Lapidge (2007); for Aldhelm's knowledge of the Virgilian commentary tradition, see Murgia (1987), who concludes: 'we cannot prove that Aldhelm knew either Servius or Servius Auctus, but we have good evidence to indicate that he probably knew the Virgilian commentary of Aelius Donatus' (291). Orchard (1994) 130-35 considers Aldhelm's knowledge of Virgil. Lapidge & Herren (1979) and Lapidge & Rosier (1985) provide useful translations of the prose and poetic works respectively.

¹⁵⁴ Text can be found at *MGH AA* 15.88-89.

the last rites of his funeral, by saying: "Mantua gave me birth, the Calabrians snatched me away, now [Parthenope] hold me" ...Lucan, emulating Virgil, imitated this with the following words: "Corduba gave me birth, Nero snatched me away, I spoke of wars..."'

Aldhelm, then, recognises that Lucan is here imitating the Virgilian epitaph (*imitabatur*) and says that he did this to emulate (*aemulans*) Virgil (*quem*). That Aldhelm speaks of *aemulatio* would suggest that he sees in the *epitaphium Lucani* an instance of Lucan challenging Virgil. For while *aemulatio* as a general concept can be something positive or negative, it always carries the idea of rivalry to some degree. But whether Aldhelm means to condemn Lucan for this rivalry (as Suetonius does in the *Vita Lucani* in the anecdote about the *Culex* quip) cannot be determined from this scant evidence. But, in a sense, it does not matter whether we interpret the *epitaphium Lucani* as a challenge or a tribute to the Virgilian life: what does matter is that, once again, it is the Virgilian life which is used as a measure for the Lucanian life. The ancient biographical traditions surrounding Lucan find it instructive, on occasion, to bring him into contact with Virgil; a fact which reflects their appreciation of Lucan's inescapable Virgilian inheritance, and their appreciation of Lucan's desire to challenge this inheritance through his verse.

3. Statius at the tomb of Virgil; *Silvae* 4.4.

Silvae 4.4 is a letter addressed by Statius to Vitorius Marcellus (1-11).¹⁵⁵ It is summer and people are escaping Rome and heading for cooler, more relaxing climes (12-29). It is a time for rest from labour; rest which will facilitate the recharging of batteries (30-38). Marcellus, an eminent lawyer in the centumviral court, is likewise taking a break from his legal duties (39-45). Marcellus' busy life as a lawyer is contrasted with

¹⁵⁵ On *Silvae* 4.4, see Hardie (1983) 164-71 (who argues that Horace, *Epistles* 1.8 is a key model for this poem); Nauta (2002) 213-16; for details on Marcellus' life, see Coleman (1988) 135-37.

Stattius' indolent existence as a poet on the bay of Naples (46-55). After mentioning Marcellus' devotion to Domitian and his role as *curator Viae Latinae* (56-60), Stattius then eulogizes Marcellus' abilities as a general and speculates on what military commissions might be coming his way (61-69). Marcellus pursues a life of action, laying down good examples to be imitated by his young son; but Stattius drifts into old age singing about the great deeds of others rather than performing them himself (69-77). Stattius then comments on how he is writing this letter from the shadow of Vesuvius, musing on the unbelievable destruction which the eruption of AD 79 has wrought; devastation which Stattius prays will never afflict Marcellus' own neighbourhood of Teate (78-86). We are next given a report of Stattius' poetic career: the *Thebaid* is finished; the *Achilleid* has been embarked upon; but Stattius is also pondering whether to write an epic in praise of Domitian's military victories – although he fears such a mighty task might overwhelm him (87-100). The poem ends with Stattius asking Marcellus to keep him in his affections, citing various mythological exempla of enduring friendship (101-105).

It is in the central section of the epistle, at a moment when Stattius is comparing the active life of Marcellus with his own inactive life, that we encounter the Virgilian tomb:

felix curarum, cui non Heliconia cordi	46
serta nec imbelles Parnasi e vertice laurus,	
sed viget ingenium et magnos accinctus in usus	
fert animus quascumque vices. nos otia vitae	
solamur cantu ventosaeque gaudia famae	50
quaerimus. en egomet somnum et geniale secutus	
litus ubi Ausonio se condidit hospita portu	
Parthenope, tenues ignavo pollice chordas	
pulso, Maroneique sedens in margine templi	
sumo animum et magni tumulis accanto magistri.	55

(*Silvae* 4.4.46-55)

'You [sc. Marcellus] are blessed in your cares, you who have no interest in the garlands of Helicon or unwarlike laurel from the summit of Parnassus; your genius flourishes and your spirit, made ready for great affairs, bears whatever twists of fortune come. I solace myself for the laziness of my life with song and seek the transient joys of fame. Look! Having sought sleep and the blithesome coast where Parthenope, a refugee, hid herself in the Ausonian harbour, I pluck the slender strings with a lazy thumb, and sitting on the edge of Virgil's shrine I take heart and sing to the tomb of my great teacher.'¹⁵⁶

Marcellus has no time for poetry as he pursues his important political career; Statius, on the other hand, lives a life of indolence (*otium*), and consoles himself for his lack of action by writing poetry which he hopes might bring him renown. The contrast between the active life of the orator, who pursues the *artes maximae*, and the leisured life of the poet, who pursues the *artes mediocres*, is conventional.¹⁵⁷ The default interpretation of the final lines of this segment has been to see in Statius' reference to Virgil a strong display of respect and deferential admiration: by calling Virgil his *magnus magister*, Statius pays due respect to the poet who exerts such a great influence upon him; and the religious colouring of the passage (*templum*) suggests the religious veneration of Virgil which is familiar to us from Silius:

In a passage like this, and in the impression which the *Silvae* generally leave with us, Statius has drawn his own portrait as that of the studious and scholarly poet, wholly devoted to his art. His concern is with the music of

¹⁵⁶ Parthenope, one of the sirens, was buried at Naples, and thus the city was also known by her name; Pliny the Elder, *Nat.* 3.62: *litore autem Neapolis, Chalcidensium et ipsa, Parthenope a tumulo Sirenis appellata.*

¹⁵⁷ Vessey (1973) 23: '...the arguments of [Tacitus'] *Dialogus* come to mind, and again Statius is compelled to bow to the superiority of the active life over poetic *otium*. The comparison between the life of orator and poet is a natural one in a society which regarded poetry as essentially an occupation for periods of *otium* and where oratorical efficiency and involvement in public life were traditionally held to be a man's highest vocation.' For further references on the oratory / poetry comparison, see Coleman (1988) *ad* 4.4.46-47.

words: resolute action and practical energy are not for him. We observe further a kind of religious veneration for Virgil, feelings of homage and adoration which he shared with his contemporary Silius.¹⁵⁸

This sense of reverence is certainly very strong and does constitute what we might call the surface meaning of the passage. But it should also be noted that coupled with this reverence is a certain degree of pride and self-confidence. The very fact that Statius sings to the tomb of his great master suggests that he is confident in his ability to sing something worthy of Virgil; for it is not an easy thing to sing to such a mighty figure – courage is needed (*sumo animum*), and courage is what Statius shows he has in this regard. We have the impression of watching a talented pupil, Statius, displaying his skills to the teacher who has nurtured his talents. But Statius' self-confidence in his ability to sing to the disembodied spirit of his mentor can also be seen as a mark of reverence: Statius' ability to sing something worthy of Virgil's ears is, in large part, due to the Virgilian poetic inheritance that he has absorbed so assiduously.¹⁵⁹

But, as often with Statius, there is more to this passage from *Silvae* 4.4 than at first meets the eye. The location at Virgil's tomb, combined with the contrast between a man of action and a poet, and the mention of Parthenope must surely put us in mind of the *sphragis* to the *Georgics*:¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Hardie (1916) 6; see also e.g. Vessey (1973) 45-46, who likewise comments that 'to Virgil...was given the formal place of honour in the homage of Statius' (46).

¹⁵⁹ Virgil was not, of course, the only formative influence on Statius; his reading of the Greek poets was also of great importance to his development as a poet, on which topic see Holford-Strevens (2000), McNelis (2002).

¹⁶⁰ On the *sphragis* to the *Georgics*, see e.g. Gale (2003) 324-28, who concludes: 'Despite its apparent finality, then, the *sphragis* functions as a bald restatement rather than a resolution of tensions that, as we shall see, pervade the poem as a whole. The high degree of formal closure achieved in these lines serves, if anything, to point up the work's resistance to closure on the thematic level and, more specifically, the open-endedness of the series of passages scattered through the poem that foreground the problematic issue of the relationship between poet and *princeps*' (328).

Haec super arborum cultu pecorumque canebam
 et super arboribus, Caesar dum magnus ad altum 560
 fulminat Euphraten bello victorque volentis
 per populos dat iura viamque adfectat Olympo.
 Illo Vergilium me tempore dulcis alebat
 Parthenope, studiis florentem ignobilis oti,
 carmina qui lusi pastorum audaxque iuventa, 565
 Tityre, te patulae cecini sub tegmine fagi.

(*Georgics* 4.559-66)

‘So much I sang in addition to the care of fields, of cattle, and of trees, while great Caesar thundered in war by deep Euphrates and bestowed a victor’s laws on willing nations, and essayed the path to heaven. In those days I, Virgil, was nursed by sweet Parthenope, and rejoiced in the arts of inglorious ease – I who toyed with shepherds’ songs, and, in youth’s boldness, sang of you, Tityrus, under the canopy of a spreading beech.’

That Statius has this passage from Virgil in mind is noted by Coleman in her commentary. She notes how both passages make the contrast between men of action and men of leisured, poetic ease; how both passages associate Naples (called, significantly, Parthenope in each case) with *otium* and the composition of poetry; and how both poets associate this poetic *otium* with the idea of pleasant indolence (cf. Statius’ *ignavus pollex* (*Silvae* 4.4.53) with Virgil’s *ignobile otium* (*Georgics* 4.564)).¹⁶¹ A further association we might add to Coleman’s list is the following: the *sphragis* as a literary device has much in common with notions of the epitaph: in a *sphragis* a poet sums up his poetic achievements and stamps his seal of authorship on them; in literary epitaphs – which are often written in the first person – the poet likewise offers a summary of his literary life, claiming ownership of his poetry and meditating

¹⁶¹ Coleman (1988) *ad* 4.4.46-7, 51-2 and 53; it is worth adding to Coleman’s correspondences the fact that *Parthenope* occupies the same metrical *sedes* in *G.4.564* and *Silvae* 4.4.53 and is in enjambment in both cases.

on his fate among posterity.¹⁶² Indeed, Bettini has suggested that the Virgilian epitaph (*Mantua me genuit...*) constitutes a subtle reworking of the *sphragis* to the *Georgics*: the unknown author of the Virgilian epitaph reworked the *sphragis* precisely because of its affinities with literary epitaphs.¹⁶³ Given this similarity between the *sphragis* as a literary device and the idea of an epitaph, there is a particular resonance in the fact that Statius references the *sphragis* to the *Georgics* while contemplating Virgil's tomb with its famous epitaph.

The most interesting feature of Statius' encounter with the Virgilian tomb is, perhaps, the way in which Statius, via the intertextuality with the *sphragis* to the *Georgics*, actually assimilates his own life with that of Virgil's. For in his self-portrait as a leisured poet who wiles away the time in Naples while others perform political and military feats, Statius is making his life resemble Virgil's. But as Statius sits at the Virgilian tomb and lazily composes poetry for the statesman Marcellus, he is not simply alluding to Virgil's life as it is presented at the end of the *Georgics*; he is actually, in one sense, reliving it – he has assumed the role and the guise of Virgil. What effect does this assimilation have? As we saw in our discussion of his use of the *Culex* in the preface to *Silvae* 1, Statius has a liking for aligning his poetic autobiography with the Virgilian precedent in a way which subtly blends reverence and competition, imitation and originality. And this passage from *Silvae* 4.4 is, to some extent, no different: for underneath the surface reverence for Virgil there actually lurks a rather more ambitious sentiment, as Statius equates his life and his poetry with that of Virgil. Once again, by assimilating his life to the Virgilian model he is not only showing reverence, but also claiming a kind of equality with Virgil; the right to inhabit the same plane as his exalted predecessor and even to relive his life. We might even go further than intimations of equality and suggest that here Statius

¹⁶² On the overlap between *sphragis* and epitaph, see e.g. Fairweather (1987) which focuses on Ovid: Fairweather discusses how *Tristia* 4.10 'must be seen as belonging to the ancient tradition of "*sphragis*" poems' (181), and how Ovid 'had grave-inscriptions in mind' (187) when he wrote the opening of that poem (*Ille ego qui fuerim...*). The idea of the *sphragis* goes back to Theognis, *IEG* 19-26: Κύρνε, σοφιζομένωι μὲν ἔμοι σφρηγίς ἐπικείσθω / τοῖσδ' ἔπεσιν κτλ.; on this passage of Theognis, see Pratt (1995).

¹⁶³ Bettini (1976-77) 439-43, which also includes general discussion on the affinity between the *sphragis* and the literary epitaph.

is obliquely suggesting superiority to Virgil. That is to say, Statius seems to have replaced Virgil – where once Virgil sang in leisured ease by the Bay of Naples, now Statius has usurped the role and succeeded him. Virgil is dead and silent in his grave; the only voice we now hear is Statius’ own. Concerning this last point, we might note how Statius sings to Virgil but does not seem to express a desire to receive anything in return. Contrast this with other poems from the *Silvae* addressed to the ghosts of the dead: in 5.3 Statius asks the spirit of his father to come to him and inspire his song (1-3, 288-90), and in 2.7 Statius asks the shade of Lucan to revisit his widow, Polla Argentaria (120-35).¹⁶⁴ But there is no such request in *Silvae* 4.4: does Statius suggest that he does not now need anything from Virgil? As a poet in his own right he is perhaps saying that he is self-sufficient and confident in his own powers: he needs nothing from Virgil; but perhaps the shade of Virgil might want to learn something from the new poet in town...?

The idea that Statius represents himself as a kind of re-embodied or reincarnated Virgil is not as strange as it might at first sound, for the Ennian precedent shows that such a conception of poetic succession was well rooted in Roman literary thought. Ennius’ representation of himself as a successor-poet to Homer is well known: in the first book of the *Annals* Homer appears to Ennius in a dream; Homer then discourses on the *rerum natura* and tells Ennius that his soul has transmigrated (after various in between stages which include a peacock) into Ennius’ own breast.¹⁶⁵ Ennius presents himself, therefore, not simply as a poet influenced by Homer or writing in the Homeric poetic tradition; he actually casts himself as a reincarnated version of Homer – through the process of metempsychosis Homer has literally been reborn in the body of Ennius. Ennius has become *alter Homerus*, a second Homer.¹⁶⁶ Statius,

¹⁶⁴ Cf. *Silvae* 3.3.195-204.

¹⁶⁵ Enn. *Ann.* 2-11 Skutsch; in his commentary Skutsch provides extensive coverage of Ennius’ Homeric encounter. Brink (1972) discusses how the image of Homer’s soul passing into Ennius parallels the account given by one of the Antipaters (Hellenistic epigrammatists) of Homer’s soul passing into Stesichorus; Brink suggests that Ennius and Antipater had a common Hellenistic source for this conceit; on Ennius’ dream, see also Suerbaum (1968) 46-113, Aicher (1989), Dominik (1993) 39-41.

¹⁶⁶ *Ennius et sapiens et fortis et alter Homerus*, Horace, *Ep.* 2.1.50; Porphyrio *ad* 2.1.51 comments: *quod secundum Pythagorae dogma anima Homeri in suum corpus venisset*; the phrase *alter Homerus*

then, can be seen to be playing with this idea of the transmigration of poetic souls when he presents himself re-enacting Virgil's pose in the *sphragis* to the *Georgics*: Statius is, as it were, portraying himself as an *alter Vergilius* – he is, in this sense, Virgil reincarnate.¹⁶⁷ Such an interpretation might also help explain the rather odd reference to sleep (*somnus*) in line 51: for why does Statius, immediately prior to his description of sitting at Virgil's tomb, say that he has been seeking sleep? Are we perhaps meant to see here an allusion to Ennius' celebrated dream of Homer in which the metempsychosis of poetic souls finds its most famous elaboration? Is Statius suggesting that the soul of Virgil has passed into his own body, just as that of Homer once passed into Ennius? If so, it might even be possible to detect a double meaning in the phrase *sumo animum* in line 55: this is usually translated as meaning 'I take courage' or 'I take heart' in a figurative sense; but we now have the intriguing possibility that Statius is hinting at how he has literally taken on Virgil's *animus*, in a scenario analogous to Ennius taking on the soul of Homer.

Another result of Statius presenting himself in the guise of Virgil (as he presented himself at the end of the *Georgics*) is that Marcellus is cast, by analogy, as Augustus. That is to say, in the *sphragis* to the *Georgics* Virgil contrasts himself with the active Augustus, whereas in *Silvae* 4.4 Statius contrasts his life with that of the active Marcellus; so if Statius is playing the role of a reincarnated Virgil, then Marcellus must be playing the role of Augustus. There are a couple of points to note about this. One is the obviously encomiastic function of this analogy: *Silvae* 4.4 is a poem written to eulogize the young and vigorous Marcellus, so a comparison which likens him to Augustus aids this process of laudation.¹⁶⁸ But in the context of Domitianic Rome,

to describe Ennius apparently goes back to Lucilius (who seems to have used the phrase satirically); see Brink (1982) 92-97 for this Horatian passage and Ennius as *alter Homerus*; also Rudd (1989) *ad loc.*

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Vessey (1973) 45 also brings up the Ennian material in the context of this poem, but his point is rather different: 'No doubt both Silius and Statius hoped that the spirit of Virgil would lend them supernatural assistance, as that of Homer had to Ennius.' Rather than seeing Statius as hoping for Virgilian assistance as Ennius once received aid from Homer, I see Statius as claiming that the spirit of Virgil has already been reborn in him, as the spirit of Homer was reborn in Ennius: we are dealing with the conceit of reincarnation.

¹⁶⁸ Many of the poems in the *Silvae* have an encomiastic function; Statius' sincerity in his praise poems – especially those directed towards Domitian – is contested: some seem genuine

likening anyone but the emperor to Augustus might be deemed a little unwise; thus the lines immediately following this section comprise an effusive encomium of Domitian – an encomium in which Marcellus is said to reverence Domitian even more than Jupiter himself:

at tu, si longi cursum dabit Atropos aevi	56
(detque precor) Latique ducis sic numina pergunt,	
quem tibi posthabito studium est coluisse Tonante,	
quique tuos alio subtexit munere fasces	
et spatia obliquae mandat renovare Latinae,	60
forsitan Ausonias ibis frenare cohorts:	

(*Silvae* 4.4.56-61)

‘But you [sc. Marcellus], if Atropos gives you a long course of life (let her give it! I pray) and if the divinity of the Latin leader [sc. Domitian] confirms it – he whom it is your desire to reverence ahead of the Thunderer and who has attached another duty to your fasces and has ordered you to renovate the extent of the slanting Latin way – perhaps you will go to bridle Ausonian cohorts...’¹⁶⁹

It is as if Statius has to put the brakes on his encomium of Marcellus which is in danger of going too far in its assimilation of him to Augustus; Statius pulls back for a

flattery, others coded criticism; for praise, see e.g. Vessey (1986) 2798: ‘Staius’ poems to the Emperor mirror faithfully an ideology developed, self-protectively, by Domitian. Old views that the *Domitiangedichte* are nothing but despicable flattery are inadequate; but the recent notion that Statius was disenchanted has nothing to commend it. The poet’s conformism is unsurprising. He had no place in the hierarchy of power, no chance of public office: but something to lose by failing to adhere to official policies. Modern notions of political “commitment” are in no sense applicable to the conditions of Flavian Rome’; for derision and criticism, see e.g. Ahl (1984b) 85-102, who comments: ‘What matters is the essential attitude which one finds in the court poet [i.e. Statius]. He must write to live, he must flatter – but his flattery can be so presented that it becomes tantamount to criticism. But it is unassailable criticism’ (102); see also Newlands (2002) 18-27.

¹⁶⁹ The sentence is awkward to punctuate and translate; I have followed Coleman (1988), who discusses the various problems.

moment and injects a healthy dose of praise for the current emperor, Domitian – praise which, in its elevation of Domitian above Jupiter – cannot go any higher.¹⁷⁰ This striking elevation of Domitian above Jupiter might not be without point when we recall that in the *sphragis* to the *Georgics* Augustus is likened to Jupiter (G.4.560-61).¹⁷¹ Having just drawn an analogy between a Jupiter-like-Augustus and Marcellus (who assumes Jovian magnificence by association), Statius immediately covers his back by elevating Domitian above the lot of them: Jupiter, Augustus, Marcellus all sink below the exulted level of *the dominus et deus*.¹⁷²

For our concluding thoughts on *Silvae* 4.4 we need to turn now to the close of the poem. In the final movement of *Silvae* 4.4 (78-100) the Virgilian presence is, again, strongly felt. In these lines Statius once more tells Marcellus that he is writing from the bay of Naples, before offering a resume of his literary career to date, commenting on his work-in-progress, and speculating on his literary ambitions for the future. The Virgilian tone is apparent from the opening line of this movement: *haec ego Chalcidicis ad te, Marcelle, sonabam / litoribus* (78-9) clearly recalls the opening line of the *sphragis* to the *Georgics* - *haec super arborum cultu pecorumque canebam* (G.4.559). The other correspondences are as follows: both poets locate their poetic activity on the bay of Naples (G.4.563-4; *Silvae* 4.4.78-86); both poets review their poetic achievements to date (G.4.565-66; *Silvae* 4.4.87-92); both poets praise the emperor and his military achievements (G.4.559-62; *Silvae* 4.4.95-100); both poets put themselves under the tutelage of deities with strong Neapolitan associations (Parthenope at G.4.563-64; Apollo at *Silvae* 4.4.95-96). Once again Statius can be seen to be presenting himself in the guise of Virgil, as Coleman notes: ‘the Virgilian reminiscences suggest that

¹⁷⁰ As Coleman (1988) comments *ad loc.*, the Virgilian colouring continues even in the praise of Domitian: *posthabito studium est coluisse Tonante* (*Silvae* 4.4.58) recalls *quam Iuno fertur terris magis omnibus unam / posthabita coluisse Samo* (*Aeneid* 1.15).

¹⁷¹ *Caesar dum magnus ad altum / fulminat Euphraten bello...*; see Thomas (1988) *ad loc.* for the ambivalent status of Jupiter in the *Georgics*, and also for some Callimachean posturing in these lines.

¹⁷² Domitian, according to Suetonius, insisted on being referred to as *dominus et deus*: *Pari arrogantia, cum procuratorum suorum nomine formalem dictaret epistulam, sic coepit: "Dominus et deus noster hoc fieri iubet." Vnde institutum posthac, ut ne scripto quidem ac sermone cuiusquam appellaretur aliter* (*Domitian* 13.2); Jones (1996) *ad loc.* surveys the evidence for this claim, with further bibliography.

[Stattius] is trying to present himself as a second Virgil.¹⁷³ Such an interpretation complements our earlier reading of Stattius at the tomb of Virgil, where he likewise presented himself as an *alter Vergilius*.

Stattius' presentation of himself as an *alter Vergilius* at the close of *Silvae* 4.4 is not, however, an entirely straightforward affair; there are several points of dissonance which reveal Stattius' creative use of the Virgilian biography in the process of his own self-definition. One point of departure from the Virgilian paradigm which has been noted by readers is that Apollo here tries to induce Stattius to write greater poetry concerning the military exploits of Domitian (*armaque monstrat / Ausonii maiora ducis*, 95-96); a clear reversal of the Callimachean precedent – employed so influentially by Virgil in *Eclogues* 6 – in which Apollo dissuades poets from greater poetry and urges them to remain in the slender sphere.¹⁷⁴ But this is not the only point of dissonance. One intriguing difference is the following. In the *sphragis* to the *Georgics* Virgil sums up his work as a poem concerning the cultivation of the land and living creatures (*haec super arborum cultu pecorumque canebam / et super arboribus*, 559-60) – a poem, in short, about creating and nurturing various forms of life. Indeed, the *sphragis* follows on from the story of Aristaeus: an episode in which the climax is the regeneration of the bees through the process of *bugonia* – an exuberant bursting-back into life after the death of the swarm.¹⁷⁵ At the end of *Silvae* 4.4, on the other hand, we find Stattius positioned in a landscape of death, sterility and barrenness:

Haec ego Chalcidicis ad te, Marcelle, sonabam
litoribus, fractas ubi Vesvius erigit iras

¹⁷³ Coleman (1988) *ad* 4.4.78.

¹⁷⁴ Coleman (1988) *ad loc.*; Gibson (2006b) 173; Nauta (2006) 31-32.

¹⁷⁵ Interpretation of the *bugonia* episode (in which oxen must be slain for the bees to be re-born) is hotly contested; from a large store, see e.g. the following (each of which provides more extensive bibliography): Morgan (1999) 108, who thinks Virgil 'is arguing the paradoxical power for good of highly destructive events', which fits his overall interpretation of the *Georgics* as a poem which endorses Augustus' creation of order after the chaos and destruction of the civil wars; Habinek (1990) also detects a positive message in this episode; Thomas (1991) detects more 'troubling' notes and is a vigorous rebuttal of Habinek (1990); Griffin (1979) 71 is likewise unconvinced that the rebirth of the bees represents a happy ending or that it 'outweighs the suffering and death of Orpheus and Eurydice'.

aemula Trinacriis volvens incendia flammis.
mira fides! credetne virum ventura propago,
cum segetes iterum, cum iam haec deserta virebunt,
infra urbes populosque premi proavitaque tanto
rura abiisse mari? necdum letale minari
cessat apex.

(*Silvae* 4.4.78-85)

'I sing these things to you, Marcellus, from Chalcidian shores, where Vesuvius raises up his fractious anger and rolls out fires which compete with Sicilian flames. Incredible to believe! Will the coming generation of men believe – when crops grow again and when these deserts shall again be green – that cities and people lie crushed below and that ancestral fields vanished in such a great sea of lava? Even now the summit does not cease to threaten doom.'

How should we read this difference? I suggest two possibilities. On the one hand we have an expression of Statius' difference from and, indeed, temporal dislocation from, his Virgilian model. For even at this moment of intense Virgilian assimilation – as Statius reanimates the role Virgil assumed for himself at the end of the *Georgics* – we also witness a trend towards originality as Statius suggests that he is necessarily different from Virgil: Statius writes from the Chalcidian shores as Virgil had done before him, suggesting the inescapable Virgilian texture of his poetic career; but Statius' Chalcidian shores have suffered catastrophe and irrevocable transformation from their previous state – the transformed physical landscape can be read as a metaphor for the difference between Virgil and Statius as poets. On the other hand we might consider the following idea. Statius invokes the *Georgics sphragis* because it recalls to our memory the story of Aristaeus to which it forms a coda. The story of Aristaeus is all about the regeneration of life after catastrophic death and destruction. So when Statius looks forward to a time when the fields around Vesuvius will be

green again, he might be seen to be alluding to the famous story of regeneration which closed out Virgil's *Georgics*, and therefore sounding a note of optimism.

4. Silius Italicus and the tomb of Virgil.

We have no ancient *vita* of Silius or commentary tradition, nor do we have any first-person, subjective poetry from him with which we might piece together his biography. In this respect our approach to the Silian biography will necessarily be different in certain aspects from that employed in looking at the Lucanian and Statian biographies. We do, however, have several sources which treat Silius' life: Pliny, Martial and Tacitus all have something to say on this consul-turned-poet.¹⁷⁶ Pliny provides the fullest résumé of Silius' life in *Ep.* 3.7. This letter is an obituary of the recently deceased Silius. A summary of Silius' political and cultural life is followed by a meditation on the brevity of human existence and the need to leave behind a reminder for posterity that we have lived. The letter is most well-known for Pliny's apparently acerbic judgment on the quality of Silius' poetry: *scribebat carmina maiore cura quam ingenio* (3.7.5).¹⁷⁷ His description of Silius' cult of Virgil is also much cited:

Erat φιλόκαλος usque ad emacitatis reprehensionem. Plures isdem in locis villas possidebat, adamatisque novis priores neglegebat. Multum ubique librorum, multum statuarum, multum imaginum, quas non habebat modo, verum etiam venerabatur, Vergili ante omnes, cuius natalem religiosius quam

¹⁷⁶ Pliny, *Ep.* 3.7 is an obituary of Silius; the following epigrams of Martial feature Silius: 4.14, 6.64, 7.63, 8.66, 9.86, 11.48, 11.50; Tacitus mentions Silius at *Hist.* 3.65. For an overview of the life and poetic career of Silius, see Laudizi (1989) 11-26.

¹⁷⁷ Pliny's evaluation is frequently invoked and often applauded: 'Pliny's devastating comment fits the *Punica* only too well', Sherwin-White (1966) *ad loc.*; 'Fair comment on the *Punica*, which runs to 12,200 lines', Radice (1969) 184 n. 1. But cf. Santini (1991) 5-6 for a note of caution regarding overly glib interpretations of Pliny's assessment; also Laudizi (1989) 19-24.

suum celebrabat, Neapoli maxime, ubi monimentum eius adire ut templum solebat.

(*Ep.* 3.7.8)

‘He was a lover of beautiful things to such an extent that he was criticized for being excessive in his spending. In the same location he would possess several villas, and after he had bought new ones he would neglect the previous ones. Everywhere he had a multitude of books, of statues and of busts, which he not only possessed, but also used to worship – those of Virgil before all others; he used to celebrate Virgil’s birthday more religiously than his own, especially at Naples, where he was accustomed to approach Virgil’s tomb as if it were a temple.’

Here Pliny relates how Silius used to frequent the tomb of Virgil and treat it as if it were a temple; Silius’ veneration of Virgil is presented as an act of religious devotion. My general interpretation of this letter matches that set out in an article by Vessey. Vessey argues that 3.7 is, taken as a whole, a damning portrait of Silius, as Pliny is ‘frank to the point of malice’ in ‘laying bare’ Silius’ ‘faults and follies’ and ‘hitting the dead man where it would have hurt him most’.¹⁷⁸ According to Vessey, Pliny’s animosity stems from Silius’ advancement under, and complicity with, Nero: ‘Pliny had not, however, forgotten or forgiven the fact that Silius, in the reign of Nero, had behaved in a manner that was discreditable’.¹⁷⁹ Vessey plausibly fits Pliny’s account of Silius’ cult of Virgil into this interpretative frame: he suggests that Pliny’s words ‘have an element of ridicule in them’ and that he views Silius’ Virgilian fanaticism as ‘somewhat ludicrous’.¹⁸⁰ In other words, Pliny uses Silius’ interaction with the Virgilian biography – interaction which he casts as excessive - as a tool with which to heap further ridicule upon him. I have nothing more to add to Vessey’s reading of *Epistle* 3.7 in this respect.

¹⁷⁸ Vessey (1974) 116.

¹⁷⁹ Vessey (1974) 109.

¹⁸⁰ Vessey (1974) 111-12.

I do, however, take issue with Vessey's reading of Martial's epigrams on Silius; epigrams which Vessey argues reveal a different approach to Silius from that encountered in Pliny. While Vessey rightly stresses how Martial's presentation of Silius plays on Silius' pretensions to be the heir of both Virgil and Cicero, he does not, however, detect any notes of irony or sarcasm in Martial's portrait; indeed, he contrasts Martial's flattery with the criticism of Pliny: 'Martial's epigrams on Silius Italicus faithfully reflect the image which his patron wished to project in his own day and to posterity. In contrast, Pliny is frank to the point of malice.'¹⁸¹ I do not accept Vessey's reading of Martial in this instance: while he is right to say that Martial plays on Silius' literary obsessions, he fails to detect the notes of irony and sarcasm in Martial which undercut the surface flattery. Martial's assessment of Silius, I will argue, is actually very similar to Pliny's; rather than seeing a contrast between Martial and Pliny, as Vessey does, we should rather see these two authors as complementing one another.¹⁸² But before we look at the relevant epigrams of Martial, we must first turn to Silius himself and his treatment of the Virgilian biography in his own poetry.

Silius' interest in the Virgilian biography can be deduced from his own poetry. The *laus Vergilii* contained in book 8 of the *Punica* is one example:

Certavit Mutinae quassata Placentia bello,
 Mantua mittenda certavit pube Cremonae, 592
 Mantua, Musarum domus atque ad sidera cantu
 evecta Aonio et Smyrneis aemula plectris.

(*Punica* 8.591-94)

¹⁸¹ Vessey (1974) 116.

¹⁸² Martial and Pliny were themselves acquainted: Martial addressed a poem to Pliny (*Epigrams* 10.20); and Pliny wrote an obituary of Martial, in which he mentions how he provided the epigrammatist with his travel-money for his return to Spain (*Epistles* 3.21).

‘Placentia, shaken by war, competed with Mutina, and Mantua competed with the youth sent out by Cremona – Mantua, the home of the Muses, raised to the stars by Aonian verse and emulous of Smyranean [i.e. Homeric] plectrums.’

Here Silius takes the opportunity to praise Mantua as the birthplace of Virgil. Less well known are the following lines from the *Punica* in which Ennius is introduced as a warrior in the Second Punic War:

Ennius, antiqua Messapi ab origine regis,
miscebat primas acies, Latiaequae superbum
uitis adornabat dextram decus. hispida tellus 395
miserunt Calabri: Rudiae genuere uetustae,
nunc Rudiae solo memorabile nomen alumno.

(*Punica* 12.393-97)

‘Ennius, descended from the ancient stock of king Messapus, was in the front line. The proud glory of the Latin vine-staff [carried by centurions] adorned his right hand. The Calabrians – a rough land – sent him forth: ancient Rudiae gave him birth – Rudiae, a name now memorable for a single son.’

In lines 395-97 Silius is clearly alluding to the famous Virgilian epitaph:

Mantua me genuit, Calabri rapuere, tenet nunc
Parthenope. cecini pascua rura duces.

(*VSD* 36)

The points of correspondence have been set out by Bettini: the repetition of *Calabri*; the use of a syncopated perfect tense in the same metrical position (*genuere* and

rapuere); the repetition of the verb *gigno*; the repetition of *nunc*.¹⁸³ At this juncture in the *Punica* Ennius is being introduced as a warrior, and Bettini suggests that by dressing him up as Virgil, Silius is alluding to his more famous role as a poet (rather than soldier) of the Punic Wars. Bettini thinks that Silius means to praise Ennius by linking him to Virgil.¹⁸⁴ Bettini also discusses the unusual nature of this piece of intertextuality: here Silius seemingly alludes not to another literary text, but to an inscription on a tomb. Furthermore, as Bettini notes, it was a tomb which Silius personally owned and had renovated.¹⁸⁵

Building upon the interesting observations of Bettini, we might add a few further thoughts on this intriguing piece of intertextuality. As we noted earlier, Ennius, in the first book of the *Annals*, presents himself as the reincarnation of Homer; a powerful expression of poetic succession. We also noted how, in the proem to *Georgics* 3, Virgil takes over the Ennian epitaph for himself (*temptanda via est, qua me quoque possim / tollere humo victorque virum volitare per ora*, G.3.8-9); another expression of poetic succession, as Virgil steals a piece of the Ennian biography for his own autobiographical self-fashioning. In addition to this, we also considered how Statius plays with these self-same ideas in *Silvae* 4.4 as he muses on his own position in the epic tradition while visiting the tomb of Virgil – he presents himself as a reincarnated Virgil. These ideas of succession and poetic reincarnation find a novel articulation in Silius' depiction of Ennius. For starters, we have the following pleasing twist: Virgil, in the proem to *Georgics* 3, had used the Ennian epitaph as part of his own self-portrait; now we witness Silius using the Virgilian epitaph to create his biography of Ennius. We also have the following point to consider: rather than depicting Ennius as a reincarnation of Homer in order to honour him – something we might expect given that this was how Ennius fashioned himself in the *Annals* – Silius depicts him instead as a kind of pre-incarnation of Virgil: Ennius is presented as pre-living, so to speak, the Virgilian life before Virgil himself has had a chance to live it. This is all, in one sense, ingenious, playful stuff; but it might also have a deeper literary-critical aspect.

¹⁸³ Bettini (1976-77) 443-44.

¹⁸⁴ Bettini (1976-77) 444-45.

¹⁸⁵ Bettini (1976-77) 445-46; see also Casali (2006) 581.

By making Ennius a pre-incarnation of Virgil, Silius might be seen to be figuring the profound influence Ennian poetry had on Virgil – the way in which he lives the Virgilian biography before Virgil himself is a way of conceptualizing the notion that Ennius' poetry is a pre-embodiment and forerunner of Virgil's own. We might say, therefore, that Silius not only presents Ennius as pre-living the life of Virgil, but also that Silius presents Virgil as re-living the life of Ennius. These reversals, clever inversions and intertwining of lives reveal a rather ingenious side to Silius' poetic craft; an ingenious side which has only recently begun to be appreciated. Whether or not the *Punica* is actually any good in aesthetic terms remains an open question; but there is an increasing sense in scholarship that Silius did not write unthinkingly – his poetry might well lack innate genius (individual readers must decide for themselves), but it does display literary *doctrina* and Silius might, therefore, be accorded the appellation *doctus poeta*.¹⁸⁶

Silius, then, introduces an epic poet, Ennius, in the guise of Virgil in order to honour the two greatest poetic influences on the *Punica* and to display his literary erudition. In the following sections we shall see Martial using similar methods, but for very different purposes: he introduces an epic poet, this time Silius himself, in the guise of Virgil on numerous occasions, but does so in order to ridicule his poetic pretensions – Silius, according to Martial, is nothing but a Virgil *manqué*.

Martial, like Pliny, mentions Silius' veneration of Virgil's tomb in a couple of epigrams:

¹⁸⁶ Pomeroy has been an insistent champion of the need to take Silius more seriously as a poet: 'it is quite mistaken to take Silius as a literary amateur. His poetic aims were real, supported by genuine learning and moulded to suit the philological tastes of his time... While Pliny was not seeking to be complimentary when he declared that Silius wrote with more diligence than talent (*maiore cura quam ingenio*), it would be a pity if that barbed evaluation caused us to overlook Silius' legitimate place in the line of *poetae docti*, the learned composers who rightly saw themselves as upholders of Rome's literary heritage', Pomeroy (1990) 135. For further rehabilitation of Silius, see the essays in Augoustakis (2010) – a volume I have not yet been able to see.

Silius haec magni celebrat monumenta Maronis,
 iugera facundi qui Ciceronis habet. 2
 heredem dominumque sui tumulive larisve
 non alium mallet nec Maro nec Cicero. 4

(11.48)

‘Silius worships these monuments of great Virgil; he also owns the estate of eloquent Cicero. Neither Virgil nor Cicero would prefer any other heir and master of their tomb or house.’

Iam prope desertos cineres et sancta Maronis
 nomina qui coleret pauper et unus erat. 2
 Silius orbatae succurrere censuit umbrae,
 et vatem vates non minor ipse colit.¹⁸⁷ 4

(11.50)

‘There was only a single poor man to cultivate the now almost deserted ashes and holy name of Virgil. Silius resolved to help the abandoned spirit, and he worships the bard – no less a bard himself.’

In these two epigrams we have a description of how Silius restored the tomb of Virgil and worshipped at it; it is usually assumed that Silius had bought an estate which encompassed the site of the tomb.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ The text of the final couplet (3-4) is problematic; what is printed in modern editions is the result of heavy emendation. The manuscript reading – ‘patent nonsense’ in the words of Kay – is as follows: *Silius optatae succurrere cenis et cliabrae / Silius et vatem non minus ipse tulit*. See Kay (1985) *ad loc.* for discussion.

¹⁸⁸ ‘Silius had obviously bought an estate near Naples which contained Vergil’s tomb’, Kay (1985) *ad* 11.48.1.

Before we look more closely at Martial's presentation of Silius in these epigrams, it will be worthwhile pondering an anecdote related by Cicero. Cicero, in the fifth book of the *Tusculan Disputations*, has just given an account of Dionysius of Syracuse as an illustration of how the life of a tyrant, despite the great power one possesses, is a wretched existence. In the following extract Cicero looks for someone to compare with Dionysius:

'I shall not now compare with his life, the most foul wretched and abominable I can imagine, the life of Plato or Archytas, learned men and, in a word, wise. From that same city I shall call up from his sand-table and rod a lowly little man who lived much later, Archimedes. When I was quaestor, I searched out his tomb, which was shut in on every side and covered with thorns and thickets. The Syracusans did not know of it: they denied it existed at all. I knew some lines of verse which I had been told were inscribed on his gravestone, which asserted that there was a sphere and cylinder on the top of the tomb. Now while I was taking a thorough look at everything – there is a great crowd of tombs at the Agrigentine Gates – I noticed a small column projecting a little way from the thickets, on which there was a representation of a sphere and cylinder. I immediately told the Syracusans – their leading men were with me – that I thought that was the very thing I was looking for. A number of men were sent in with sickles and cleared and opened up the place. When it had been made accessible, we went up to the base facing us. There could be seen the epitaph with about half missing where the ends of the lines were worn away. So that distinguished Greek city, once also a centre of learning, would have been unaware of the tomb of its cleverest citizen, if it had not learned of it from a man from Arpinum. But my discourse must return to the point from which it digressed. Who in the world is there, who has any dealings with the Muses, that is, with culture and learning, who would not rather be this mathematician than that tyrant? If we ask about their way of life and behaviour, the mind of the one was nourished by weighing and exploring theories, along with the

pleasure of using one's wits, which is the sweetest food of souls, the other's in murder and unjust acts attended by fear day and night.¹⁸⁹

From this point on we hear no more of Archimedes, as Cicero moves on to pastures new. The question is, therefore: why are we given such an elaborate introduction to Archimedes? For, as has been noted, this story about the tomb is a 'pleasing, but completely irrelevant, anecdote.'¹⁹⁰ Indeed, the only 'relevant' material comes in the final two sentences, where Cicero actually compares the life of Archimedes with that of Dionysius; and Cicero himself admits that he has been digressing to this point when he says: *sed redeat unde aberravit oratio*. But the digression does, in important ways, have numerous points.¹⁹¹ For starters, the interest in, and quest to rediscover, the tomb of Archimedes is indicative of Cicero's allegiance to intellectual pursuits. Cicero also presents himself as something of an intellectual evangelist: he restores the honour due to Archimedes which had been neglected by the Syracusans. Cicero is clearly proud of his discovery – proud that a man from Arpinum has been responsible for, in a sense, rediscovering one of the great intellectual figures of the

¹⁸⁹ *Tusc.* 5.64-66: [64] *Non ego iam cum huius vita, qua taetrius, miserius, detestabilius excogitare nihil possum, Platonis aut Archytae vitam comparabo, doctorum hominum et plane sapientium: ex eadem urbe humilem homunculum a pulvere et radio excitabo, qui multis annis post fuit, Archimedes. Cuius ego quaestor ignoratum ab Syracusanis, cum esse omnino negarent, saeptum undique et vestitum vepribus et dumetis indagavi sepulcrum. Tenebam enim quosdam senariolos, quos in eius monumento esse inscriptos acceperam, qui declarabant in summo sepulcro sphaeram esse positam cum cylindro.* [65] *Ego autem cum omnia conlustrarem oculis — est enim ad portas Agragantinas magna frequentia sepulcrorum —, animum adverti columellam non multum e dumis eminentem, in qua inerat sphaerae figura et cylindri. Atque ego statim Syracusanis — erant autem principes mecum — dixi me illud ipsum arbitrari esse, quod quaererem. Immissi cum falcibus multi purgarunt et aperuerunt locum.* [66] *Quo cum patefactus esset aditus, ad adversam basim accessimus. Apparebat epigramma exesis posterioribus partibus versiculorum dimidiatum fere. Ita nobilissima Graeciae civitas, quondam vero etiam doctissima, sui civis unius acutissimi monumentum ignorasset, nisi ab homine Arpinate didicisset. Sed redeat, unde aberravit oratio. quis est omnium, qui modo cum Musis, id est cum humanitate et cum doctrina, habeat aliquod commercium, qui se non hunc mathematicum malit quam illum tyrannum? Si vitae modum actionemque quaerimus, alterius mens rationibus agitandis exquirendisque alebatur cum oblectatione sollertiae, qui est unus suavissimus pastus animorum, alterius in caede et iniuriis cum et diurno et nocturno metu.* The translation is that of Douglas (1990).

¹⁹⁰ Douglas (1990) 156. On Archimedes' tomb, see Simms (1990), Trapp (1990)

¹⁹¹ Jaeger (2002) is a thorough analysis of how the digression on the tomb of Archimedes fits into the larger design of the *Tusculan Disputations* in its relation to ideas of memory, death, immortality, virtue, intellectual pursuit, tyranny and so forth; on the *Tusculan Disputations* as a whole, see Gildenhard (2007b).

Greek world. There is also a sense that Cicero is basking in the reflected glory of Archimedes; by honouring the tomb of the great mathematician, a little of the sheen of Archimedes rubs off onto Cicero himself. But perhaps we can go further: Cicero is not just basking in reflected glory, but also suggesting a kind of assimilation, or identity. That is to say, Archimedes' life, in its intellectual pursuits, is set up as the antithesis of Dionysius' tyrannical life; following on from this, we are tempted to draw an analogy with Cicero's own position at the time when he was writing this work: the tyranny of Caesar is, after all, the backdrop to Cicero's own intellectual endeavours.¹⁹²

Cicero's story of his rediscovery of Archimedes' tomb is not, therefore, simply a charming but irrelevant anecdote; it actually tells us a great deal about Cicero's conception of himself – or the conception of himself he would like to promote to his readers. If we now return our attention to Silius' restoration of the Virgilian tomb, it is possible to see in this action a conscious emulation and imitation of the Ciceronian precedent.¹⁹³ That is, Silius' restoration of Virgil's tomb – a tomb which had been almost forgotten and was tended only by a single pauper – might be read as an act of homage by Silius who self-consciously replays the kind of deed once enacted by his revered Cicero: just as Cicero once restored the tomb of Archimedes, so now Silius restores the tomb of Virgil. In his restoration of Virgil's tomb Silius manages, therefore, to perform a dual act of reverence: most obviously he honours Virgil, the poet who meant the most to him; but he also honours Cicero – the orator and statesman who was closest to his heart – by repeating his act of sepulchral restoration.

¹⁹² The sense that Cicero is assimilating his life to Archimedes' is also argued for by Jaeger (2002), who discusses how this anecdote 'intertwines the lives of two men, both known for practical and theoretical accomplishments, the Roman statesman and philosopher, and the Greek inventor and mathematician' (56); and also how it is 'possible that Cicero sees his defence of the Republic by means of all the political contrivances he could muster as analogous to Archimedes' efforts at defending Syracuse with all the mechanical contrivances he could devise, and his withdrawal into philosophy as analogous to Archimedes' concentration on his diagrams when all was lost' (58-59).

¹⁹³ Simms (1990) 286 also raises this possibility, but does not elaborate on it.

In the previous paragraph we have reconstructed the possible motivations of Silius in his restoration of the Virgilian tomb: an act of homage to both Virgil and Cicero, the two literary figures whose lives he seeks to emulate and repeat. But there is an immediate problem here: the information on Silius' restoration of the Virgilian tomb comes to us through the filter of Martial's epigrams. The question, therefore, is this: is Martial playing with a straight bat here, or is there more to his presentation of Silius at the tomb than meets the eye on a superficial reading? What are we to make of these scraps of biographical information? Are they simply throwaway comments, off-the-cuff remarks typical of epigrammatic poetry and not something upon which to linger? Or can we, by giving due weight to the ingenuity and cleverness of Martial's poetic craft, weave a more substantial web of interpretation? In the paragraphs to come I pursue the latter path, for even in its seemingly most flippant and shallow moments Martial's verse has a tendency to be more pregnant with ideas than its outward appearance would have us believe: digging beneath the surface will often throw up some surprising results.¹⁹⁴ True, Martial pleads with us in the following strains to be simplistic readers of his verse:

...et probetur in me novissimum ingenium. absit a iocorum nostrorum
simplicitate malignus interpres nec epigrammata mea inscribat: improbe facit
qui in alieno libro ingeniosus est.

(*Epigrams* 1, pref.)

'...ingenuity is the last quality for which I seek approval. My quips are straightforward. I want no interpreter's malice, and beg that nobody write addresses on my epigrams. It is a scurvy trick to be ingenious with another man's book.'¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ It is only relatively recently that criticism has really begun to focus on the more literary and poetic qualities of Martial's verse, replacing older approaches which were more interested in Martial as a source for social history (especially Roman patronage systems); see e.g. Fowler (1995), Roman (2001), Fitzgerald (2007) and Hinds (2007).

¹⁹⁵ Trans. Shackleton Bailey (1993).

And yet we might suggest that ‘the lady doth protest too much’ and that here Martial is clearly being disingenuous: ingenuity might very well be the first quality for which he seeks approval.¹⁹⁶

In these two epigrams on Virgil’s tomb and Cicero’s estate (11.48 and 11.50) we have, apparently, a eulogy of Silius as poet and orator – double heir of those twin bastions of Latin letters, Virgil and Cicero. Martial plays with the idea of Silius as both literary and physical heir of Virgil (and Cicero). That is to say, in 11.48 Silius is *heres* in a double sense: he owns property connected with his idols (Virgil’s tomb and Cicero’s estate) and so, in that respect is like an heir who inherits the family estate and has a duty to look after it; but he is also the literary heir of Virgil and Cicero – the man who inherits and repeats their poetic and oratorical achievements. For Vessey these two epigrams constitute flattery of Silius: ‘Once again, Martial has succeeded in casting a flattering light on Silius’ actions. What Pliny regarded as somewhat ludicrous, Martial extols and applauds’.¹⁹⁷ If we restrict ourselves to considering these two epigrams in isolation, then we may well be tempted to agree with Vessey’s judgement; for it does not seem possible to extrapolate a more devious interpretation from these epigrams. We could, of course, simply say that the flattery is so gross that it must be insincere, and that the effusive praise really constitutes sarcastic ridicule; but that might seem to some a rather weak way out. Far better, I suggest, to look for devious meanings by looking at the position of these epigrams in the wider context of Book 11; a book which is, importantly, characterized by Martial as being especially bawdy in its content.¹⁹⁸ As Fitzgerald has recently reminded us, the juxtaposition of epigrams within a particular book can have a profound effect on interpretation. In this instance, the epigrams surrounding 11.48 and 11.50 serve to undermine their surface tone of sincere praise. The three epigrams leading up to 11.48 are all sexually explicit and bawdy pieces: 11.45 is about a certain Cantharus, who allegedly takes the passive role in sex; 11.46 deals with the impotence and sexual frustrations of a

¹⁹⁶ See Fitzgerald (2007) 1 for Martial’s profession of simplicity; also 71-3 for a discussion of the *malignus interpres* in the dedicatory epistle to the first book.

¹⁹⁷ Vessey (1974) 112.

¹⁹⁸ See e.g. *Ep.* 11.2; Kay (1985) 5: The idea of bawdiness thus naturally forms the backbone of the book: over half of the skoptic epigrams are of an obscene nature.’

certain Mevius; and 11.47 comprises an attack on a certain Lattara who is accused of performing cunnilingus. This run up to 11.48 must surely have an effect on how we interpret Martial's account of Silius' veneration of Virgil; the immediate transition from sexual explicitness to supposed religious veneration is incongruous to say the least, as the final line of 11.47, *cur lingit cunnum Lattara? ne futuat* (8) is immediately followed by *Silius haec magni celebrat monumenta Maronis* (11.48.1). The epigram which intervenes between the two Silius epigrams continues this theme, as Martial begs his girlfriend not to say no to any of his own sexual predilections (11.49.12). Finally, the epigram which immediately follows the description of Silius' renovation of the Virgilian tomb is all about a certain Titius and his ample physical endowment (11.51). Martial, therefore, sets Silius' reverence of Virgil amidst a succession of bawdy epigrams; and such an incongruous setting serves to undermine the surface flattery or seriousness of 11.48 and 11.50 – Martial's praise of Silius comes with a sting in its tail. Silius' Virgilian pretensions – his claims to be the heir of Virgil – are debased and degraded by Martial's act of positioning them in a context of sexual bawdiness and obscenity.

5. Beyond the tomb: Martial on Silius as *alter Vergilius*.

In the previous section we have looked at various treatments of the 'Silius at the tomb of Virgil' topos. In this final section I want to expand the field of enquiry and to examine more generally Martial's presentation of Silius as an heir of Virgil, a devotee of the Virgilian cult, and even a *Vergilius redux*. I begin with the following epigram:

Sili, Castalidum decus sororum,
 qui periuria barbari furoris
 ingenti premis ore perfidosque
 astus Hannibalis levisque Poenos
 magnis cedere cogis Africanis:

5

paulum seposita severitate,
dum blanda vagus alea December
incertis sonat hinc et hinc fritillis
et ludit tropha nequiore talo,
nostris otia commoda Camenis. 10
nec torva lege fronte, sed remissa
lascivis madidos iocis libellos.
sic forsan tener ausus est Catullus
magno mittere Passerem Maroni.

(*Epigrams* 4.14)

‘Silius, glory of the Castalian sisters, you who crush the perjuries of barbarian madness with your great voice and force the treacherous wiles of Hannibal and the fickle Carthaginians to give way before the great Africani: lay aside your grim aspect for a little while, while December – wandering with his seductive dice – resounds here and there with the unpredictable dice-boxes and tropha plays with naughtier anklebones,¹⁹⁹ and make some leisure time for my own poetry. But don’t read my little books – which are dripping with cheeky jokes – with a grim aspect; read them with a relaxed brow. Thus, perhaps, delicate Catullus dared to send his “Passer” to the great Virgil.’

In this lively hendecasyllabic epigram, which is addressed to Silius, Martial fleetingly engages with a moment in the Virgilian biography by suggesting that Catullus might have sent his *Passer* to the great Maro (what this *Passer* might have been I shall discuss below). In the paragraphs to come we shall investigate how this moment from the Virgilian biography is used by Martial to further his characterization of Silius.

¹⁹⁹ ‘Tropha’ (τρόφα) was a game in which ankle-bones (αστάγαλοι / *tali*) were thrown into a jar; Soldevila (2006) *ad loc.*

We might start by wondering about the historical plausibility of the suggestion that Catullus sent his *Passer* to Virgil. Friedländer informs us that the *Passer* in question refers to Catullus' book of poetry, which was named after the two poems (2 & 3) on Lesbia's sparrow. He also makes the following comment on the historical truthfulness of this anecdote: 'In reality there was no relationship between Catullus and Virgil, since the latter (born in 70 BC) was only sixteen years old when the former died (c.54 BC)'.²⁰⁰ A century later Shackleton Bailey comments in a similar vein on the historical accuracy of Martial's suggestion: 'Actually, Virgil was a child when Catullus wrote his poems'.²⁰¹ Friedländer and Shackleton Bailey both make a valid point: given the relevant chronologies it certainly does seem unlikely - though not entirely impossible - that Catullus would actually have sent a volume of his poetry to Virgil. But an appeal to dates and historical plausibility need not be the end of the story; for although Friedländer and Shackleton Bailey offer a satisfactory answer to one question (is it likely that Catullus and Virgil knew each other in reality?), another question, and one which is potentially more interesting, immediately suggests itself: why does Martial say that Catullus and Virgil might have engaged with one another in this way? It is this second question which will constitute the substance of the following discussion. For whether this Catullan anecdote is historically true or not seems to me a less fruitful and more restricted line of enquiry than an approach which seeks to explain the reference in both its specific poetic context and also within the wider context of ancient engagements with the Virgilian biography. Furthermore, incidents in which Martial seems to be slipping up and making elementary mistakes (such as the chronological implausibility perceived by Friedländer and Shackleton Bailey in 4.14) should put us on our guard, for such 'deliberate mistakes' are a hallmark of Martial's epigrammatic technique. If we understand that such mistakes might be deliberate and have ulterior motives, we might laugh along with Martial, complicit in his epigrammatic disruptions; but if we

²⁰⁰ Friedländer (1886) *ad loc.*

²⁰¹ Shackleton Bailey (1993) vol. 1, 271 n.25.

mildly reprove Martial for his slipshod inaccuracy, we might very well find the epigrammatist laughing at us as the butt of the joke.²⁰²

It will be useful to begin with a summary of the poem and a brief discussion of its explicit themes. The poem is addressed to Silius Italicus, former consul (Nero's final appointment in AD 68) and now dedicated poet (*Castalidum decus sororum*, 1) whose major composition was the epic *Punica* (alluded to in lines 2-5).²⁰³ Martial invites Silius to lay aside his seriousness for a while (*paulum seposita severitate*, 6), since it is the riotous festival of the Saturnalia (7-9), and to spend some time reading his own salaciously amusing epigrams (10-12). In the same way (*sic*, 13), Martial concludes, Catullus might perhaps (*forsan*, 13) have dared to send his light verse (*Passer*, 14) to Virgil. A clear analogy is therefore established: Martial, a poet in a low genre, stands in relation to Silius, a poet in the highest genre (epic), just as Catullus might once have stood in relation to Virgil. In this schema Martial aligns himself with Catullus and Silius with Virgil. None of this strikes us as particularly novel or odd, for Martial consistently presents himself as a poetic heir of Catullus, and Silius as a poetic heir of Virgil.²⁰⁴ Once again, therefore, we are dealing with an epigram in which Martial broaches issues surrounding literary genres (epic / epigram), poetic hierarchies (epic vs. epigram) and poetic genealogies (Martial follows Catullus as Silius follows Virgil); a poem in which he suggests that epigram should be given room alongside loftier epic compositions, if only during the wanton festival of the Saturnalia.

²⁰² Williams (2002a) has an interesting discussion of some of these issues, especially on Martial's use of the deliberate mistake in his intertextual engagements with Ovid; Martial enjoys misremembering his poetic predecessors; see also Hinds (2007) *passim*.

²⁰³ For Martial's relationship to Silius Italicus, see the overview of Galán Vioque (2002) 364, who claims that the 'relationship is one of patronage rather than friendship'; so also Szelest (1959) and (1986) and Vessey (1974).

²⁰⁴ For Martial as a poetic heir of Catullus see e.g. the dedicatory epistle to the first book; also 5.5.6, 7.99.7, 10.78.16 (*uno sed tibi sim minor Catullo* – 'but rank me below Catullus only'); Martial's self-presentation as an heir of Catullus is discussed by Johannsen (2006) 129-34; for a discussion of Catullus' influence on Martial, see Swann (1994) and (1998). For the presentation of Silius as an *alter Vergilius*, see e.g. 7.63, 11.48, 11.50. Fitzgerald (2007) 167-86 provides an excellent discussion of Martial's interaction with Catullus, illustrating how the epigrammatist revels in rewriting, adapting and banalizing his poetic predecessor – in Martial's eyes, Catullus is both a revered master and paradigm, and also a poetic father to be slain and superseded.

The above summary might be considered a 'standard' reading of the poem, and it is not an interpretation that I in any way seek to overturn or disprove. But I do think that we can expand the interpretative grid and produce a more nuanced and insightful reading if we engage a little more closely with some of the details of the text.

The obvious place to start is with Catullus' *Passer*. Up until now I have been assuming that this refers straightforwardly to Catullus' poetry: *Passer* is used as the title (whether official or popular) of a Catullan book of poetry, and derives from the two famous poems Catullus wrote on Lesbia's pet sparrow (thus Friedländer, for example).²⁰⁵ On this reading, therefore, Catullus is envisioned sending a book of poetry, called the *Passer*, to Virgil. But, as everybody knows, the story of Catullus and his *passer* does not end there, for we must also consider the sexual undertones which are potentially in play: that is, the possibility that *passer* is a euphemism for *mentula*. Whatever Catullus himself meant by his poems on Lesbia's *passer* – the topic is still debated²⁰⁶ – there is a strong consensus that Martial imputes the meaning of *mentula* to the Catullan *passer*. For instance, in his commentary on epigram 11.6, Kay remarks:

'This is not the place to discuss Catullus, for we are only dealing with what M[artial] read into the phrase *passer Catulli*...but there seems to me a strong case that M[artial] is playing with such an interpretation here [sc. that *passer* = *mentula*].'²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ Cf. Pliny, *Epistles*, 9.25.3, where he refers to his poetic efforts as 'my little sparrows and doves' (*passerculis et columbulis*).

²⁰⁶ For the view that Catullus meant *passer* to signify *mentula*, see Giangrande (1975); for an opposing view, see Jocelyn (1980). Nadeau (1984) uses passages from Martial, Juvenal and Ovid to argue that the Catullan *passer* is a synonym for *mentula*.

²⁰⁷ Kay (1985) *ad* 11.6.16, who provides bibliography for the debate centred on the meaning of *passer* within the Catullan oeuvre; see also Galán Vioque (2002) 118; Howell (1980) 122-23; Shackleton Bailey (1993) vol. 3, 9.

Given the apparent erotic connotations of references to Catullus' *passer* in other epigrams of Martial,²⁰⁸ we might now ponder the ramifications of such an association for an interpretation of 4.14. If Martial uses the Catullan *passer* as a means of referring both to poetry and *mentulae*, and draws comic effects from this *double entendre*, how is our reading of 4.14 affected? We might, initially, not think that it makes a great deal of difference, for the erotic revelation chimes fairly harmoniously with the overall tone of the epigram: Martial is encouraging the usually *severus* Silius to let his hair down for the rowdy Saturnalia, and therefore a touch of school-boyishly bawdy humour seems perfectly in keeping with the general ambience of the piece. Furthermore, the final ribald couplet (13-14) makes a neat contrast with the opening lines of the epigram, which ape epic diction in their forced magniloquence; the bawdy quip with which the poem ends provides an effective dose of bathos which perfectly encapsulates the theme of the epigram: the joy to be had from moving from the high to the low.

It might seem reasonable, therefore, to leave the *passer* story there, were it not for one important fact: that it is Silius Italicus, no less, who is the addressee of this epigram. That Martial includes this obscene joke about Catullus and Virgil in a poem ostensibly destined for the ears of Silius Italicus makes, I think, quite a substantial difference to the way we interpret both the specific joke and the surrounding epigram as a whole. For the point is that Silius is not just any old patron or epigrammatic addressee, but that he is a *bona fide* Virgil fanatic. We have already seen this fanaticism in action in Pliny's obituary, but Martial too provides his own evidence of Silius' religious veneration of Virgil in 11.48 and 11.50 (discussed above).

Given Silius' pious veneration of Virgil, the crude joke which rounds off epigram 4.14 takes on added punch: for a man used to worshipping piously the mysteries of the divine Mantuan, a bawdy piece of eroticism might not seem the most appropriate coda to a poem. It is incongruous, to say the least. Why, therefore, does Martial

²⁰⁸ See e.g. epigrams 1.7 and 11.6, with insightful discussion by Fitzgerald (2007) 78-9 and 182-3.

present this low portrait of Virgil in a poem addressed to the Mantuan's greatest venerator? Perhaps we can, once again, simply appeal to the Saturnalian context of this epigram: Martial's insinuation about Catullus and Virgil is lewd, yes, but then lewdness was all part-and-parcel of the Saturnalia – indeed, part-and-parcel of the epigrammatic genre as a whole. That is certainly a valid reading, and not one which I would want to discount entirely. But I would also suggest that we can profitably see this obscene joke as one part of Martial's larger strategy of deflating Silius' literary pretensions and desire to be seen as a *Vergilius redux*; which in turn is part of a grander strategy of championing the lowly genre of epigram vis-à-vis its loftier (but more ludicrous and obsolete, in Martial's eyes) generic overlord, namely epic.²⁰⁹ This needs some unpicking.

In a number of epigrams Martial seemingly showers compliments on Silius, the ex-consul and epic poet, and persistently connects him with his revered master, Virgil. These compliments allow for the possibility of being read as ironic, even sarcastic, in the extreme.²¹⁰ I will proceed to read in an ironic, suspicious light, although remaining fully aware that this is not the only interpretative strategy. Indeed, part of the challenge (and fun) in reading Martial is in trying to gauge the tone and colouring as we move inexorably through myriad different epigrams, never quite sure if we are over-interpreting (seeing more than might really be there) or under-interpreting (missing the joke completely).²¹¹ This conundrum rears its head especially in epigrams connected with Domitian, where some see genuine flattery and others coded criticism; but such ambivalence is not limited to the imperial poems.²¹²

²⁰⁹ For Martial's literary polemic, in which the value and relevance of epigram is championed over and against stale and irrelevant epic, see Citroni (1968).

²¹⁰ For an alternative view see e.g. Galán Vioque (2002) 364, who provides a survey of Martial's engagement with Silius, and thinks we get 'no inkling of his [Martial's] personal opinion of his [Silius'] work'.

²¹¹ Fitzgerald (2007) 80 discusses this conundrum.

²¹² Garthwaite has written extensively on how Martial's imperial epigrams might be read as critiques of Domitian: see e.g. Garthwaite (1993) and (1998), where he comments: "The most recent comprehensive study of Martial (by Sullivan) and Howell's new commentary on these very epigrams, continue to portray the imperial panegyrics as sincere, or certainly, at the least, unreserved and unambiguous expressions of support. But a more critical reading of

The remit of these observations can be expanded and applied more broadly to Martial's epigrams in general: we are faced with the constant dilemma of whether we should read the surface meaning as the only meaning, or should succumb to infection and rummage around for further voices. A Fitzgerald notes, an epigram can be 'both inflationary and deflationary, and sometimes both at the same time'.²¹³ With this 'interpretive uncertainty' flagged up – an uncertainty which is 'intrinsic to the world of Martial's books and part of the experience of finding our way around them' - let us proceed to do some rummaging.²¹⁴

We can begin by considering 7.63, an epigram in which Martial reviews Silius' career. Martial seemingly showers compliments on Silius as both politician and poet, suggesting that in his life he has matched the achievements not only of Virgil, but also of Cicero:

sacra cothurnati non attigit ante Maronis
implevit magni quam Ciceronis opus.

(7.63.5-6)

'He did not touch the sacred rites of buskined Virgil before he had fulfilled the work of great Cicero.'

An ambiguity in line 5 has not received sufficient comment. It is most readily taken to refer to Silius' poetic activity – he did not start writing poetry in the Virgilian manner before his legal and political career had ended. But I suggest that we can also see here a reference to Silius' physical and material worship of Virgil's tomb. Galán Vioque notes the following in his commentary: '**attigit**: a term indicating a ritual

these poems in book 5 shows, I believe, a tone of disaffection, if not sarcasm, beneath their apparent courteousness and humility' (171).

²¹³ Fitzgerald (2007) 199.

²¹⁴ The quotations are from Fitzgerald (2007) 6.

gesture. Placing a hand on the altar was common practice among those carrying out sacrifices...The stance is typical of supplicants', but takes the observation no further.²¹⁵ Moreover, the word *sacra*, while metaphorically it means Virgil's sacred poetry, in a more concrete sense can mean the sacred physical objects at his tomb; even, perhaps, his relics. This language of ritual worship, with Silius placing his hands (*attigit*) on Virgil's sacred relics (*sacra*) must surely put us in mind of Silius' veneration of Virgil's tomb. In this poem, then, Martial is not simply presenting Silius as a literary heir of Virgil, but as someone who takes his veneration and worship to a further level: it is the image of Silius as a priest of the Virgilian cult.

Despite the surface praise of Silius in 7.63, can we detect more ambivalent tones? I think we can.²¹⁶ When Martial writes thus of Silius' poetry:

Perpetui numquam moritura volumina Sili
qui legis et Latia carmina digna toga...

(7.63.1-2)

'Reader of the everlasting volumes of immortal Silius, poems worthy of the Latin gown...'²¹⁷

I would argue that we should be reading with a pinch of salt.²¹⁸ Shackleton Bailey's translation, which I have printed here, does not really bring out the irony of this couplet; we might prefer: 'You who read the never-ending volumes of the interminable Silius...', observing how Martial takes a sly pop at the behemoth which is the *Punica*. We also need not read the phrase *et Latia carmina digna toga* in

²¹⁵ Galán Vioque (2002) *ad loc.* with further references.

²¹⁶ In this I differ from Vessey (1974) 110-11, who reads the excessive flattery of 7.63 as an attempt by Martial to curry favour with the wealthy Silius.

²¹⁷ Translation of Shackleton Bailey (1993).

²¹⁸ Cf. Galán Vioque's comment *ad loc.* on the phrase *perpetui numquam moritura volumina Sili*: 'an adroit judgement on the way history would view Silius' work, *Punica*, the longest Latin poem that has come down to us.'

apposition to *volumina*, as Shackleton Bailey does,²¹⁹ but rather as introducing a new thought, which we might paraphrase: ‘you who read Silius’ never ending drivel, *and who also* read poetry actually worthy of the Latin gown (i.e. something other than Silius which is actually worth reading)...’

The way in which Martial, in 7.63, subtly undercuts his praise of Silius as a second Virgil is matched by his undercutting, in the same poem, of Silius’ pretensions to be a second Cicero. In the following lines Martial refers to Silius’ tenure of the consulship in AD 68:

postquam bis senis ingentem fascibus annum
rexerat asserto qui sacer orbe fuit.

(7.63.9-10)

‘After he had reigned over the great year with the twelve fasces – a year which was holy because in it the world was set free.’

Martial here seemingly praises Silius for being consul in the great year (*ingentem...annum*) in which Nero was deposed and the world set free (*asserto...orbe*). But there is something odd in the way Martial articulates Silius’ consulship: his use of the verb *rexerat* to describe Silius’ consulship jars somewhat, especially in conjunction with notions of a world being set free from a despotic tyrant – Martial reminds us (like Pliny in *Ep.* 3.7) that Silius did rather well under Nero. Furthermore, using notions of kingship to describe Silius in a poem in which Silius’ connections to Cicero have been flagged up also seems to contain ironic undertones: Cicero spent his career trying to prevent a *rex* from ruling in Rome, whereas Silius – who would

²¹⁹ Although this is, for sure, the most natural way to translate it.

like to be thought of as a second Cicero – spends his career ruling like a king (*rexerat*) under the tyranny of another regal tyrant (Nero).²²⁰

One final point on 7.63 remains; it concerns the idea of Silius' literary career. In the previous chapter we considered how various poets played with the notion of a Virgilian poetic career; especially how some imperial poets mischievously toyed with the *Culex* as Virgil's poetic debut and the relationship of their own careers to the Virgilian model. In epigram 7.63 Martial provides another spin on the literary career topos; a spin which is quite different from the others we have seen. For Martial creates for Silius the ultimate literary career imaginable: his literary debut is presented as a recapitulation of the Ciceronian oeuvre (*implevit magni quam Ciceronis opus*); and only after this debut does he then repeat the poetic achievement of Virgil (*sacra cothurnati non attigit ante Maronis*). The telescoping of these two great literary careers – the enduring models for verse and prose composition – into the single body of Silius seems so hyperbolic that we are left with the lingering feeling that it cannot be meant in all seriousness: it all seems far too excessive and, ultimately, unbelievable. Silius is being portrayed as an inconceivably vast literary figure; he is so massive that his body can accommodate both a Virgil and a Cicero. This might not be without a literary-critical aspect: the vastness of Silius' poem, the *Punica*, finds its correlative in this conceptualization of the vastness of Silius' literary career.²²¹

Given Martial's wry, ironic presentation of the epic poet Silius elsewhere in his oeuvre, we are now in a better position to gauge the effects of the *passer* joke in

²²⁰ It is worth noting that Cicero himself was portrayed as a tyrant by his opponents for executing the Catilinarian conspirators without trial. Clodius, for instance, set up a statue of *Libertas* in Cicero's ruined house as a sign that the tyrant had been driven from the city. For Cicero commenting on his opponents' characterization of him as a *rex*, see e.g. *Att.* 1.16.10; see further Gildenhard (2011) 173-4, with additional references.

²²¹ Cf. 6.64.10, where Martial claims that 'the bookcases of immortal Silius' deem his [Martial's] epigrams worthy of inclusion (*quas et perpetui dignantur scrinia Sili*, 6.64.10); in the seemingly complimentary phrase 'immortal Silius' we have again a clear pun: *perpetuus Silius* certainly does allow the translation 'immortal', but it also, once more, suggests a humorous indictment of Rome's greatest windbag ('never-ending Silius'). The phrase *perpetuus Silius* used here is the same as that found at 7.63.1 – Martial's jibes at the never-ending nature of Silius are, well, never-ending...

epigram 4.14, and to see how it is one more pin-prick designed to burst the bubble of Silius' epic pretensions. And again we note the subtle blend of tones and deliberate ambiguities, as Silius is at one moment the seeming object of eulogy, before unexpectedly having the ladder kicked out from beneath him. For instance, we might note the instructive contrast between the first and the last lines of the epigram. The opening line (*Sili, Castalidum decus sororum*) is all epic grandeur and magniloquence, with the name of the great contemporary epicist standing to the fore; but when we finish reading through the final line (*magno mittere Passerem Maroni*) – with the name of Maro as final word mirroring that of Silius as first word – the obscene resonances of the Catullan *passer* have now disrupted the easy, eulogistic tone of the entire epigram. We are suddenly unsure as to whether we have been singing the praises of Silius or ridiculing him. And this uncertainty begins to breed further doubts and to unlock more potentially mocking indictments of Silius in the epigram. For example, whereas Virgil, Roman paradigm of true epic greatness, is described as simply being 'great' (*magno...Maroni*, 14), and the Africani, heroes of the Punic wars are likewise said to be 'great' (*magnis...Africanis*, 5), poor old Silius cannot match these icons' massive statures however hard he tries: Silius is not great *per se*, as Virgil and the Africani are, but only merits the description 'he has a big mouth' (*ingenti ore*, 3) – and we are back to Silian prolixity.

To conclude this investigation I want to return to where I started this section: the respective chronologies of Catullus and Virgil. As I mentioned above, commentators have dismissed the historical plausibility of the suggested Catullus-Virgil interaction on the grounds of chronology, for Catullus died when Virgil was still only sixteen.²²² But there is a further problem. For not only does Martial seem to have synchronized the poetic careers of Catullus and Virgil too much (by making them poetic peers rather than predecessor and successor respectively), but also the manner in which he presents the scenario seems almost to suggest that Catullus is the junior to an older Virgil. How this is so requires a little explanation. Catullus is described as *tener*, which not only means 'tender' or 'delicate', but is also often used to describe

²²² See e.g. Friedländer (1886) and Shackleton Bailey (1993) *ad loc.*

youthfulness or immaturity.²²³ It seems to be the daring youth (*tener ausus est*, 13), Catullus, who risks sending his poetry to his poetic superior and elder, the *magnus Maro*,²²⁴ taking advantage of the licence granted by the Saturnalian context.²²⁵ This configuration, in which a counter-intuitively youthful Catullus sends his poetry to an older epic poet, Virgil, can then find its mirror in the relationship between Martial and Silius: for Martial was actually younger than Silius.²²⁶ On this passage Soldevila comments: '*tener* also suggests Martial's youth with respect to the older [Silius] Italicus (which is not the case with Catullus and Virgil – the latter was an adolescent when the former died)'.²²⁷ But the desire for symmetry – making Martial: Silius correspond to Catullus: Virgil – is not the only explanation we can give to account for this strange situation in which Catullus is represented as junior to Virgil. We can also suggest that Martial makes Catullus junior to Virgil as a means of commenting upon their respective reputations and statures. That is to say, making Virgil appear the senior partner in the pairing is a way of conceptualizing his greater stature and his more exalted reputation in Latin cultural discourse. Although Virgil was, historically speaking, Catullus' junior, Martial recasts him as the senior partner, thus commenting upon Virgil's pre-eminence vis-à-vis Catullus in the Roman poetic canon. In other words, we have an example of how a biographical fiction can be a useful and insightful way of thinking about concepts which go beyond (or even contradict, as in this case) the strictly historical-biographical. In these concluding lines of epigram 4.14 Martial is, on this reading, not trying to reconstruct an episode in the lives of Virgil and Catullus as it really happened, but is rather using a biographical conceit as a way in which to think about poetic hierarchies in the Latin canon.

²²³ For *tener* meaning 'young', see e.g. Statius, *Silvae* 2.7.54 and van Dam (1984) *ad.* 2.3.35-37; *tener* in this context also has a literary-critical resonance (referring to the lightweight, small-scale nature of Catullan verse).

²²⁴ *magnus* can be used to designate age, though the comparative form is far more common.

²²⁵ For the boldness associated with youth, cf. the phrase *audax iuventa* in Virgil's sphragis to the *Georgics* (4.565).

²²⁶ The *OCD* states that Martial was born between AD 38 and 41 and probably died sometime between AD 101 and 104; Silius' dates are c. AD 26-102.

²²⁷ Soldevila (2006) *ad loc.*

A further point to note is that Martial's ahistorical strategy of making Catullus junior to Virgil is facilitated by – and is, indeed, a reflection of – the Saturnalian context of the poem. For the Saturnalia, which took place over several days in December every year, was a festival of reversals and inversions. The festival was characterised by drinking, gambling (*fritillis...tropa...*8-9) and the giving of gifts – indeed Martial's fourteenth book (*Apophoreta*) presents itself as a collection of two-line epigrammatic labels designed to accompany such Saturnalian gifts (14.1). Martial also provides us with some of the most vivid descriptions of the Saturnalia:

Unctis falciferi senis diebus,
 regnator quibus imperat fritillus,
 versu ludere non laborioso
 permittis, puto, pilleata Roma.
 risisti; licet ergo, non vetamur. 5
 pallentes procul hinc abite curae;
 quidquid venerit obvium loquamur
 morosa sine cogitatione.
 misce dimidios, puer, trientes,
 quales Pythagoras dabat Neroni, 10
 misce, Dindyme, sed frequentiores:
 possum nil ego sobrius; bibenti
 succurrent mihi quindecim poetae.
 da nunc basia, sed Catulliana:
 quae si tot fuerint quot ille dixit, 15
 donabo tibi Passerem Catulli.

(*Epigrams* 11.6)

'On the sumptuous feast days of the old Scythe-bearer, over which king Dice-box rules, methinks you allow me, cap-clad Rome, to sport in toil-free verse. You smile. Permission granted then, I am not forbidden. Pale cares, get you far

hence. Whatever comes my way, let me out with it and no moody meditation. Boy, mix me bumpers half and half, such as Pythagoras used to give to Nero, mix them, Dindymus, and not too long between them. I can do nothing sober, but when I drink, fifteen poets will come to my aid. Give me kisses, Catullian kisses. If they shall be as many as he said, I will give you Catullus' Sparrow.'²²⁸

Here we can observe references to gambling (2) and drinking (9-13), and also to an eroticised version of gift-giving, some of whose resonances we have explored above: *donabo tibi Passerem Catulli* (4.14.16). We should also note how light verse is included in the parade of typically Saturnalian pastimes (*versu ludere non laborioso*, 3) – Martial's verse is consistently portrayed as Saturnalian.²²⁹ All of these facets of the Saturnalia would merit deeper exploration, but to maintain our focus on epigram 4.14 there is one other Saturnalian characteristic which I want to concentrate on: the concept of transgression and inversion. In epigram 11.6 Martial says that *pilleata Roma* gives him licence (*permittis; licet*) to write his frivolous verse, and, as Shackleton Bailey explains: 'The *pilleus*, or cap of liberty worn by manumitted slaves (cf. 2.68.4), was also generally worn at the Saturnalia. It was a symbol of license'.²³⁰ The extended licence of the Saturnalia was one of its most characteristic features, as Kay observes: 'But for the Romans its [sc. the Saturnalia's] most noticeable characteristic was the general licence, an attempt to recreate the Golden Age...normal social conventions were relaxed, exemplified by a (partial) change of roles between slave and master; gambling was legally allowed; drunkenness and revelry were the rule; the toga was discarded in favour of the more comfortable *synthesis*'.²³¹ Given this context of reversal and inversion, the sleight of hand whereby Martial makes Catullus the junior of Virgil might begin to make a little more sense. Martial's disruption and

²²⁸ Translation of Shackleton Bailey (1993).

²²⁹ Citroni (1992).

²³⁰ Shackleton Bailey (1993) vol. 3, 9.

²³¹ Kay (1985) 72, and see also his comments on 11.6 with further bibliography for the *Saturnalia*.

reversal of historical reality mirrors the reversals and disruptions which were a defining feature of the Saturnalia.²³²

We can conclude by making one final observation concerning the Catullus–Virgil incident in epigram 4.14. Barbara Graziosi has argued that biographical stories in the reception of Homer are often powerful ways of thinking about the Homeric texts themselves:

‘I maintain that ancient (and, indeed, modern) discussions of the figure of Homer can be seen as testimonies to the significance and meaning of the Homeric poems for specific audiences.’²³³

Reacting against the approach of Mary Lefkowitz - who argued for the fictionality of the *vitae poetarum Graecorum* in order to dismiss them as useful aids in the criticism of Greek poetry²³⁴ – Graziosi prefers an approach which sees in the biographical musings on the life of Homer reflections of the ways in which the Homeric texts were read at specific moments in their reception:

‘My main contention is that the fictionality and popularity of the ancient material on Homer’s life does not warrant our ‘disregard’ [Lefkowitz’s line]. Precisely because they are fictional, early speculations about the author of the Homeric poems must ultimately derive from an encounter between the poems and their ancient audiences. For this reason they constitute evidence concerning the reception of the Homeric poems at a time in which their reputation was still in the making.’²³⁵

²³² Cf. the point made in the previous chapter about how the attribution of greater value to the *Culex* than to the *Aeneid* in 14.185 and 14.186 is a reflection of the topsy-turvy world of the Saturnalia.

²³³ Graziosi (2002) 2-3.

²³⁴ Lefkowitz (1981).

²³⁵ Graziosi (2002) 3.

Although the biographical reception of Homer is a very different affair from the biographical reception of Virgil, I think that the general idea of fictional biographical stories being a conduit for literary-critical comments can be applied to this epigram, and indeed more generally to Virgilian biographical engagements. We need not think that the scrupulously historical approaches to the Virgilian biography which attempt to ascertain the facts about the real Virgil as he actually lived are the only way to proceed.²³⁶ With regard to epigram 4.14, we have already noted the historical implausibility of the engagement between the two poets; but that is not the only thing to be said if we consider what function the story might be serving. We might argue, for instance, that by making Catullus send his book of poetry to Virgil, Martial is more interested in making a comment on the influence of Catullan poetry on Virgilian poetry, rather than in any historically real encounter between the two poets. Having a biographical story in which Catullus sends his volume of poetry to Virgil is a means of signalling Virgil's literary indebtedness to his predecessor: Virgil's very real reception of Catullan poetry is transformed into a biographical titbit. Martial's keen insight into a particular quality of Virgil's verse – its Catullan inheritance – is one which is shared in modern critical approaches; the only difference, of course, is that where we prefer to talk about intertextuality, reception studies, Oedipal poetics or whatever, Martial chooses to talk in terms of biographical potentialities.²³⁷ To put it bluntly, saying that Catullus sent his *passer* to Virgil might just be a roundabout way of saying that Catullus' poetry influenced the poetry of Virgil.

²³⁶ For such approaches, see e.g. Naumann (1981); Horsfall (1995) 1-25, who acknowledges the influence of Lefkowitz on his approach (1).

²³⁷ Ferguson (1971-2) 41 rounds off a discussion of Catullus' influence on Virgil with the following thought: 'Perhaps when Martial made Catullus present his book to Virgil he was not so far wrong'. But Ferguson is, fairly enough, more interested in Catullus and Virgil, not Martial, and he offers no further comment on Martial. The tone of his suggestion is also telling: it is as if Martial was on to something despite himself or unintentionally – he just happened accidentally to say something which contained some important kernel of truth. It will be clear that I attribute a greater degree of thought and intelligence to Martial himself.

Conclusion.

In this chapter we have considered various responses to what we might call the cult of Virgil. In this endeavour the tomb of Virgil has been our loosely connective thread. We began by looking at Virgil's own play with sepulchral themes in his recycling of the Ennian epitaph as part of his own autobiographical self-fashioning. We then looked at how the Lucanian epitaph reworks the Virgilian epitaph. In the following section we analysed how Statius uses his encounter with the Virgilian tomb to conceptualize his own relationship with Virgil in typically learned ways. The final part of the chapter was given over to Silius Italicus, the man who restored the tomb of Virgil and worshipped at it assiduously. After looking at Silius' own presentation of his Virgilian inheritance, we moved on to what Pliny and Martial have to say on this topic. It was suggested that Martial's presentation of Silius' Virgil-cult is riddled with ironies and sarcasm as the epigrammatist pours scorn on Silius' Virgilian pretensions.

Chapter 3.

Biographical readings of the *Eclogues*.

Introduction.

For Virgil's ancient readers the *Eclogues* constituted a treasure-trove of biographical information about their author. Such readers conceived the *Eclogues* as a form of autobiographical allegory: elements of Virgil's own historical biography were perceived beneath the pastoral characters and situations described in the *Eclogues*. Information about his farm, his dispossession, his lovers, his friends, his literary rivals and so on could, it was thought, be extracted by the competent reader if he knew where to look and how to read this *roman-à-clef*. The *VSD*, for instance, explicitly tells us that the Alexis of the second *Eclogue* is a representation of Virgil's lover Alexander (*VSD* 9) and that in the fifth *Eclogue* Virgil laments the death of his brother, Flaccus, under the mask of Daphnis (*VSD* 14). In addition to what the *VSD* explicitly reads out of the *Eclogues*, a large proportion of its other material on Virgil's life has been persuasively shown to result from a biographical reading of Virgil's texts, especially the *Eclogues*: Virgil's sufferings in the land redistributions (*VSD* 19-20) is a literal reading of *Eclogues* 1 and 9; the aborted attempt at writing *res Romanae* before switching to the *Eclogues* (*VSD* 19) is a literal interpretation of the prologue to the sixth *Eclogue*; that the infant Virgil smiled serenely in his manger (*VSD* 4) is a spin on *Eclogues* 4.60-63; and so the list goes on.²³⁸

This chapter offers a re-examination of the biographical approach to the *Eclogues* as practised in antiquity; a re-examination which will focus not on the fact that the ancients read these poems biographically (that much is well-known), but rather on how they approached the problem of biography in the *Eclogues* and what they chose

²³⁸ See e.g. Naumann (1981a) 8-12 and Horsfall (1995) 1-25 for these arguments and more.

to do with it. What I am interested in exploring is how different texts probe, interrogate and make use of the biographical potential of the *Eclogues*; and how these processes of interrogation are far from straightforward or homogeneous. For all too often the biographizing impulse of the ancients is treated as if it were a monolithic entity; as if it displayed a kind of solid and unchanging uniformity. This chapter will suggest that such a conceptualization is too simplistic. For while it might be true to say that many ancient readers are united in their general biographical approach to the *Eclogues*, they differ in how and why they employ this reading practice. In other words, the ancient readers of Virgil might all read the *Eclogues* biographically, but they read biographically in different ways and for different reasons; each biographical reader has his own particular axe to grind or spin to impart. This difference in how the biographical method might be put into practice will be illustrated by case-studies of Propertius 2.34, Martial 8.55 and, finally, Servius. A detailed analysis of these texts will demonstrate the malleable nature of approaches to the biographical potential of the *Eclogues* and reveal the potential dynamism in a reading practice which is too often dismissed as the sterile and ossified pastime of grammarians and biographer-hacks.

1. The intellectual and literary background.

Before we proceed to the biographical readings of the *Eclogues*, it will be useful if we briefly consider the intellectual and literary background from which this biographizing impulse sprang.

Within the Greek tradition of literary biography the method of drawing an author's life from his oeuvre was prevalent. The contents of one's poetry were thought to map

onto the contents of one's life, as the following formulation of the peripatetic biographer, Chamaeleon, suggests:

ἅ δ' αὐτὸς ὁ τραγῳδοποιὸς ἐποίει, ταῦτα τοῖς ἥρωσι περιέθηκε.²³⁹

'The tragic poet (i.e. Aeschylus) ascribed to the heroes what he did himself.'

The attitude expressed in this fragment of Chamaeleon is pervasive in the ancient tradition of literary biography. The result is that a vast proportion of the biographical material which has come down to us concerning the lives of literary men and women seems to have been extrapolated from the oeuvres of the respective writers, as Lefkowitz notes: 'I will contend that ancient biographers took most of their information about poets from the poets' own works'.²⁴⁰ Some representative examples will suffice to illustrate this basic point. The widespread idea that Homer was blind can be seen as a deduction from the text of the *Odyssey*, where the celebrated bard, Demodocus, is described as being blind.²⁴¹ The biographical tradition concerning Euripides' marital problems and resultant misogyny can be seen as an extrapolation from the *Hippolytus*.²⁴² That Virgil's father kept bees can be seen

²³⁹ fr. 26 Wehrli.

²⁴⁰ Lefkowitz (1981) viii. Appreciation of the deductive method of ancient literary biography has been widespread since the late nineteenth-century; Leo (1901), (1903) and (1912) represent important milestones in uncovering the deductive method; Stuart (1931) and Podlecki (1969) are also useful. In more recent times the various publications of Fairweather (esp. (1974)) and Lefkowitz (esp. (1981)) have been influential.

²⁴¹ For Homer's blindness, see e.g. *Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi* 2; Graziosi (2002) ch.4 explores the resonances of Homer's blindness: 'I argue that one of the reasons why this particular feature [sc. Homer's blindness] dominates both literary and visual representations of the poet is that it is itself open to various interpretations: it can be used to emphasise Homer's closeness to the gods, but it can just as easily become a symbol of his poverty and dependence on the goodwill of others' (125-26).

²⁴² *Genos Euripidou* 23-25: 'He was regarded as sullen and pensive and stern, a hater of laughter and of women. Thus Aristophanes finds fault with him as "[Euripides] for my taste sour to talk to". They say that when he had married Mnesilochus' daughter Choerile and had observed her licentiousness, he wrote his first *Hippolytus*, in which he loudly proclaims the shamelessness of women and thereafter divorced her. When the man who married her said, "She is chaste in my house", he replied, "You are a poor fool if you think that she 'is chaste with one man and with one a whore'" [a quotation adapted from Euripides' *Electra* 923-24]. They say he married a second wife, and finding her even more licentious, he became all the

as an inference from the theme of the fourth book of the *Georgics*.²⁴³ And Quintilian laments the fact that Afranius, though an excellent writer of *fabulae togatae*, sullied his plots by including material which betrayed his own shameful love affairs with boys.²⁴⁴

This deductive method of the literary biographers does not exist in a vacuum, but is closely related to the philosophical notion that a literary work reflects the nature of the man who wrote it.²⁴⁵ Consider the following formulation articulated by Socrates in Plato's *Republic*:

‘And the content of the poetry and the manner in which it is expressed depend, in their turn, on moral character... Thus, then, excellence of form and content in discourse and of musical expression and rhythm, and grace of form and movement, all depend on goodness of nature, by which I mean, not the foolish simplicity sometimes called by courtesy “good nature”, but a nature in which goodness of character has been well and truly established... And the absence of grace, rhythm, harmony is nearly allied to baseness of thought and expression and baseness of character; whereas their presence goes with that moral excellence and self-mastery of which they are the embodiment.’

(*Republic* 400d-401a)²⁴⁶

readier to speak ill of women. But the women wanted to kill him, going into the cave in which he spent his time writing’ (trans. Kovacs (1994) 7, who also provides the Greek text).

²⁴³ *VSD* 1: *egregieque substantiae silvis coemendis et apibus curandis auxisse re<c>ulam*.

²⁴⁴ *Inst. Or.* 10.1.100: *Togatis excellit Afranius: utinam non inquinasset argumenta puerorum foedis amoribus, mores suos fassus*.

²⁴⁵ For some more modern thoughts on this topic, see e.g. Stuart (1931) 301-04; Cherniss (1962) *passim*; Rudd (1964) *passim*; Sandy (1971) 54; Clay (1998); Mayer (2003).

²⁴⁶ τί δ' ὁ τρόπος τῆς λέξεως, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, καὶ ὁ λόγος; οὐ τῷ τῆς ψυχῆς ἦθει ἔπεται... εὐλογία ἄρα καὶ εὐαρμοστία καὶ εὐσημοσύνη καὶ εὐρυθμία εὐηθεία ἀκολουθεῖ, οὐχ ἦν ἄνοιαν οὔσαν ὑποκοριζόμενοι καλοῦμεν [ὡς εὐήθειαν], ἀλλὰ τὴν ὡς ἀληθῶς εὖ τε καὶ καλῶς τὸ ἦθος κατεσκευασμένην διάνοιαν... καὶ ἡ μὲν ἀσημοσύνη καὶ ἀρρυθμία καὶ ἀναρμοστία κακολογίας καὶ κακοηθείας ἀδελφά, τὰ δ' ἐναντία τοῦ ἐναντίου, σώφρονός τε καὶ ἀγαθοῦ ἦθος, ἀδελφά τε καὶ μιμήματα. The translation is from Cornford (1941).

Without embroiling ourselves in Plato's theories about literature and its role in the ideal state, it is enough for our purposes simply to note the basic tenet of what Socrates is here suggesting: that good poetry is related to goodness of character, and bad poetry to badness of character.²⁴⁷ The Platonic conception of the work reflecting the moral character of its author is taken up, in turn, by Aristotle. In his *Poetics* he tells us the following in his account of the birth of poetry:

'Poetry divided according to the individual characters of the writers; for the more serious writers depicted the fine deeds of fine people, while the more lightweight writers depicted silly things – the lightweight writers began by writing invectives, whereas the serious writers wrote hymns and encomia.'

(*Poetics* 1448b 24-27)²⁴⁸

In this Aristotelian configuration we can see a similar idea to that espoused by the Platonic Socrates: the character of the author can be inferred from the type of literature he produces.²⁴⁹ Cicero too can be grouped with Plato and Aristotle in his contention that a man's character and disposition can be read from his words and deeds:

'This is confirmed for us by that conclusion of Socrates. For that prince of philosophers used to argue in the following way: he said that as is the disposition of a man's mind, so is the man; and as is the man himself, so is his speech; and his deeds are reflected in his speech, and his life in his deeds.'

²⁴⁷ Plato's views on poetry in general are still hotly contested; the various essays in Destrée & Herrmann (2011) provide the latest instalment in a long-running saga, with further bibliography.

²⁴⁸ διεσπάσθη δὲ κατὰ τὰ οἰκειὰ ἦθη ἢ ποίησις· οἱ μὲν γὰρ σεμνότεροι τὰς καλὰς ἐμιμοῦντο πράξεις καὶ τὰς τῶν τοιούτων, οἱ δὲ εὐτελέστεροι τὰς τῶν φαύλων, πρῶτον ψόγους ποιοῦντες, ὥσπερ ἔτεροι ὕμνους καὶ ἐγκώμια.

²⁴⁹ On this passage see Else (1967) 135-37, Lord (1974) 197 n.5; for an overview of Aristotle's views on literature, see Shields (2007) 375-97.

Although we have no explicit mention of literary composition here, the point is much the same as that which we find in Plato and Aristotle: words (in this case spoken, but easily transferred to the written page) mirror the character of their creator. We can end this necessarily brief survey of philosophers with Seneca who, in a well-known essay on the relationship between language and morals, quotes the following proverb which he says he has taken from the Greeks: *talis hominibus fuit oratio qualis vita* ('men's style of speech was the same as their (style of) life').²⁵¹ Taking Maecenas as a case-study, Seneca argues that his luxurious and louche lifestyle is reflected in his verse:

'These words of his, put together so faultily, thrown off so carelessly, and arranged in such marked contrast to the usual practice, declare that the character of their writer was equally unusual, unsound, and eccentric... it is evident that he was not really gentle, but effeminate, as is proved by his misleading word-order, his inverted expressions, and the surprising thoughts which frequently contain something great, but in finding expression have become nerveless.'

²⁵⁰ *idque nobis Socratica illa conclusione confirmatur. Sic enim princeps ille philosophiae disserebat: qualis cuiusque animi adfectus esset, talem esse hominem; qualis autem homo ipse esset, talem eius esse orationem; orationi autem facta similia, factis vitam.* On this passage, see Douglas (1990) *ad loc.*

²⁵¹ *Ep.* 114.1. Costa (1988) *ad loc.* comments: 'The theory that a writer's style somehow mirrors his character has had a distinguished history: it lies behind "Longinus"' famous dictum "grandeur in writing is the echo of a noble mind (*On Sublimity* 9.2), Buffon's "le style est l'homme même" (*Discours sur le style*, 1753), and Gibbon's "style is the image of character (Introduction to his *Memoirs*); and generally speaking it was a popular belief among English critics from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century.' Cf. Seneca, *Ep.* 115.2: *oratio cultus animi est: si circumtonsa est et fucata et manu facta, ostendit illum quoque non esse sincerum et habere aliquid fracti. Non est ornamentum virile concinnitas.*

²⁵² *Haec verba tam inprobe structa, tam negligenter abiecta, tam contra consuetudinem omnium posita ostendunt mores quoque non minus novos et pravos et singulares fuisse... apparet enim mollem fuisse, non mitem. hoc istae ambages compositionis, hoc verba transversa, hoc sensus miri, magni quidem saepe sed enervati dum exeunt.* Seneca was evidently no great admirer of Maecenas; as Dalzell (1956) 152-53 notes: 'The minister of Nero found the minister of Augustus too deficient in the

This philosophical tenet – that the style is a reflection of the man – is closely related, though not identical, to the practice of the ancient literary biographers who read the life of the poet from his oeuvre. Whereas the philosophical position merely states that a literary work is a general reflection of one’s soul, the position of the biographers was to use the literary work as a mine of evidence for specific episodes from the life of the author. This distinction can be illustrated by comparing what Aristotle tells us concerning the nature of tragedians in general, with what the peripatetic biographer Chamaeleon tells us about Aeschylus in particular:

‘After tragedy and comedy appeared, poets were drawn to one or the other according to their individual natures.’

(*Poetics* 1449a)²⁵³

‘The tragic poet (i.e. Aeschylus) ascribed to the heroes what he did himself.’

(Chamaeleon, fr. 26 Wehrli)²⁵⁴

Aristotle is making a general point about how the literary output of a writer is a reflection of that writer’s soul; the fact that a writer chooses to compose tragedy reveals something about the fundamental nature of his character. In the fragment of Chamaeleon the point is rather that episodes in Aeschylus’ tragedies are reflections of things Aeschylus himself actually did or experienced in his own life; the focus

solid Stoic virtues for his liking, and almost every time he quotes from his writings, he is tempted into superlatives of disapproval. The good Stoic sage was appalled by the vanity and foppery of Maecenas...’ Cf. Tacitus, *Dialogus* 26.1 where Messalla, a staunch traditionalist, lambasts Maecenas’ oratorical style: *malim hercle C. Gracchi impetum aut L. Crassi maturitatem quam calamistros Maecenatis aut tinnitus Gallionis: adeo melius est orationem vel hirta toga induere quam fucatis et meretriciis vestibus insignire.*

²⁵³ παραφανείσης δὲ τῆς τραγωδίας καὶ κωμωδίας οἱ ἐφ’ ἑκατέραν τὴν ποιήσιν ὀρμῶντες κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν φύσιν.

²⁵⁴ ἂ δ’ αὐτὸς ὁ τραγωδοποιὸς ἐποίει, ταῦτα τοῖς ἥρωσι περιέθηκε.

here is on how the work reflects the specific biographical details of a life (deeds, experiences, words and such like), not just its general character or tenor.

The biographizing impulse was, then, widespread in antiquity; but it was not uncontested. Many authors complained that fallacious inferences about their lives had been drawn from a literal exegesis of their oeuvres. Consider the following examples:

Pedicabo ego uos et irrumabo,
Aureli pathice et cinaede Furi,
qui me ex uersiculis meis putastis,
quod sunt molliculi, parum pudicum.
nam castum esse decet pium poetam 5
ipsum, uersiculos nihil necesse est.

(Catullus 16.1-6)²⁵⁵

'I'll have you by the short and curly hair,
Furius and Aurelius, horrible pair,
Bugger and bum-boy! So you dare conclude
Because my verse is wanton that I'm lewd?
Fools! Though the sacred poet should abjure
Grossness himself, his work need not be pure.'²⁵⁶

crede mihi, distant mores a carmine nostri,
vita verecunda est, Musa iocosa mea
magnaue pars mendax operum est et ficta meorum: 355
plus sibi permisit compositore suo.
nec liber indicium est animi, sed honesta voluptas;

²⁵⁵ A much discussed poem; see e.g. Kinsey (1966); Sandy (1971); Skinner (1993) 64-67.

²⁵⁶ trans. James Michie (1969).

plurima mulcendis auribus apta feret.
Accius esset atrox, conviva Terentius esset,
essent pugnaces qui fera bella canunt. 360

(Ovid, *Tristia* 2.353-60)²⁵⁷

‘Believe me, my own morals are different from those of my poetry. My life is chaste, my Muse is playful; a great part of my oeuvre is untrue and made-up: my work has permitted more to itself than its author (has permitted to himself). And a book is not an indicator of one’s soul, but a respectable pleasure; it will bear many things suitable to charm listeners. (If this were not the case) Accius would be fierce, Terence would be a party-goer, and those who sing of savage wars would be pugnacious.’

Contigeris nostros, Caesar, si forte libellos,
terrarum dominum pone supercilium.
Consueuere iocos uestri quoque ferre triumpho,
materiam dictis nec pudet esse ducem.
Qua Thymelen spectas derisoremque Latinum, 5
illa fronte precor carmina nostra legas.
Innocuos censura potest permittere lusus:
lasciua est nobis pagina, uita proba.

(Martial, *Epigrams* 1.4)²⁵⁸

‘Caesar, if by chance you pick up my little books, lay aside your haughtiness which rules the world. Your triumphs have been accustomed to put up with jokes also, and it is not a shameful thing for a leader to become the subject of

²⁵⁷ With Ingleheart (2010) *ad loc.*

²⁵⁸ Howell (1980) 116 (my emphasis): ‘There is no reason why one should not take Martial at his word. Nevertheless, the best explanation that Paley and Stone can provide for this line is this: “This must mean (*as Martial was a sensualist of the grossest kind*) that his life had not received any censorial notice.”’ – quite! (the reference is to Paley & Stone (1868) *ad loc.*).

jokes. May you read my poems, I pray, with that expression with which you watch Thymele and mocking Latinus.²⁵⁹ The censor can allow innocent frivolities: my page is wanton, my life is pure.'

These are just three examples – and there are several more - where a distinction seems to be drawn between the author *of* the text and the author *in* the text; between the historical author who puts pen to paper and the authorial persona who is a character constructed within the text.²⁶⁰ Given this distinction, the authors contend that the contents of their poetry should not be mapped onto their own lives: they seem to reject the notion that details of their lives can be drawn from their respective oeuvres. In the examples quoted it would seem that some ancient writers did have a conception of what we might term the literary persona – that the authorial “I” in a text is something distinct from the extra-textual historical author.

The existence or otherwise of an appreciation of the literary persona in antiquity is, however, a controversial issue. For instance, certain scholars of Roman satire have seen in the use of the first person “I” a construction of a satiric persona: we should not think that we are listening to the rants of the historical Juvenal, but rather to those of a fictional, rhetorically constructed persona: so, not Juvenal, but “Juvenal”.²⁶¹ For scholars such as these, there are two parts to the equation: not only a writer who creates a persona, but also a reader who is capable of discerning this persona, as the following formulation makes clear: ‘the satirists create a range of satiric mouthpieces, conveniently called the satirist’s mask or persona. The dramatic dimension of these poems would have been readily appreciated by the Roman elite audience, who were thoroughly accustomed to the creation of characters from their rhetorical training.’²⁶² But such a formulation – very amenable to contemporary ways of reading literature – has not gone unchallenged. In a recent paper Mayer has argued that in antiquity

²⁵⁹ Thymele and Latinus were mime performers; see Citroni (1975) *ad loc.* for details.

²⁶⁰ Similar sentiments can be found at e.g. : Martial, *Ep.* 11.15; Pliny, *Ep.* 4.14; Apuleius, *Apologia* 11; Ausonius, *Cento Nuptialis*, pp. 390-92 in Loeb edition.

²⁶¹ This type of reading is especially associated with Anderson (1982), and his followers, e.g. Braund (1988).

²⁶² Braund (2004) 2.

there was no understanding of the literary persona – or at least not in the sense we understand it nowadays. Mayer, in his polemical paper, concludes that the ancients read in a fundamentally biographical manner, and says that it ‘may therefore be urged that we look upon modern persona criticism with scepticism.’²⁶³ While Mayer is surely right to stress the pervasiveness of biographical criticism in antiquity, he goes too far in his attempt to eradicate an ancient conception of the literary persona all together. Mayer’s theory runs into especial difficulties when it is faced with passages like those from Catullus, Ovid and Martial (quoted above) in which we are apparently presented with an ancient conception of the literary persona. Mayer, who wants to abolish persona criticism as an anachronistic approach to ancient poetry, does his best to downplay the implications of these passages. His concluding remarks are worth quoting in full:

These passages do not substantially alter what we know about the normal mode of reading personal poetry in Rome. The writers discussed above are all for some reason or other on the defensive, and try out a line of argument which is clearly at odds with the common perception of their readers, a perception they themselves all too readily share. Their claims that one’s poems do not reflect one’s way of life served restricted, local need; it was not a general theory of the use of the persona.²⁶⁴

Now while Mayer may well be right in saying that we do not have here ‘a general theory’ of the persona, and that these poets’ discussions do not conform to ‘the common perception’, the point still remains that certain writers could conceptualize a distinction between the author of the text and the author in a text. The biographical mode of reading might well have held common sway, but these passages suggest that at least some poets saw the possibility for alternative reading strategies. In this respect the conclusions drawn by Clay in an exploration of the ancient concept of the literary persona might be a more accurate reflection of the true state of affairs:

²⁶³ Mayer (2003) 79.

²⁶⁴ Mayer (2003) 71.

If there is an end to this search for an ancient theory of the literary persona, it is to be found not in ancient literary criticism but in our increasing awareness of the practice of poets who created personae within their poetry for their own rhetorical purposes and who also created a persona for the reader.²⁶⁵

In Clay's eyes the Roman poets who talk about separating the author from his work understood the idea of a persona, even if the majority of their audience did not: 'The protests voiced by none of these poets seem to have convinced its audience: The habit and attraction of a voyeuristic reading of erotic poetry were too powerful.'²⁶⁶ Mayer, however, finds Clay's conclusion that ancient poets knew about personae even if their readers did not problematic for two main reasons: 'He [Clay] did not explain how, as writers, they [sc. the ancient poets] managed to free themselves from the common ancient view of the persona, which, as readers, they so often betray.'²⁶⁷ Mayer's first problem is with the notion that the poets could exhibit a different reading strategy from mainstream literary criticism: how is it possible that where most read biographically, the poets could write with an understanding of persona theory? His second problem arises from the fact that these poets who are supposed to understand the concept of a literary persona are so ready to engage in biographical criticism of their own poetic predecessors: if these poets write with an appreciation of the literary persona for their own work, why do they read the work of others poets in such a biographical vein?

Neither of these problems is, it seems to me, insuperable. In responding to Mayer's first problem, there seems to be no problem in saying that there existed in antiquity different approaches to reading. Certainly the biographical method was predominant, but to try and close out other reading practices just because of this predominance seems a misguided judgement. Mayer's second problem also, on closer inspection, turns out not to be a problem at all. For while it is undoubtedly

²⁶⁵ Clay (1998) 39.

²⁶⁶ Clay (1998) 34.

²⁶⁷ Mayer (2003) 56.

true that these poets do, on occasion, read their predecessors biographically, this is not incompatible with also showing an awareness of literary persona: for why can a poet not approach literature in more than one way? If an author wants to read biographically, he can read biographically; if he wants to think about literary personae, then that is his prerogative. Why should we try and restrict him to a monolithic engagement with the literary world? Indeed, what is most fascinating is the way in which these poets explore the tensions and contradictions which arise when one looks at biographical criticism and persona-centred criticism in tandem. Take, for instance, Ovid in *Tristia* 2. Mayer thinks that Ovid's distinction between the author and his work (353-60) should not be given much weight since Ovid so blatantly reads his poetic predecessors in a biographical manner later in the poem (363-466).²⁶⁸ But such an approach seems too polarized and too reductive, for surely part of the point of *Tristia* 2 is to explore different approaches to reading literature and their consequences, and to explore the tensions which might result from biographical exegesis.²⁶⁹

To sum up the picture so far: in antiquity the biographical criticism of authors was a widespread practice; this biographical approach was connected to the philosophical position that held that literary style was a mirror-image of one's innate character or disposition; the biographical approach was not universally accepted or uncontested – ancient readers could show an appreciation of the divide between the author of a text and the contents of his oeuvre and thus explore the potential pitfalls and complications of biographical deduction as an interpretative approach.

2. Virgil in the *Eclogues*.

²⁶⁸ Mayer (2003) 68-69.

²⁶⁹ On the subtleties of *Tristia* 2, see e.g. Barchiesi (1993), Gibson (1999), Ingleheart (2009) and (2010) *passim*.

Biographical exegesis of the Virgilian texts would appear to stem from two sources, the first general, the second more specific to Virgil. First, there is that pervasive strand in ancient literary criticism which we looked at in the previous section: the idea that the author can be read out of his works. Second, we have the fact that Virgil seems actively to encourage biographical exegesis of the *Eclogues*. This second point requires some expansion at this stage.

That Virgil himself seems to encourage biographical exegesis of the *Eclogues* can be illustrated by reference to the *Eclogues* themselves. It is often felt that certain pastoral characters in the *Eclogues* are alter egos of Virgil. This stems from the fact that Virgil several times seems to blur the distinction between himself as poet of the *Eclogues* and pastoral characters within the *Eclogues*; the separation between Virgil - the author outside the text - and the shepherds within the text is not always distinct.

Let us begin by considering two examples from *Eclogue* 10 in which Virgil assimilates himself in a general fashion to a pastoral shepherd:

incipi; sollicitos Galli dicamus amores,
dum tenera attendent simae uirgulta capellae.
Non canimus surdis: respondent omnia siluae.

(*Eclogues* 10.6-8)

'Begin! Let us tell of the fraught loves of Gallus, while the snub-nosed goats graze on the tender shoots. We are not singing to the deaf; the woods echo everything.'

Haec sat erit, diuae, uestrum cecinisse poetam, 70
dum sedet et gracili fiscellam textit hibisco,
Pierides: uos haec facietis maxima Gallo,
Gallo, cuius amor tantum mihi crescit in horas,

quantum uere nouo uiridis se subicit alnus.

Surgamus: solet esse grauis cantantibus umbra, 75

iuniperi grauis umbra; nocent et frugibus umbrae.

Ite domum saturae, uenit Hesperus, ite, capellae.

(*Eclogues* 10.70-77)

‘Pierian goddesses, it will be enough that your poet has sung these things, while he has been sitting weaving a basket from pliant hibiscus: you will make these verses of the greatest value to Gallus – Gallus, love for whom grows in me as the hours pass as much as the green elm tree shoots up at the start of spring. Let us arise: shade is accustomed to be burdensome to singers; the shade of the juniper is burdensome; shadows are also harmful to crops. Go home goats, now that you are full, go home; evening has come.’

What we seem to see here is Virgil, narrating *in propria persona*, portraying himself as a shepherd inhabiting the pastoral world.²⁷⁰ Virgil is, in this instance, not only a poet who sings about the lives of shepherds, but is also a shepherd himself.

The scenario in *Eclogue* 10 is general: Virgil portrays himself as a generic shepherd, but not as a specific shepherd. This is not always the case. For instance, in the sixth *Eclogue* Virgil seems to refer to himself specifically as Tityrus as he muses on his poetic career in a post-Callimachean fashion:²⁷¹

Prima Syracosio dignata est ludere uersu
nostra, neque erubuit siluas habitare, Thalia.

²⁷⁰ DServius *ad Ecl.*10.7: *et dicens ‘simae virgulta capellae’ hic poetam quasi pastorem posuit*. For another place where Virgil potentially portrays himself as a shepherd, see *Georgics* 4.565-66: *carmina qui lusi pastorum audaxque iuuenta, / Tityre, te patulae cecini sub tegmine fagi* – in line 566 the phrase *sub tegmine fagi* is most obviously applied to Tityrus; but it is grammatically possible to be joined with Virgil, so that it is Virgil singing in the pastoral shade and thus adopting the guise of a herdsman; see Hunter (2006) 270; Nauta (2006b) 308.

²⁷¹ Clausen (1994) 174-78 for the Callimachean issues at play: ‘His pastoral poetry, Virgil implies, though ostensibly Theocritean, is essentially Callimachean’ (175).

Cum canerem reges et proelia, Cynthia aurem
uellit, et admonuit: "Pastorem, Tityre, pinguis
pascere oportet ouis, deductum dicere carmen." 5

(*Eclogues* 6.1-5)

'My Thalia first deigned to play in Syracusan verse and was not embarrassed to inhabit the woods. When I began to sing of kings and battles, the Cynthian god flicked my ear and warned me thus: "Tityrus, it is fitting that a shepherd feeds his flock to be fat, but that he speak a thinly-spun poem".'

Virgil here styles himself Tityrus – a poet-shepherd inhabiting a pastoral world.²⁷² And at the end of the fifth *Eclogue* the pastoral character Menalcas seems to portray himself as the author of the second and third *Eclogues* by quoting (in slightly adapted form) the opening lines of those two poems:

Hac te nos fragili donabimus ante cicuta:
haec nos "Formosum Corydon ardebat Alexim",
haec eadem docuit "Cuium pecus? an Meliboei?"²⁷³

(*Eclogues* 5.85-7)

'First let me give you this delicate reed. This taught me "Corydon was aflame for the fair Alexis" and also "Who owns the flock? Is it Meliboeus?"'

In these two examples Virgil seems to identify himself with specific characters in the *Eclogues* and thus, in one sense, to invite biographical interpretation of the oeuvre. For if Tityrus and Menalcas are masks for Virgil, then surely, so the argument might

²⁷² Coleman (1977) *ad vv.* 3-4: 'Virgil is addressed by the name of the typical lowly herdsman.'

²⁷³ *Ecl.*2.1: *formosum pastor Corydon ardebat Alexin*; *Ecl.*3.1: *dic mihi, Damoeta, cuium pecus? an Meliboei?*.

run, the biographies of Tityrus and Menalcas as expounded in the verses of the *Eclogues* must pertain in some way or other to Virgil's own biography?

But, as always with Virgil, things are not quite as simple as they might at first seem. For the way in which Virgil blurs the distinction between himself as external author of the *Eclogues* and the fictional shepherds who sing in his pastoral world is more teasing and suggestive than it is clear-cut.²⁷⁴ For instance, in the passage from the fifth *Eclogue* (85-7), Menalcas actually only says that his pipe has taught him (*docuit*) the second and third *Eclogues*, not that he himself has composed them. The point is that we are being tempted to read biographically (Menalcas = Virgil), but the actual text holds something back so that we are left in an interpretative limbo: is Menalcas a self-portrait of Virgil or not? Clausen's comment on this encapsulates the sense of ambiguity:

Similarly, at the end of the fifth *Eclogue*...Menalcas gives Mopsus a pipe...The pipe is special; it taught Menalcas '*formosum Corydon ardebat Alexin*' and '*cuium pecus? an Meliboei?*' His gesture, so qualified, seems to suggest that Menalcas (Virgil?) has reached a crucial stage in his career...²⁷⁵

Clausen's aporetic question-mark distils the ambiguity concerning the link between Menalcas and Virgil. The ancient scholiasts clearly thought that Menalcas was a mask for Virgil, but for us the situation is not so clear.²⁷⁶ Likewise, the biographical rendering of the sixth *Eclogue* is problematic. As Thomas has argued, we should not ignore the fact that this famous poetic manifesto is actually put into the mouth of a fictional shepherd, Tityrus, and is not spoken *in propria persona* by Virgil.²⁷⁷ Again, there is a temptation to read biographically, especially given the Callimachean

²⁷⁴ Cf. the comments of Conington (1881) 110 in relation to *Eclogues* 1 and *Eclogues* 10: 'the identification of the shepherd and poet is so rudely managed as to amount to absolute confusion.'

²⁷⁵ Clausen (1994) 154.

²⁷⁶ DServius *ad Ecl.*9.1: *...Menalcae, quem nunc pro Vergilio debemus accipere; Scholia Bernensia intro. ad Ec.5: in hac ecloga Vergilius quasi sub persona Menalcae loquitur*

²⁷⁷ Thomas (1998a).

precedent in which Callimachus does articulate his poetic credo *in propria persona*, but a temptation is what it must remain: ultimately it is Tityrus who speaks, not Virgil.

Even if we were satisfied that Menalcas in *Eclogues* 5 and Tityrus in *Eclogues* 6 were transparent embodiments of Virgil, that would only lead us on to a further problem. For Menalcas and Tityrus are recurring characters in the *Eclogues*, so we would have to ask whether they are always representations of Virgil, or only sometimes. The point is raised by Coleman when he discusses the role of Menalcas in *Eclogue* 5 and *Eclogue* 9 – two occasions where Coleman thinks that Menalcas ‘represents Virgil’:

The identification in both *Eclogues* [i.e. 5 and 9] poses in a particularly acute form the question raised [earlier]. Can we avoid associating this Menalcas with the Menalcas of *Ecl.* 3, of 2.15 and 10.20, even though Vergil has there given us no comparable clues to identification? Ought we to?²⁷⁸

This problem recurs in the case of Tityrus: if Tityrus in *Eclogue* 6 is taken as a representation of Virgil, does that mean that the Tityruses of *Eclogues* 1, of 3.20, of 5.12, of 8.55 and of 9.23-35 are also instances of Virgil in disguise? Is Tityrus in the *Eclogues* consistently Virgil, or only sporadically? This is a problem which the text raises but does not answer in any definitive sense.²⁷⁹

Let us return, finally, to those passages from *Eclogues* 10 in which Virgil portrayed himself in a general way as a shepherd. We initially suggested that this general identification between poet and shepherd might facilitate a biographical approach to the *Eclogues*, for if Virgil is like a shepherd, then perhaps the shepherds of whom he sings are like Virgil. But, once again, things are not quite so simple: this temptation to biographize is undercut by our appreciation that the presentation of the poet in the

²⁷⁸ Coleman (1977) 31 n.1.

²⁷⁹ Cf. Coleman (1977) 25: ‘On the whole it seems that with the exception of Menalcas there is, as in Theocritus, nothing much to be gained (or for that matter lost) from a general assumption that the recurrence of the same name is significant.’

guise of a shepherd is one of the oldest conceits in ancient poetry. In the most famous scene of poetic initiation in antiquity, Hesiod relates how he encountered the Muses on Mount Helicon while he was shepherding his flock:²⁸⁰

αἶ νύ ποθ' Ἡσίοδον καλήν ἐδίδαξαν ἀοιδήν,
ἄρνας ποιμαίνονθ' Ἑλικῶνος ὑπο ζαθέοιο.
τόνδε δέ με πρόωιστα θεαὶ πρὸς μῦθον ἔειπον,
Μοῦσαι Ὀλυμπιάδες, κοῦραι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο:
ποιμένες ἄγραυλοι...

(Hesiod, *Theogony* 22-25)

'They (the Muses) once taught Hesiod a beautiful song as he was shepherding his flock under holy Mount Helicon. The divine, Olympian Muses, daughters of aegis-bearing Zeus, spoke this speech to me first of all: 'Shepherds who dwell in the fields...''

And within the pastoral tradition itself bucolic poets are often portrayed as being shepherds themselves:

ἄ μεγάλα μοι Κύπρις ἔθ' ὑπνώοντι παρέστα
νηπίαχον τὸν Ἔρωτα καλᾶς ἐκ χειρὸς ἄγοισα
ἐς χθόνα νευστάζοντα, τόσον δέ μοι ἔφρασε μῦθον,
"μέλπειν μοι, φίλε βοῦτα, λαβὼν τὸν Ἔρωτα δίδασκει".

(Bion, fr. 10)

'Great Aphrodite stood next to me while I was still asleep, leading with her beautiful hand her child, Eros, whose head was nodding towards the ground; she spoke thus to me: "Take Eros and teach him to sing, dear cowherd".'²⁸¹

²⁸⁰ On Hesiod's encounter with the Muses, see West (1966) 158-61.

καὶ σύριγγας ἔτευχε καὶ ἀδέα πόρτιν ἄμελγε.

([Moschus] 3.82 – the so-called *Epitaphium Bionis*)

‘And Bion made a set of pan-pipes and milked his sweet heifer.’

In both of these examples the bucolic poet Bion is portrayed as a cowherd, and not just as a poet who sings about cowherds.²⁸² Virgil’s presentation of himself as a shepherd in *Eclogues* 10 thus conforms to a trope of the bucolic genre: the poet who sings about shepherds is also a shepherd himself.²⁸³ Virgil’s self-presentation of himself as a shepherd in *Eclogues* 10 does not in itself, therefore, prompt us to read the oeuvre as autobiographical allegory; for there is a clear gap between likening oneself to a shepherd in a general sense (which might be a purely literary conceit) and assimilating oneself to specific shepherds in the world of the *Eclogues*. While the poet-shepherd identification in *Eclogues* 10 might, therefore, tempt us to read in a biographical fashion, the awareness of literary conventions might make a reader pause for thought before diving headlong in this direction.

What we have in the *Eclogues* is an oblique insinuation that the figure of Virgil lurks behind these singing shepherds, but nothing more explicit than that; and it is an insinuation suggested by the author himself by flirting with the possibility that he shares an identity with Menalcas and Tityrus. Virgil’s technique here might well be indebted to Theocritus’ seventh *Idyll* and the ancient scholarship on this poem. The seventh *Idyll* is narrated in the first-person, and for the first twenty lines it would

²⁸¹ On this passage, see Fantuzzi & Hunter (2004) 174-76.

²⁸² Nauta (2006b) 307: ‘In bucolic poetry before Virgil, the herdsman, singer of ‘bucolic’ in the sense of a type of folk song, had come to represent the poet, writer of ‘bucolic’ in the sense of a genre of Hellenistic poetry. We find this in a systematic manner in the *Epitaph for Bion*, an anonymous dirge for the bucolic poet Bion. There Bion is called “cowherd” (βουκόλος, l. 11, βούτας, ll. 65, 81)...’

²⁸³ It is worth noting that Daphnis – that perennial subject of bucolic verse – is both the archetypal shepherd and also the archetypal pastoral poet. For the myriad permutations of the Daphnis myth, see Gow (1952) 1-2 (vol. 2).

appear that the narrator is Theocritus himself. At line 21, however, we suddenly find out that the first-person narrator is not Theocritus, but rather a character called Simichidas. The ancient scholia inform us that while some people identified Simichidas with Theocritus, others did not.²⁸⁴ This critical uncertainty over the identity of Simichidas in the seventh *Idyll* could well have been known to Virgil, and thus his own teasing presence behind the masks of his own bucolic characters in the *Eclogues* might be seen as a riff upon this Theocritean precedent.²⁸⁵

To sum up the story so far, we can see how the *Eclogues* come into contact with the two broad approaches to literary criticism set out in part one. On the one hand we witness the *Eclogues* tempting us into a form of biographical literary criticism: by equating himself with Menalcas, Tityrus and shepherds in general, Virgil provokes us into discerning elements of his own biography beneath the pastoral façade. On the other hand we are aware that the text seems to hold something back, and to undermine its own status as autobiographical allegory: we are made aware that there is a gap between the external author of the work and internal characters within the work – one does not map unproblematically onto the other. This tension between the impulse to biographize and the awareness that such a process is in itself questionable and fraught with difficulties is an inherent feature of the *Eclogues*; and it is a tension which is worked-out in various ways by the authors who received Virgil.

²⁸⁴ Σ *ad* 7.21: Σιμιχίδα: οἱ μὲν αὐτόν φασι Θεόκριτον καθὸ Σιμίχου ἦν υἱός, ἢ καθὸ σιμὸς ἦν. οἱ δὲ ἕτερόν τινα τῶν σὺν αὐτῷ καὶ οὐ Θεόκριτον... For the whole Simichidas / Theocritus problem, see Gow (1952) 127-29 (vol. 2); Hunter (1999) 146. Fantuzzi (2006) 252-54 comments: 'Another aspect of the onomastics of Theocritean bucolic poetry was the masking of an essentially authorial "ego" under a different name in Theoc. 7, a first-person narration by a character called Simichidas. This character does not coincide completely with the author (Theocritus)...It is, however, clear that Simichidas represents, in many respects, an 'ideal image' of the author himself...'

²⁸⁵ See Gow (1952) lxxxii-lxxxiv (vol. 1) for the ancient commentators on Theocritus; Theon and Asclepiades, both active in the first-century BC, wrote commentaries on Theocritus.

3. Propertius 2.34.67-76: a biographical reading of the *Eclogues*?

For a variety of reasons Propertius 2.34 is one of the elegist's most discussed poems.²⁸⁶ Before I pile a few more grains onto the already sizable interpretative heap, it will be useful first to offer a brief summary of the poem, and then to survey some of the major critical readings of this elegy.²⁸⁷

Propertius begins by censuring a certain Lynceus for making advances towards his *puella* (1-12), complaining that he cannot brook a rival in love (13-20). Lynceus' transgression is then pardoned by Propertius on the grounds of diminished responsibility: for Lynceus was drunk at the time of the indiscretion (21-2). Propertius then suggests that Lynceus' outwardly ascetic demeanour is in fact a sham – the truth is that he too is susceptible to the charms of wine and love just like everybody else (23-4). Next we hear – to the great delight of Propertius – that Lynceus is in love (25-6). Given these circumstances, Propertius advises Lynceus that lofty poetical and philosophical topics will avail him naught (27-30; 33-42; 51-4), and that he should rather compose works in the slender style of Philitas or Callimachus (31-2; 43). Propertius then describes his own elegiac lifestyle (54-60) and contrasts this with Virgil's epic ambitions (61-6). In lines 66-80 we are offered a potted version of Virgil's pre-*Aeneid* poetic career, before the elegy concludes with a catalogue of Latin love poets – a catalogue which culminates in the person of Propertius himself (85-94).

Many aspects of this intriguing and frustrating poem have been pored over by scholars. Textual critics have pulled out their hair over all manner of problems (corruptions, transpositions, interpolations and so on) and reached little consensus on many of the issues.²⁸⁸ Literary critics have likewise been divided in their

²⁸⁶ Heyworth (2007b) 262: 'These 94 verses are some of the most studied and difficult in the corpus.'

²⁸⁷ See Syndikus (2006) 315-18 for an overview of the poem with further bibliography.

²⁸⁸ See Heyworth (2007b) *ad loc.* for these issues; also Butrica (1997) 201-4.

interpretations, perhaps no more so than when it comes to judging the tone of Propertius' famous announcement of the nascent *Aeneid*. Where some see sincere praise of Virgil's epic project, others see coded criticism.²⁸⁹ And such praise or criticism can be couched in either poetical or political terms: Propertius, the self-styled 'Roman Callimachus' can be seen either to praise or to criticize Virgil's decision to progress to the highest poetic genre, epic;²⁹⁰ alternatively he can be seen either to endorse or to sneer at Virgil's alleged pro-Augustan political stance.²⁹¹

But these are not the only approaches to this complex poem. For instance, in an epilogue to an exploration of how neat generic boundaries are disrupted by intertextuality, Thomas has argued that in lines 67-76 Propertius 'elegizes' Virgil's *Eclogues*: 'elegy rewrites pastoral (perhaps as that very pastoral had once rewritten Gallan elegy) and in the process creates and re-creates its genre'.²⁹² Cairns, on the other hand, prefers a reading of this poem which sees Propertius reflecting upon his entry into the 'circle of Maecenas', and trying to assert his claim to be the pre-eminent elegiac poet in this Epicurean set of like-minded friends.²⁹³

Although little consensus has been reached about the precise tenor of the 'Virgil passage' of 2.34 (vv. 59-84), there are a few points upon which critics seem to have reached some sort of common ground. For instance, by merely counting lines it can be seen that the *Eclogues* receive the greatest attention from Propertius, followed by

²⁸⁹ For praise of Virgil, see e.g. Comparetti in *VMA* 8, who comments: 'In the year 26 already Propertius was acquainted with some part of the work, and speaks of it enthusiastically as of something great which was in the course of construction'; for a critical stance, see e.g. Stahl (1985) 172-88, who comments: 'Coming from Propertius' lips, the exuberant tribute to the New Homer and an epic even greater than the *Iliad* is a very dubious, because ambiguous, compliment' (181).

²⁹⁰ For Propertius' self-fashioning as the Roman Callimachus, see 4.1.64: *Umbria Romani patria Callimachi*, with Hutchinson (2006) *ad loc.*

²⁹¹ See e.g. Miller (2004) 75. Cf. Ezra Pound's translation of 2.34.65-66: Make way, ye Roman authors, clear the street, O ye Greeks, / For a much larger Iliad is in the course of construction (and to Imperial order), Clear the streets, O ye Greeks!

²⁹² Thomas (1996) 244.

²⁹³ Cairns (2006) 295- 319, who follows the suggestion of Boucher (1958) that Lynceus in 2.34 is a pseudonym for L. Varius Rufus – epic / tragic poet, friend of Virgil and posthumous editor of the *Aeneid*; see also Camps (1967) 235 for thoughts on Lynceus as a pseudonym for Varius.

the *Aeneid* and then the *Georgics*.²⁹⁴ Most critics have explained this in the following way: the *Eclogues* are given precedence by Propertius because they come closest to his own poetry in both style (Callimachean slenderness) and content (the prominence of erotic themes). Connected with this interpretation is the idea, briefly mentioned above, that Propertius is casting the Virgil of the *Eclogues* as a love poet – perhaps even as a proto-elegist, as Thomas would argue. These two interconnected interpretations - which see Propertius praising the *Eclogues* for their style and content, and painting Virgil as a love poet – have received cogent and persuasive argumentation; and that for very good reasons. For the poem as a whole can be read as a literary defence of elegy, in which slender love poetry of the kind Propertius composes is championed over and against the supposedly higher genres which have been Lynceus’ stamping-ground up till now. In this wider context it therefore stands to reason that Virgil’s *Eclogues* – small and often amatory in nature – should receive more extensive treatment than the epic *Aeneid* and didactic *Georgics*.²⁹⁵ What is more, privileging a conception of Virgil as a love poet aligns him with the other love poets discussed in 2.34: not only Propertius himself, but also the catalogue of erotic poets which concludes the poem (85-94). We should also note that these other love poets (Varro, Catullus, Calvus and Gallus) were not exclusively writers of erotic verse: Propertius’ privileges the erotic portions of their oeuvre just as he privileges Virgil’s erotic compositions over and above his didactic and epic endeavours.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁴ The *Eclogues* receive either 10 or 14 lines (67-76; or 67-76 + 81-84) depending on how we take *haec* in 81 (does it refer to Virgil’s erotic poetry, or rather to Propertius’?) - see Fedeli (2005) *ad loc.* for an overview of the problem; the *Aeneid* receives 6 lines (61-66); the *Georgics* 2 or 4 lines (77-8; or 77-80). Butrica (1997) 201-4 and (2006) 34 has suggested that 65-84 are an interpolation by an unidentifiable hand (possibly Augustan) – but his arguments (clearly and forcefully expounded though they are) have found few supporters.

²⁹⁵ There are, of course, nuances in the precise way critics address this issue. For example, Stahl (1985) 181-83 suggests that Propertius censures Virgil for his ‘superficial’ treatment of *amor* in the *Eclogues*, before adding: ‘But the criticism is minor, of course, in the face of the fact that Vergil should once practice a small art form dealing with love at all. The greater criticism is that Vergil turned away from it...’ (182).

²⁹⁶ In addition to erotic poetry Varro of Atax wrote an *Argonautica*, Catullus wrote epyllia etc. (e.g. 64), Calvus wrote, among other things, a miniature epic *Io*, and Gallus wrote an aetiological epyllion on the Grynean Grove (for this see Virgil, *Eclogues* 6.72-73 and 10.50 with Clausen (1994) *ad loc.*).

felix intactum Corydon qui temptat Alexin
agricolae domini carpere delicias!
quamvis ille sua lassus requiescat avena, 75
laudatur facilis inter Hamadryadas.

(2.34.67-76)²⁹⁷

‘Underneath the pine-groves of shady Galaesus you (sc. Virgil) sing of Thyrsis and Daphnis with worn-out pipes and of how ten apples and a kid sent fresh from the teat can seduce girls. Happy you, who buy your love cheaply with apples! Tityrus himself may sing to this girl, although she is ungrateful. Happy is Corydon who tries to woo the untouched Alexis – the toy-boy of his master the farmer. Although tired out he takes a rest from his piping, he is praised by the compliant Hamadryads.’

How does Propertius present Virgil in this passage? Let us begin by considering the possibility that this is in no way a biographical reading of the *Eclogues*, and that all Propertius is essentially saying is that Virgil wrote the *Eclogues*: Propertius describes how Virgil sings about Thyrsis and Daphnis (who carries a set of pan-pipes) sitting in the shade by a river(67-68);²⁹⁸ he describes how the *Eclogues* contain material on various gifts given to wished-for lovers (69-70); he extols the blessings of shepherds like Tityrus who can win a lover with a gift of apples (71-72); and finally he extols the blessings of Corydon who attempts to woo Alexis, and who is praised by the woodland nymphs when he takes a rest from his piping (73-76). On such a reading there is nothing really biographical in Propertius’ reading of the *Eclogues*: he simply presents them as poems Virgil wrote, not poems which document Virgil’s life.

²⁹⁷ Hard as it is to believe (given the wretched state of Propertian manuscripts), we do not have any textual cruces to worry about here – Goold (1990), Fedeli (2005) and Heyworth (2007a), to pick three recent editors, all print the same text; the problems are all to do with interpretation.

²⁹⁸ Here taking *umbrosi subter pineta Galaesi* as qualifying Daphnis and Thyrsis; on the alternative translation, see below.

It has, however, been suggested that in this passage Virgil is portrayed in the guise of a shepherd.²⁹⁹ Virgil is, apparently, described as singing his songs while sitting in the shade on a riverbank (67); and he sings these songs to the accompaniment of his well-worn panpipes – the archetypal pastoral instrument (68). It is important to appreciate that portraying Virgil as a shepherd is not the same thing as advocating a biographical reading of the *Eclogues*, although it might facilitate and encourage such a reading. For instance, we might think that Propertius is simply regurgitating the trope typical of pastoral poetry which we considered above, in which the poet who sings of shepherds is portrayed as a shepherd himself; or indeed simply employing the conventional (and related) *poeta creator* motif, whereby a poet is portrayed as doing what his poetry describes.³⁰⁰ Alternatively, we might think that Propertius' presentation of Virgil as a shepherd does encourage us to look at the *Eclogues* as autobiographical allegory: by presenting Virgil in the guise of his pastoral creations, Propertius might be seen to be tempting us to see in those pastoral creations elements of Virgil's own life.

But is it actually accurate to say that Propertius portrays Virgil as a shepherd in these lines? While the commentators uniformly take the phrase *umbrosi subter pineta Galaesi* (67) with *tu canis* (67), so that it is Virgil singing in the shade as a pastoral shepherd, it is also possible to attach this phrase to Daphnis and Thyrsis in the following line – that is to say, Daphnis and Thyrsis are lying in the shade, not Virgil. We might paraphrase the alternative translations available to us in the following way:

²⁹⁹ Fedeli (2005) 994: 'La rievocazione delle *Bucoliche* è aperta dalla rappresentazione di Virgilio che, nelle stesse vesti dei suoi pastori, sdraiato all' ombra canta Tirsi e Dafni. Il travestimento del poeta in pastore costituisce un tratto tipico della tradizione bucolica; lo aveva praticato Virgilio stesso, identificandosi col poeta-pastore Menalca quale autore della seconda e della terza ecloga e rappresentandosi come pastore nella decima. Ricollegandosi all' illustre modello, della cui poesia intende tessere l' elogio, Propertio inquadra il poeta-pastore Virgilio in uno scenario tipicamente bucolico, caratterizzato da un fiume e dalla riposante ombra degli alberi.'

³⁰⁰ For the *poeta creator* conceit, see e.g. Horace, *Sat.* 1.10.36: *turgidus Alpinus iugulat dum Memnona*; Propertius 2.1.18: *ut possem heroas ducere in arma manus*; Statius, *Silvae* 4.2.2: *qui magnum Aenean Laurentibus intulit arvis*; Lieberg (1982) *passim*; Masters (1992) 6-7; Morgan (1999) 17, 56-61 and see the index s.v. *poeta creator* motif.

A: 'You (Virgil) sit in the pastoral shade and sing of Thyrsis and Daphnis...'

B: 'You (Virgil) sing of Thyrsis and Daphnis, shepherds who sit in the pastoral shade...'

If we translate according to B, then the idea that Virgil is being presented as a shepherd breaks down; he is simply presented as singing about shepherds, not as being a shepherd himself. The same point can be made about the application of *atritis harundinibus* in line 68. On this point the commentators do note the ambiguity: 'Some take the ablative as instrumental with *canis* (in 67), so that the pipe is the poet's (i.e. Virgil's). Others take the ablative as attributive...so that the sense is "Daphnis with his well-worn pipe".'³⁰¹ Once again, therefore, we have alternative translations available:

A: 'You (Virgil) sing about Daphnis on your own well-worn pipes...'

B: 'You (Virgil) sing about Daphnis who carries with him his well-worn pipes...'

We therefore have another ambiguity: do the quintessentially pastoral panpipes belong with Virgil (thus contributing to his characterization as a poet-shepherd inhabiting a pastoral landscape), or do they belong with Daphnis (thus making no contribution to the portrait of Virgil as a herdsman)? We cannot say for sure; Propertius' language here is inherently ambiguous.

So far we have suggested the following points: in lines 67-70 Propertius might or might not be portraying Virgil in the guise of a herdsman; and if he is presenting him as a herdsman, then this might or might not be seen as encouraging a biographical approach to the *Eclogues*. For the next stage of our investigation, we need to consider whether Propertius suggests an identity between Virgil as poet of the *Eclogues*, and specific characters who feature in the *Eclogues*.

³⁰¹ Camps (1967) *ad loc.*

Does Propertius suggest an identity between the poet of the *Eclogues*, Virgil, and characters in the *Eclogues*? Again the situation seems rather ambiguous. For in one sense no such identity is explicitly suggested: Propertius mentions several characters from the *Eclogues* – Thyrsis, Daphnis, Tityrus and Corydon – but he does not explicitly say that any of these characters stand for Virgil himself. On the other hand, the way in which the passage is constructed seems to hint at the possibility that such an identification might be made. Consider the following couplet:

felix, qui vilis pomis mercaris amores!
huic licet ingratae Tityrus ipse canat. 72

In line 71 the subject of the *makarismos*, addressed in the second person, is apparently Virgil – for up until this point Virgil has been the subject (*tu canis*, 67). In line 72, however, we suddenly shift into the third person – now Tityrus is the subject (*Tityrus ipse canat*). A change in subject, from Virgil to Tityrus, need not in itself prompt us to identify the two. The way, however, in which Propertius has constructed the couplet hints at this possibility, for line 72 seems to be grammatically and thematically connected to line 71: the antecedent to *huic* would appear to be the *puella* implied by the word *amores* (71), so that the girl to whom Tityrus might sing (72) is the girl whom Virgil can buy with apples (71).³⁰² This might suggest, therefore, that Tityrus is here to be identified with Virgil, an interpretation which has appealed to some readers:

Propertius utitur secunda persona, quia interdum ‘Tityri sub persona’ Vergilium debemus accipere (Servius ad Ecl. 1.1).³⁰³

felix: probably to be taken as addressed to Virgil, whom Propertius thinks of as assuming the guise of Tityrus in *Ecl.* 1.³⁰⁴

³⁰² On *huic*, Enk (1962) *ad loc.* comments: ‘*huic* = *puellae*, id quod e voce *amores* (71) sumendum est’; Camps (1967) *ad loc.*: ‘*huic* then is she who can be bought with fruit.’

³⁰³ Enk (1962) *ad loc.*

But such an identification is not unproblematic. For so far we have assumed that the subject of the second person verb in line 71 (*mercaris*) is Virgil, and then tried to understand how this relates to the introduction of Tityrus in the following line. But are we correct to assume that Virgil is the subject in line 71? It is certainly possible, but there are other options. In the *Eclogues* the character who attempts to win a lover with a gift of apples is Menalcas; so perhaps we are simply meant here to imagine Propertius addressing a fictional character from the *Eclogues*, and not Virgil himself.³⁰⁵ Alternatively, we might follow Fedeli, who sees in line 71 not a reference to Virgil himself, or indeed to any character in particular; rather, the happy person who can buy his lover with apples is to be understood in a broad sense as the generic shepherd of the pastoral world.³⁰⁶ If this is the case, then our earlier attempts to see a link between Virgil (in line 71) and Tityrus (in line 72) break down because Virgil is now absent from line 71.

The way in which Propertius both suggests a link between Tityrus and Virgil and undercuts that link might be seen to be repeated in the case of Corydon. Here are the relevant lines:

felix intactum Corydon qui temptat Alexin	
agricolae domini carpere delicias!	74
quamvis ille sua lassus requiescat avena,	
laudatur facilis inter Hamadryadas.	76

In lines 73-74 Propertius is talking about Corydon and his attempts to woo Alexis – a clear allusion to the second *Eclogue*. But who is the subject in lines 75-76? The most obvious interpretation is to take the *ille* as referring to Corydon, so that the meaning

³⁰⁴ Richardson (1976) *ad loc.*

³⁰⁵ Menalcas sends apples at *Ec.* 3.70-71: *quod potui, puero silvestri ex arbore lecta / aurea mala decem misi: cras altera decem.*

³⁰⁶ Fedeli (2005) 997-98: 'Il *makarismos* del v. 71 è in rapporto con i doni agresti del distico precedente: di conseguenza piuttosto che a Virgilio sarà rivolto genericamente al pastore che è in grado di procurarsi l'amore in modo tanto economico'.

is as follows: although Corydon takes a rest from his piping, he is praised by the compliant nymphs. But the modern commentators on this passage have been eager to detect an ambiguity. They think the *ille* refers not only to Corydon, but also to Virgil himself, and that what Propertius is really saying is the following: although Virgil has ceased composing bucolic poetry, he is still praised for this poetry by the easy-going girls of Rome.³⁰⁷ Such an interpretation, although attractive, is not strictly necessary: we may, if we prefer, see *ille* simply as a reference to Corydon, and not to Virgil. But the point is that there is a temptation to read more into the *ille* – to see it as a reference to Virgil – because of the overall construction of this passage on the *Eclogues*. For Propertius begins the section by addressing Virgil in the second person as a pastoral poet (*tu canis umbrosi subter pineta Galaesi*, 67); so when he comes to end the *Eclogues* section by describing, in the third person, ‘that man’ who lays down his panpipes, although we realise that this, strictly speaking, only refers to Corydon, we are tempted to infer that it also alludes to Virgil’s departure from pastoral poetry. And if we succumb to this temptation, the result is that we blur the distinction between Virgil as poet of the *Eclogues* and a character within the *Eclogues*: *ille* is both Corydon and Virgil.

We can see, therefore, that Propertius has created a tantalizing ambiguity in his lines on the *Eclogues*: is he presenting Virgil as a shepherd inhabiting the pastoral world of his own creation (i.e. the pastoral world delineated in the *Eclogues*), or simply presenting Virgil as a poet who has written of the bucolic world (but not actually been a herdsman himself)? And is he suggesting a shared identity between Virgil and Tityrus and Virgil and Corydon, or is he keeping the poet distinct from these characters? Rather than restricting ourselves in these choices, I think a more productive and interesting response is to say that all of these possibilities are in play,

³⁰⁷ Camps (1967) *ad loc.*: ‘though the shepherd poet rests from his work and pipes no more, the indulgent nymphs still praise him in their talk. Using the terms of the pastoral this says that though Virgil no longer writes pastoral poetry, his *Eclogues* are still read and admired by the easygoing girls of Rome’; Fedeli (2005) 999: ‘*Ille* (v. 75) sembra riferirsi a Coridone: tuttavia è chiaro, anche in rapporto al *tu canis* del v. 67, che Properzio nell’immagine del cantore bucolico che, stanco, mette da parte la sua zampogna e prende finalmente riposo, raffigura Virgilio, cantore del mondo pastorale, che mette fine alla sua poesia bucolica’; on the referent of *ille*, Enk (1962) *ad loc.* simply states: ‘*ille*: Corydon vel Vergilius’.

and that Propertius is in fact offering a brilliant rendering of a fundamental tension present within the *Eclogues* themselves. For as we saw above (section 2), Virgil on occasion toys with the notion that certain of the herdsmen in the *Eclogues* are his alter egos, and obliquely presents himself in the guise of a shepherd. What Propertius does in 2.34 is to recreate this teasing ambiguity by giving us a portrait of Virgil in which it is unclear whether he is being portrayed as a shepherd himself, or merely a poet who writes about shepherds. Propertius' oblique suggestion that Virgil might or might not be identified to some extent with the pastoral characters of the *Eclogues* represents a first stage in the development of the biographical approach to these poems. While later readers will make the explicit point that Corydon or Tityrus or Menalcas are masks for Virgil, and that their experiences as delineated within the *Eclogues* can be easily mapped onto events in Virgil's life, Propertius' technique is much more implicit and teasingly suggestive. By hinting at some form of identification between Virgil and his pastoral creations, Propertius tentatively opens up the possibility of biographical extrapolation: for if Virgil is, in some ill-defined sense, to be identified with his pastoral creations, then words and deeds apportioned to the characters in the *Eclogues* might be transferred to the real life experience of Virgil himself.

This Propertian suggestion that beneath the pastoral facade of the *Eclogues* there lurks Virgil's personal erotic biography is reinforced by the surrounding context of this specific poem. For the overarching theme of 2.34 is that poets who are in love should write love poetry. Propertius exhorts Lynceus to give up his more lofty poetic ambitions and to write erotic verse now that he is in love with a girl (25-58). As precedents Propertius produces a catalogue of subjective love poets who have immortalized their beloveds in their poetry: Varro wrote of his lover Leucadia (85-6); Catullus of Lesbia (87-8); Calvus of Quintilia (89-90); Gallus of Lycoris (91-2); and Propertius himself of Cynthia (93-4).³⁰⁸ The important point to note is that in all these instances the love poetry stems from personal experience: these love poets write poetry which is a form of erotic autobiography; their love poetry is a reflection of

³⁰⁸ For Propertius on his neoteric predecessors, see Knox (2006).

their lived erotic experience. Virgil too is characterized as a love poet; his *Eclogues* are elegized by Propertius. Given the surrounding context – that love poets write about their love lives – we are led to infer that Virgil’s love poems, the *Eclogues*, are to some degree reflective of his own erotic experiences; that beneath the pastoral veneer Virgil is presenting us with his own erotic autobiography.

By blurring the distinction between Virgil as author of the *Eclogues* and characters within the *Eclogues*, Propertius is hinting at the biographical potential of these cryptically autobiographical poems. But a tantalizing hint is all, ultimately, that it remains. What is more, there is a further aspect of this passage which might suggest that Propertius, in the very process of suggesting the autobiographical nature of the *Eclogues*, is playfully undermining and calling into question such an approach. I am referring here to the co-called ‘errors’ in Propertius’ passage on the *Eclogues*. The errors, noted by most commentators, are as follows: the Galaesus (67) is not a river mentioned in the *Eclogues*, but seems to have been imported from *Georgics* 4.126; in line 69 the reference to ten apples seducing girls ‘corrects’ the Virgilian model in which ten apples are sent to seduce a boy (*Ec.*3.70-1) by reverting to the Theocritean version in which a girl is indeed the target (*Idyll* 3.10-11);³⁰⁹ this story repeats itself in line 70 – a male love-interest in Virgil (*Ec.*2.40-4, where two *capreoli* are being kept for the male beloved, Alexis) is replaced by female beloveds in Propertius in line with the Theocritean master-text (*Idyll* 3.34-6, where a goat with two kids is being kept for the female beloved, Amaryllis);³¹⁰ and in place of the famously *infelix* Corydon of *Eclogue* 2, Propertius presents us here with a *felix Corydon* (73).³¹¹

³⁰⁹ *Ec.* 3.70-1: *quod potui, puero silvestri ex arbore lecta / aurea mala decem misi: cras altera mittam; Id.* 3.10-11: ἦνίδε τοι δέκα μᾶλα φέρω: τηνῶθε καθεῖλον / ὦ μ’ ἐκέλευ καθελεῖν τύ: καὶ αὔριον ἄλλά τοι οἰσῶ; for the role of apples as love-tokens, see Gow (1952) *ad Id.* 5.88.

³¹⁰ *Ec.* 2.40-4: *praeterea duo, nec tuta mihi valle reperti, / capreoli, sparsis etiam nunc pellibus albo; / bina die siccant ovis ubera: quos tibi servo. / iam pridem a me illos abducere Thestylis orat; / et faciet, quoniam sordent tibi munera nostra; Id.* 3.34-6: ἦ μάν τοι λευκὰν διδυματόκον αἶγα φυλάσσω, / τάν με καὶ ἅ Μέρμνωνος ἐριθακὶς ἅ μελανόχρως / αἰτεῖ, καὶ δωσῶ οἱ, ἐπεὶ τύ μοι ἐνδιαθούπτῃ.

³¹¹ On the Virgilian Corydon’s *infelicitas*, see e.g. *Ec.* 2.58: *heu heu, quid volui misero mihi?*

Although the commentators duly note these errors, none fully explores what possible reasons there might be for them. While it is certainly right to see in these ‘errors’ Hellenistic erudition, as Propertius mischievously ‘misreads’ his poetic predecessor and ‘corrects’ his poems and mixes up his sources, can more be said?³¹² I think that it can if we link these errors with the idea that in this passage Propertius is presenting us with an ironic and self-aware version of the *Eclogues* as potentially a form of autobiography – a version which is constantly in the process of undermining and questioning itself. Propertius, as I have said, teases us with a portrait of Virgil as a shepherd-poet singing by a shady river of love escapades (67-70), and tempts us to see Virgil behind the masks of Tityrus and Corydon (71-76). He tempts us to read Virgil out of the characters in the *Eclogues*. But this tempting offer is, at the very moment it is being made, being undermined by the ‘errors’. For on the one hand Propertius seems to be suggesting the construction of a biographical portrait of Virgil from the *Eclogues*, and conforming to the traditional literary-critical practice of reading an author from his oeuvre. But when we spot the errors, it suddenly becomes apparent that Propertius is not really reading Virgil from the *Eclogues* as such, but is rather reading him from a mishmash of various texts, principally Theocritus. Propertius creates the illusion that he is reading Virgil from the *Eclogues*, but an illusion is all it is: for there is no river Galaesus in the *Eclogues*, no girls seduced by apples or goats, no Corydon who is happy in his wooing of Alexis, and no Corydon who is praised by nymphs. It suddenly seems that Propertius might have been leading us on a merry dance: he has constructed a Virgil from the *Eclogues* which, from one perspective, appears to have little or no basis in what the *Eclogues* actually tell us. We might see in all this an acknowledgment from Propertius of the pitfalls involved in trying to equate episodes in the *Eclogues* with Virgil’s personal biography; the one does not map easily or unproblematically onto the other. Furthermore, the Theocritean intertextuality at play here points us towards the idea that there is more than one sense in which the *Eclogues* might be interpreted biographically. For while we have seen how Propertius hints at the existence of

³¹² Fedeli (2005) 995-96 notes Propertius’ Hellenistic refinement in these ‘errors’ and ‘corrections’.

Virgil's erotic biography as something woven into the fabric of the *Eclogues*, these Theocritean intrusions point us more towards the notion of Virgil's literary autobiography and the sense that the shepherds and their lovers from the *Eclogues* might have more to do with a literary response to Theocritus than they do with Virgil's lived experience.

4. Martial on the biographical nature of the *Eclogues*; *Epigrams* 8.55.

In this section we will reconsider one of Martial's epigrams which comes into contact with interpretation of the *Eclogues* and the Virgilian biography. What I will examine is how 8.55 can be viewed as a poem which ingeniously explores the biographical nature of the *Eclogues* and uses it as a platform for creative thinking. Martial's treatment of this theme can be read as a development of that which we find in Propertius.

The epigram in question is the following:

Temporibus nostris aetas cum cedat auorum
creuerit et maior cum duce Roma suo,
ingenium sacri miraris deesse Maronis
nec quemquam tanta bella sonare tuba.
sint Maecenates, non deerunt, Flacce, Marones 5
Vergiliumque tibi uel tua rura dabunt.
iugera perdiderat miserae uicina Cremonae
flebat et abductas Tityrus aeger oues:
risit Tuscus eques paupertatemque malignam
reppulit et celeri iussit abire fuga. 10
'accipe diuitias et uatum maximus esto;
tu licet et nostrum' dixit 'Alexin ames.'

adstabat domini mensis pulcherrimus ille
marmorea fundens nigra Falerna manu,
et libata dabat roseis carchesia labris, 15
quae poterant ipsum sollicitare Iouem.
excidit attonito pinguis Galatea poetae
Thestylis et rubras messibus usta genas:
protinus Italiam concepit et 'arma uirumque',
qui modo uix Culicem fleuerat ore rudi. 20
quid Varios Marsosque loquar ditataque uatum
nomina, magnus erit quos numerare labor?
ergo ero Vergilius, si munera Maecenatis
des mihi? Vergilius non ero, Marsus ero.

(*Epigrams* 8.55)

'Since the age of our grandfathers has ceded to our own times and Rome has grown greater with her leader, you wonder that the genius of holy Virgil is absent and that nobody is sounding wars on such a great trumpet. Let there be Maecenases, Flaccus, and Virgils will not be lacking; and your own estates will give you a Virgil. Tityrus, sick at heart, had lost his fields which were close to wretched Cremona and was mourning his stolen sheep; the Tuscan knight laughed and repelled malignant poverty and ordered it to be gone with swift flight. 'Receive riches and be the greatest of bards; you can also' he said 'love my Alexis.' That most beautiful boy was attending the tables of his master and was pouring dark Falernian wine with his snow-white arm, and was handing out cups kissed by his rosy lips – lips which could have aroused Jupiter himself. Fat Galatea fell from the mind of the astonished poet, as did Thestylis whose cheeks were sunburnt by the harvests. Immediately he conceived Italy and 'Arms and the man' – he who had only recently and with difficulty mourned the Gnat in rudimentary strains. Why should I tell of the Variuses and the Marsuses and the names of enriched bards, to count whom would be a

great task? Will I therefore be a Virgil if you were to give me the gifts of a Maecenas? I will not be a Virgil; I will be a Marsus.'

On the surface the poem seems fairly straightforward. After an encomiastic opening directed towards Domitian (*duce*, 2), Martial introduces the theme of the piece: Flaccus' wonderment as to why Rome has not produced any poets equal to Virgil despite the blessings of the age?³¹³ Martial responds to Flaccus' question by saying that if there were benefactors like Maecenas, then there would be poets like Virgil. Following on from this Martial presents a mini-biography of Virgil, describing how the poet lost his lands, won the patronage of Maecenas, and was thus inspired to produce his poetic masterpiece. After eulogizing the extent of Maecenas' patronage (extended not just to Virgil, but to countless other poets) Martial comes to the sting in the tail: even if he were to enjoy the support of a Maecenas, he would still not be a Virgil, but rather a Marsus.

This epigram has generated a degree of interest amongst Martial critics, although the rich interpretative seams are far from being mined to exhaustion. The poem has, in the first instance, naturally attracted the eye of those inquisitors into the conditions of poetry production at the end of the first century of our era: unpicking the relationship between patronage and poetry has always been at the vanguard of Martial studies.³¹⁴ The epigram has, furthermore, been examined by those keen to unearth Martial's literary credos and aesthetic allegiances: the rejection of the epic Virgilian model in favour of that provided by Domitius Marsus – an epigrammatist of the Augustan age and important forerunner of Martial – has rightly been fitted into the broader context of Martial's consistent disavowal of outmoded epic and championing of the epigram form.³¹⁵ Finally, we might mention the limited and

³¹³ On Flaccus, see Howell (1980) *ad Epig.* 1.57.1; Pitcher (1984). Watson & Watson (2003) *ad loc.* make the following interesting suggestion: 'The choice of addressee may have been influenced by the context, *Flacce mi* being Maecenas' appellation for Horace (*FLP Maec.* fr. 2), after Virgil the best-known recipient of Maecenas' generosity.'

³¹⁴ For discussion of the patronage theme in 8.55, see e.g. Nauta (2002) 82-7; Gold (2003) 611. For literary patronage more generally, see e.g. White (1975), (1978) and (1993).

³¹⁵ See Citroni (1968), esp. 287-91.

circumscribed attention which this epigram's presentation of the Virgilian biography has received: the stories presented in 8.55 concerning Virgil's eviction from his farm, the patronage of Maecenas, the infatuation with Alexis and so on all invite comparison with the sorts of stories we find in the ancient exegetical tradition on Virgil (principally the ancient *Lives* and commentaries). However, examinations of Martial's treatment of the Virgilian biography in 8.55, though useful as far they go, remain relatively cursory, and there is much scope for further elaboration. The aim of this section is to tease out some of these unexplored ideas, and in so doing to add further weight to contemporary trends in scholarship which have not only revived Martial as one of Rome's great writers, but also shown him to be one of her most astute and cunning readers.³¹⁶

It is immediately apparent that in 8.55 we have a much more explicit example of a biographical reading of the *Eclogues* than that which we detected in Propertius.³¹⁷ While Propertius, in an incredibly oblique way, pondered the possibility or otherwise of a biographical approach to the *Eclogues*, Martial seems to go straight for the jugular in his biographizing: Tityrus, therefore, is Virgil; Alexis is a real lover, not just a literary creation; and the same can be said of Galatea and Thestylis – these characters from the *Eclogues* become real girlfriends of Virgil who are supplanted in the poet's affections by Alexis. What is more, the themes of dispossession and land confiscation which feature in the first and ninth *Eclogues* become real historical events in the life of Virgil: the losses of Meliboeus (*Eclogue* 1) and of Moeris and Menalcas (*Eclogue* 9) become the real losses of Virgil himself. In addition to this we have a further biographical deduction from the first *Eclogue*: the episode in which a godlike young man guarantees Tityrus possession of his farm becomes a real

³¹⁶ See especially Roman (2001); Hinds (2007); Fitzgerald (2007).

³¹⁷ Cf. the explicit biographizing in Calpurnius Siculus 4.159-163: *tum mihi talis eris, quale qui dulce sonantem / Tityron e silvis dominam deduxit in urbem / ostenditque deos et "spreto" dixit "ovili, / Tityre, rura prius, sed post cantabimus arma"*. Calpurnius is generally dated to the Neronian period, but the whole issue is contentious and many have dated him considerably later (to the third-century); see Mayer (1980) for a Neronian dating; Champlin (1978) for a third-century dating.

historical episode in which Maecenas reimburses the dispossessed Virgil and provides for his future.³¹⁸

Martial, then, quite brazenly constructs his Virgilian biography out of information contained in the *Eclogues*; that is to say, characters and episodes from the *Eclogues* are presented as if they represent real characters and episodes in the life of Virgil. In this regard the *Eclogues* are actually presented in an entirely different way from the rest of the Virgilian oeuvre: whereas the *Culex* and the *Aeneid* are all presented straightforwardly as things Virgil wrote, the *Eclogues* do not actually appear as one of his literary compositions. By this I mean that the *Eclogues* are not presented as a set of poems Virgil wrote which document his life, but rather they are presented as episodes in his biography – they are not presented as poems at all, but rather as lived reality.

Martial's acceptance of the autobiographical nature of the *Eclogues* marks a clear development from Propertius' uncertainty. Where Propertius had flirted with, but never fully committed to, the biographical potential latent in these poems, Martial gets straight to the point in identifying characters from the *Eclogues* with Virgil himself. This assimilation of Virgil to characters in the *Eclogues* might at first seem a rather crude and unsubtle affair, albeit an amusing one: crediting Virgil's toy-boy, Alexis, as the inspirational force behind the composition of the *Aeneid* is humorous enough. But on closer inspection Martial's biographical reading of the *Eclogues* actually turns out to be far more sophisticated and nuanced than initial appearances might suggest. The way in which Martial constructs his portrait of Virgil from the

³¹⁸ Martial chooses to read the anonymous godlike young man of the first *Eclogue* as Maecenas, whereas the exegetical tradition identifies him as Octavian; see e.g. Servius *ad Ec.* 1.7 and *Ec.* 1.42 for the common view that the *iuvenis* / *deus* of *Ec.* 1 is to be identified with Octavian. The Servian view is often repeated in modern scholarship – even in readings of the *Eclogues* which are virulently anti-biographical – but it is worth repeating that the identification of the *iuvenis* with Octavian is merely an inference; the text itself does not compel us to accept this view; see e.g. du Quesnay (1981) 35, 40-44 for the standard identification with Octavian (in a paper which is generally not very receptive to the ancient biographical exegesis); see e.g. Mayer (1983) and Farrell (1991b) 209 for the point that the Octavian identification is only a widely accepted inference and not a necessity.

verses of the *Eclogues* is, as we shall soon see, in no way reductive; on the contrary, the intricate design of this passage actually opens up interpretative possibilities.

A strange feature of Martial's Virgilian portrait in 8.55 is the surprising intrusion of Ovid into proceedings.³¹⁹ Although Martial is, ostensibly, giving us a version of Virgil's life, the whole episode has a clearly discernible Ovidian hue thanks to the intertextual presence of *Amores* 1.1. In that poem Ovid describes how he had embarked upon an epic poem before Cupid intervened and set him upon a different poetic trajectory; the would-be epicist is converted by Cupid into an elegist in a novel spin on an old theme.³²⁰ This motif of a powerful figure redirecting and facilitating one's poetic career is also found in our poem by Martial: Maecenas intervenes in Virgil's life and facilitates his poetic career. This thematic similarity would not on its own be enough to posit a close link between *Amores* 1.1 and *Epigrams* 8.55; there are, however, some very close verbal reminiscences in the Martial which strongly suggest that he does have this programmatic Ovidian piece in mind. The verbal parallels, which are noted by the Watsons in their commentary, are as follows: *risit Tuscus eques* (8.55.9) picks up *risisse Cupido / dicitur* (A. 1.1.3-4); *accipe divitias* (8.55.11) references *'quod' que 'canas, vates, accipe' dixit 'opus'* (A. 1.1.24).³²¹ The language used by Martial to describe Maecenas picks up, therefore, the language Ovid had used to describe Cupid: both of these powerful figures laugh (or, perhaps, smile)³²² at their poetic protégés, before addressing them directly and ordering them to receive (*accipe*) something which will facilitate poetic production.³²³

³¹⁹ On Martial's reception of Ovid, see Hinds (2007).

³²⁰ Crediting divine intervention for one's choice of poetic genre is a well-worn conceit: the prologue to the first book of Callimachus' *Aetia* was especially influential for the Augustan and later imperial poets; McKeown (1989) 7-11.

³²¹ Watson and Watson (2003) 125. Schöffel (2002) does not discuss this Ovidian intertext.

³²² See Schöffel (2002) *ad loc.* for the translation of *rideo*.

³²³ The Ovidian tone of this passage is reinforced by other parallels beyond those taken from *Amores* 1.1: Maecenas' laughing intervention also picks up *Amores* 2.18.15 (*risit Amor*), and Martial's phrase *excidit attonito pinguis Galatea poetae* (8.55.17) recalls *excidit ingenio Iuppiter ipse meo* (*Amores* 2.1.18) – in both of these Ovidian poems the same scenario is being played out as in *Amores* 1.1 (Ovid flirts with higher genres, only to return to love elegiacs).

Martial's reworking of *Amores* 1.1 comes, as we might expect, with various twists. In their commentary the Watsons briefly note a couple of these: while Ovid was diverted by Cupid from a lofty epic composition to slender love poetry, Martial presents Virgil as moving in the opposite direction - Maecenas' intercession causes him to move from the trivial poetry of the *Culex* to the mighty *Aeneid* (8.55.19-20); and while a lover is conventionally an inspiration for love poetry, in 8.55 Virgil's lover, Alexis, actually inspires the *Aeneid*!³²⁴ In the following paragraphs I want to expand on some of these ideas and open up some further lines of enquiry concerning the strange presence of Ovid in this poem about Virgil.

We can begin by considering Martial's conceit that it is Virgil's lover, Alexis, who provides the inspiration for the *Aeneid*. On the surface the burlesque tone is clear enough: making Rome's most prestigious poem the consequence of an amatory infatuation is an amusing formulation and a farcical deployment of biographical criticism. But Martial is not merely deploying his comedic skills here; he is also building upon the Ovidian conception of Virgil as a love-elegist and the *Aeneid* and *Eclogues* as erotic poems. Consider the following lines from *Tristia* 2:

et tamen ille tuae felix Aeneidos auctor
 contulit in Tyrios arma uirumque toros,
 nec legitur pars ulla magis de corpore toto, 535
 quam non legitimo foedere iunctus amor.
 Phyllidis hic idem teneraeque Amaryllidis ignes
 bucolicis iuuenis luserat ante modis.
 nos quoque iam pridem scripto peccavimus isto:
 supplicium patitur non nova culpa novum. 540

(*Tristia* 2.533-40)

³²⁴ Watson & Watson (2003) 125.

‘However, that blessed author of your *Aeneid* also brought his arms and the man to Tyrian couches, nor is any portion from the whole work more read than the love joined by an illegitimate pact. This same man, when young, had toyed with the passions of Phyllis and tender Amaryllis in bucolic strains. I also, long ago, sinned in this type of writing: a sin which is not novel is suffering a novel punishment.’

As Ingleheart notes, in the first part of this passage Ovid ‘humorously reduces the elevated, epic, and Augustan *Aeneid* to a sex scene between Aeneas and Dido;’ and in the second half ‘implies (erotic) continuity in Virgil’s career by moving from his epic masterpiece to the *Eclogues*’.³²⁵ Ovid, then, privileges the erotic aspects of the Virgilian oeuvre as he tendentiously casts Virgil as a love poet like himself. Martial’s approach is related but different: rather than privileging the erotic bits of the *Aeneid* as Ovid had done, Martial actually presents the entire *Aeneid* as one long love poem to Alexis – the *Aeneid* is cast as a poem inspired by and written for Virgil’s lover, in the same manner that love elegists portray their *puella* as the inspirational force behind their poems. To construct an image of the *Aeneid* as a love poem written for Alexis can be fitted into Martial’s wider strategy of deflating epic pretensions and literary bombast.

We can continue our investigation by considering the figure of Maecenas and the role he performs for Virgil in 8.55. The Watsons note that in this epigram Maecenas plays a role analogous to that played by gods in *recusationes*, but they do not discuss the amusing fact that, given the *Amores* 1.1 intertext, Maecenas is therefore likened to Cupid (the god who decisively intervenes in Ovid’s poetic career as it is just beginning). Equating Maecenas with Cupid is amusing in and of itself, but it seems likely that here Martial is also playing with the biographical image of Maecenas as a sybarite – for such an image we need only think of the damning critique offered by

³²⁵ Ingleheart (2010) *ad* vv. 533-34 and 537-38; see also Barchiesi (1993) 169-71 and (1994) 18-19 on these lines.

Seneca in *Epistle* 114, in which Maecenas' louche lifestyle is put in the spotlight.³²⁶ Another correspondence, related to this last point, is the following: in *Amores*. 1.1 Ovid complains that he has no *puer* or *puella* to inspire his poetry (20), so Cupid rectifies this situation by making Ovid fall in love; while in 8.55 Maecenas (playing the role of Cupid) likewise provides a *puer* (Alexis) who inspires the poet's composition. But here we also detect a difference between the two poems: in Ovid love is the sole inspiration for poetry, as befits an elegiac lover; but in 8.55 Virgil has a double motivation – both love (Alexis) and money (*accipe divitias*, 11). So whereas Ovid presents himself as the quintessential elegiac lover, Martial portrays Virgil as both elegiac lover and also mercenary court poet.³²⁷ And whether we think the lover or the money is motivating Virgil, what is clear is that Martial is, once again, deflating Virgil's self-inflated vatic persona: the Virgilian conception of the *vates* as a seer inspired by the gods (whether Apollo or the Muses) is brought down to earth by Martial, who depicts Virgil as a poet inspired by money and a boy.

Martial's playful allusions to *Amores* 1.1 in his Virgilian portrait can be complicated further if we think about how that programmatic Ovidian piece itself constitutes an intense engagement with Virgil. Ovid's playful allusions to, and reconfigurations of, the Virgilian paradigm in *Amores* 1.1 are, of course, very well-known and do not require extensive argumentation here. On *arma*, the first word of *Amores* 1.1, Farrell comments that 'no one is unaware that Ovid is citing Virgil here', and indeed the entire poem is framed within a Virgilian context, as Ovid, the aspiring epic *vates*, is

³²⁶ See e.g. *Ep.* 114.4: *Quomodo Maecenas vixerit notius est, quam ut narrari nunc debeat, quomodo ambulaverit, quam delicatus fuerit, quam cupierit videri, quam vitia sua latere noluerit. Quid ergo? Non oratio eius aequae soluta est quam ipse discinctus? Non tam insignita illius verba sunt quam cultus, quam comitatus, quam domus, quam uxor? Magni vir ingenii fuerat, si illud egisset via rectiore, si non vitasset intellegi, si non etiam in oratione difflieret. videbis itaque eloquentiam ebrii hominis involutam et errantem et licentiae plenam.*

³²⁷ On Virgil's mercenary muse, cf. Horace, *Odes* 4.12.25: *verum pone moras et studium lucri* – with Thomas (2011) 227; also Horace, *Ep.* 2.1.245-47: *at neque dedecorant tua de se iudicia atque / munera quae multa dantis cum laude tulerunt / dilecti tibi Vergilius Variusque poetae*; also Juvenal 7.66-71, where material and erotic inspirations are likewise both in play; cf. the story in the exegetical tradition that Virgil's lines on Marcellus in *Aeneid* 6 prompted Octavia to remunerate him lavishly (Servius *ad Aen.* 6.861; Donatus Auctus 47).

humbled by a Cupid who consigns him to a lowlier role as an elegist.³²⁸ The concept of the *vates*, central to Virgil's self-presentation of himself as a poet, is amusingly deflated in *Amores* 1.1, as Ovid's lofty vatic pretensions (*Pieridum vates, non tua turba sumus*, 1.1.6) are thrown derisively back in his face by an unimpressed Cupid: *'quod'que 'canas, vates, accipe' dixit 'opus'* (1.1.24).³²⁹ But the aspect of *Amores* 1.1 which I especially want to emphasise is its complex engagement with the Virgilian poetic career. Farrell has recently argued that in *Amores* 1.1 Ovid alludes not only to Virgil at the end of his career (i.e. *arma* = *Aeneid*), but also alludes to the beginning of Virgil's poetic career as it is presented in *Eclogue* 6: the intervention of Cupid and Ovid's subsequent shift from epic to elegy clearly recalls Apollo's epiphany in *Eclogue* 6 and Virgil's subsequent move from epic *reges et proelia* to the *deductum carmen* of pastoral poetry.³³⁰ Ovid is, according to Farrell, drawing an analogy between the start of his poetic career and the start of Virgil's: they both begin in exactly the same way by turning from the high to the low at the prompting of a god. In the remainder of the article Farrell goes on to demonstrate how Ovid, in other autobiographical sections of his oeuvre (especially the eroto-didactic and exilic works), presents his poetic career within a clearly visible Virgilian frame of reference. He concludes that 'Ovid played an important part in objectifying Virgil's career and in making it a point of comparison for later poets', and that Ovid fostered 'the conceit that his own career continued to parallel that of Virgil'.³³¹ This is the key point which I want to take away from Farrell's article: that Ovid conceptualized his own poetic autobiography in Virgilian terms, and that *Amores* 1.1 is an important text in the construction of this conceit. With this in mind, we can now return to Martial 8.55.

We are now faced with the following mind-boggling scenario: Martial constructs his biography of Virgil (8.55) in such a way that its language and its themes are

³²⁸ Farrell (2004) 42; see also McKeown (1989) *ad loc.*: '[Ovid] is, in fact, alluding specifically to the *Aeneid*.'

³²⁹ For the *vates* concept in Virgil and Augustan poetry more generally, see e.g. Newman (1967); Hardie (1986) 5-84; Gildenhard (2007a) 87-88.

³³⁰ Farrell (2004) 42-3, who also discusses the well-known Callimachean model for both these texts.

³³¹ Farrell (2004) 53.

reminiscent of an ‘autobiographical’ poem by Ovid (*Amores* 1.1), which in its turn is based upon an ‘autobiographical’ poem by Virgil (*Eclogues* 6) and the idea of the Virgilian career more widely (as Farrell argues), which in its turn is based upon the Callimachean poetic autobiography (the *Aetia* prologue). This nexus of allusions is enough to make the head spin, but beneath it all Martial is actually making a rather neat point about literary succession, and also showing himself to be an astute reader of his poetic predecessors’ tactics of literary self-definition. There are several strands that we can unravel here. First, by mixing up elements from the Ovidian autobiography (the linguistic and thematic allusions to *Amores* 1.1) with his version of the Virgilian biography (the explicit theme of 8.55), Martial nods towards Ovid’s insistent presentation of his poetic career in Virgilian terms. We can also flip this formulation around in the following way. Not only does Ovid present his own poetic career in Virgilian terms, he also presents the Virgilian poetic career in Ovidian terms; Ovid consistently eroticizes the Virgilian corpus and delights in turning Virgil into, for instance, a love elegist and proto-Ovid – that is, Ovid not only portrays himself as post-Virgilian, but also portrays Virgil as pre-Ovidian. So, as Stephen Hinds has pointed out, we are dealing with both a Virgilian Ovid and an Ovidian Virgil.³³² The way in which Ovid portrays himself in Virgilian terms and Virgil in Ovidian terms is captured perfectly by Martial in 8.55, as Virgil is portrayed in the guise of Ovid (as presented in *Amores* 1.1) and vice versa. Martial’s shape-shifting poets (Virgil in the guise of Ovid; Ovid in the guise of Virgil) comprise a brilliant rendering of Ovid’s tactics of poetic autobiography.³³³

Martial’s blurring of Virgilian and Ovidian identities is a sophisticated piece of literary criticism in its own right; but the intrusion of Ovid into 8.55 also performs a further function as part of Martial’s self-definition as a poet. How is this so? To

³³² Hinds (1998) 106: ‘Rather than construct himself as an epigonal reader of the *Aeneid*, Ovid is constructing Virgil as a hesitant precursor of the *Metamorphoses*. There is a *Metamorphoses* latent in the *Aeneid*, Ovid’s treatment tells us’; and Hinds (1998) 112: ‘Amid such appropriations and reappropriations, it becomes hard to know at any given juncture whether *we* are responding to a Virgilian Ovid, a Homeric Virgil, or a Homeric Ovid...or indeed...to an Ovidian Virgil, a Virgilian Homer, or an Ovidian Homer’ (emphasis in original).

³³³ Hinds (2007) is fundamental on Martial’s brilliant reading of Ovid.

answer this we need to consider the theme of the poem as a whole: if Martial were to find a Maecenas, what kind of poet would he be? Martial answers this question, seemingly unambiguously, in the final couplet:

ergo ero Vergilius, si munera Maecenatis
des mihi? Vergilius non ero, Marsus ero.

‘Will I therefore be a Virgil if you were to give me the gifts of a Maecenas? I will not be a Virgil; I will be a Marsus.’

Martial says that, were he to find a Maecenas, he would be another Marsus.³³⁴ This is routinely interpreted as meaning that even if Martial were to enjoy the largesse of a beneficent patron, he would remain an epigrammatist in the mould of Marsus, rather than attempting a Virgilian epic. The poem is thus read as Martial defining his epigrammatic poetic ancestry and writing himself into the canon of epigrammatic poets.³³⁵ But while Martial explicitly moulds himself as an heir to Marsus and not to Virgil, this might be considered to be only half the story. For the poetic intrigues of 8.55 at which we have looked, which have focused on the subtle presence of Ovid behind the scenes, also point us towards a conception of Martial as an heir to Ovid:

³³⁴ Martial elsewhere claims Marsus as a model, e.g. *praef. ad lib. 1: lascivam verborum veritatem, id est epigrammaton linguam, excusarem, si meum esset exemplum: sic scribit Catullus, sic Marsus, sic Pedo, sic Gaetulicus, sic quicumque perlegitur*; 5.5.5-6: *sit locus et nostris aliqua tibi parte libellis, / qua Pedo, qua Marsus quaque Catullus erit*. The scant remains of Marsus and *testimonia* can be found in Fogazza (1981); on Marsus prose treatise *de urbanitate*, see Ramage (1959). Byrne (2004) argues that the relationship between Maecenas and Marsus is something which has been invented by Martial to raise the prestige levels of epigram by linking the genre with the archetypal patron of letters (Byrne builds her case on the fact that Martial is the only author who links Marsus to Maecenas).

³³⁵ Things might not be this simple; the concluding couplet is potentially more ambiguous and witty than is usually imagined. In *Epigrams* 4.29 Martial criticizes a poem by Domitius Marsus called the *Amazonis*, which seems to have been an unsuccessful attempt at epic poetry by the Augustan epigrammatist: *saepius in libro numeratur Persius uno / quam levis in tota Marsus Amazonide* (4.29.7-8). If we apply this knowledge to the ending of 8.55, then we can come up with an alternative interpretation of the concluding phrase *Marsus ero*. For when Martial says he will be like Marsus if he were to receive the patronage of a Maecenas, he means it in a double sense: he will be a good epigrammatist and a terrible epic poet, just like Marsus was who received patronage from the real Maecenas (8.55.21-22). Cf. *Epigrams* 7.29 with Galán Vioque (2002) *ad loc.* for a further connection between Marsus and Maecenas.

Martial's relentlessly clever fusion of his poetic models – operating on both thematic and linguistic levels – shows him very much to be an inheritor of Ovid's brand of *docta poesis*. Despite the bathetic conclusion to 8.55, in which Martial seemingly downplays his poetic ambitions, the ingenious literary games that we have seen to be operating in this epigram reveal a *doctus poeta* in action.

5. The exegetical tradition: a Servian coda.

In this final section I want to reconsider the Servian response to the biographical nature of the *Eclogues* in the light of our investigations into Propertius' and Martial's biographical approach.³³⁶ The ideas we have been exploring in the company of the poets resurface in the pages of the schoolmaster, but now they are packaged differently and speak to different needs.

Before we proceed, a brief word on Servius and the commentaries attributed to him might be useful.³³⁷ The Servian commentary has come down to us in two versions: the shorter, vulgate text (conventionally referred to as 'Servius'), and the expanded version (conventionally called 'Servius Danielis' / 'Servius Auctus' – abbreviated to DServius (or just DS)).³³⁸ It was originally thought (by e.g. Pierre Daniel) that DServius was the original commentary of Servius, and that the shorter commentary was an abridged version of this. This position was decisively overturned in the nineteenth-century when scholars realized that DServius did not represent the original Servian commentary, but was rather an amalgamation of Servius plus additional exegetical material interpolated from another source.³³⁹ That DServius is

³³⁶ Fowler (1997b) is a useful introduction to Servius; he well comments: 'Apart from their own interest as late antique texts, the Servian commentaries are always worth consulting... Even where a critic may wish to disagree, however, the commentaries are always a potentially productive stimulus for criticism' (77-78); see also the various essays in Casali & Stok (2008).

³³⁷ Marshall (1983) offers a succinct overview.

³³⁸ The moniker 'Danielis' refers to Pierre Daniel, who published the *editio princeps* of the expanded Servius in 1600.

³³⁹ Set out in e.g. Thilo-Hagen I.v-lxix.; Thomas (1880).

an amalgamation of Servius and previous exegetical material has for a long time been the *communis opinio*. Exactly what this previous exegetical material was and how it was inserted into the Servian commentary and by whom are more controversial topics, and not ones which we need enter into here. Suffice it to say that the lost commentary of Donatus is often posited as the source for much of the D material in DServius, and it has been suggested that this material from Donatus was inserted into the Servian commentary at some point in the seventh or eighth-century by an Irish scholar.³⁴⁰ But the whole process which gave rise to DServius is very murky, and Goold rightly sounds a note of caution: 'What needs now to be recognized is that the equation DS = S(ervius) + D(onatus), though fundamentally true, greatly oversimplifies the situation.'³⁴¹

While we shall be focusing on Servius, it is worth reiterating that his commentary represents a synthesis of exegetical lore stretching back to Virgil's own day. Many other critics had trodden the same path before Servius compiled his commentary: of the earlier critics we might think of Caecilius Epirota, Iulius Hyginus, Asconius Pedianus, Annaeus Cornutus and Valerius Probus;³⁴² of the later critics Aelius Donatus looms the largest.³⁴³ The Servian commentary should be thought of as a selective amalgamation of these earlier voices, with some original contributions, no doubt, from Servius himself. That is, after all, how commentaries are constructed, even today: they are tralaticious by nature.³⁴⁴ Donatus himself tells us as much in the letter with which he prefaced his own commentary on Virgil:

Ael. Donatus L. Munatio suo salutem.

³⁴⁰ We have Donatus' prefatory letter to Munatius, his *vita Vergilii* and his introduction to the *Eclogues* (VVA 9-56); the remainder of his commentary has not survived.

³⁴¹ Goold (1970) 105. On the issue of the relationship between Servius and DServius, and the source of the added material in DServius, see e.g. Rand (1916), Lloyd (1961) 291-93, Goold (1970) 102-17, Murgia (1974), (1987), Daintree (1990).

³⁴² On these scholars, all of whom survive only fragmentarily, see Zetzel (1981) 28-54.

³⁴³ Daintree (1990).

³⁴⁴ On classical commentaries in general, see the various essays in Gibson & Kraus (2002); on the tralatician commentary, see Kraus (2002) 11-17; Hunter (2002) 105-6; further ruminations on the commentary can be found in Most (1999).

Inspectis fere omnibus ante me qui in Vergilii opera calluerunt, brevitati admodum studens quam te amare cogoveram, adeo de multis pauca decerpsi, ut magis iustam offensionem lectoris expectem, quod veterum sciens multa transierim, quam quod paginam compleverim supervacuis. agnosce igitur saepe in hoc munere conlati<v>o sinceram vocem priscae auctoritatis. cum enim liceret usquequaque nostra interponere, maluimus optima fide, quorum res <f>uerant, eorum etiam verba servare. quid igitur adsecuti sumus? hoc scilicet, ut his adpositis quae sunt congesta de multis, admixto etiam sensu nostro, plus hic nos pauca praesentia quam alios alibi multa delectent.

(Donatus, *Epistula ad Munatium*)³⁴⁵

‘Aelius Donatus sends his greetings to Lucius Munatius.

Having consulted almost all the works of those Virgilian experts prior to me, and being very keen to achieve that brevity which I knew you liked, I have excerpted a few things from many sources to such an extent that I am more expectant of the just offence of the reader because I have knowingly passed over much contained in the old sources rather than because I have filled the page with superfluities. Therefore recognize often in this composite gift the authentic voice of ancient authority. For although I could have inserted my own thoughts at each and every juncture, I preferred to preserve the words also of my original sources with the greatest fidelity. What therefore have I achieved? This, evidently: with these things brought together which have been gathered from many sources – with a little of my own thinking mixed in – the few things present (in this commentary) delight us more here than a plethora of material pleases other people in other places.’

Here Donatus explicitly sets out the tralatitious nature of commentary writing: his commentary will be a condensed version of all previous Virgilian lore – often quoted

³⁴⁵ VVA 15.2-15.

verbatim (*eorum etiam verba servare*) – with a few of his own thoughts mixed into this inherited material (*admixto etiam sensu nostro*).³⁴⁶

In section 3 of this chapter we examined how Propertius raises, but does not definitively answer, the question of the autobiographical nature of the *Eclogues*. In section 4 we witnessed how Martial assumes the biographical nature of the *Eclogues*, and constructs various complicated literary conceits on top of this assumption. In one respect Servius' approach to biography in the *Eclogues* can be seen to be closer to the Propertian approach than to Martial's. This is because Servius does not simply assume that the *Eclogues* are autobiographical, but confronts the issue head-on. Servius' formulation of the problem and his solution are, naturally, rather different in form and motivation from Propertius' treatment: while Propertius frames the biographical potential of the *Eclogues* in an implicit and deeply impressionistic fashion which remains open-ended, Servius confronts the problem explicitly and offers a solution. Servius formulates in a prosaic and schoolmasterly way a problem which receives a poetic treatment in Propertius. Here are the key passages:

intentio poetae haec est, ut imitetur Theocritum Syracusanum...et aliquibus locis per allegoriam agat gratias Augusto vel aliis nobilibus, quorum favore amissum agrum recepit. in qua re tantum dissentit a Theocrito: ille enim ubique simplex est, hic necessitate compulsus aliquibus locis miscet figuras...

(Servius, *Praef. in Eclogas*)³⁴⁷

³⁴⁶ Zetzel (1975) 337-8 makes the following apposite comments on this passage: 'All of this shows quite clearly that Donatus composed his commentary by collecting interpretations from the available earlier authorities, most notably Asper, Probus, Hyginus, and Cornutus, and connected them with occasional observations of his own. Donatus was not the first Virgilian critic to take earlier scholarship into account; Asper probably knew the work of the critics who came before him, and so did some others. The pattern of the development of Virgilian exegesis is, in general, clear. Each successive critic built on his predecessors' work, until Donatus in the mid-fourth century compiled a commentary which was largely composed of excerpts from his predecessors. The commentary of Servius, built on that of Donatus, took a step backward in this respect, and tended to resynthesize the material gathered by Donatus, eliminating the varying interpretations and names of earlier scholars.'

³⁴⁷ Thilo-Hagen III.2.

‘This is the intention of the poet: to imitate the Syracusan Theocritus...and in some places to render thanks via allegory to Augustus or to the other nobles, by whose favour he got back the farm he had lost. In this matter he differs greatly from Theocritus: for Theocritus is everywhere simple, while Virgil, compelled by necessity, incorporates figures in some places...’³⁴⁸

et hoc loco Tityri sub persona Vergilium debemus accipere; non tamen ubique, sed tantum ubi exigit ratio.

(Servius *ad Ec.* 1.1)

‘And in this place we ought to accept Virgil under the mask of Tityrus; we should not do this everywhere, however, but only where reason impels us.’

refutandae enim sunt allegoriae in bucolico carmine, nisi cum, ut supra diximus, ex aliqua agrorum perditorum necessitate descendunt.

(Servius *ad Ec.* 3.20)

‘For allegories are not to be admitted into bucolic poetry unless, as we said above, they stem from some necessity concerning the lost fields.’

These passages show Servius grappling head-on with the autobiographical nature of the *Eclogues* and finding an answer: autobiographical allegory is present in these

³⁴⁸ The same dual motivation for the *Eclogues* – imitation of Theocritus and the rendering of thanks to Octavian – is found in Donatus, *Praefatio in Eclogas: Intentio libri quam σκοπόν Graeci vocant, in imitatione Theocriti poetae constituitur, qui Siculus ac Syracusanus fuit. est intentio etiam in laude Caesaris et principum ceterorum, per quos in sedes suas atque agros rediit, unde effectus finisque carminis et delectationem et utilitatem secundum praecepta confecit* (VVA 49).

poems, but only in as much as it relates to Virgil's experiences in the land redistributions.³⁴⁹

In his initial querying of the biographical nature of the *Eclogues*, Servius might share something with Propertius; but once he has established parameters for a biographical reading his approach develops in a very different mode: Servius attempts to control meaning and close down interpretation in a fashion radically different from Propertius, whose impressionistic account serves only to raise questions and expand interpretative possibilities without offering any definitive answers. Consider the following example (I give the relevant passage from the *Eclogues* first, followed by Servius' comment):

Menalcas:

Quid domini faciant, audent cum talia fures?
non ego te vidi Damonos, pessime, caprum
excipere insidiis multum latrante Lycisca? 18
et cum clamarem 'quo nunc se proripit ille?
Tityre, coge pecus', tu post carecta latebas. 20

'What are masters to do when thieves dare such things? Didn't I see you (sc. Damoetas), wretched man, stealing Damon's goat by deception while Lycisca was barking madly? And when I shouted 'Where is that man taking himself off to? Tityrus, guard your flock', you were hiding behind the rushes.'

sane hoc loco superfluum volunt esse allegoriam, dicentes rem nusquam lectam de Vergilio. aiunt enim hoc: Varus, tragoediarum scriptor, habuit uxorem litteratissimam, cum qua Vergilius adulterium solebat admittere, cui etiam

³⁴⁹ Cf. Donatus, *Praefatio in Eclogas*: *illud tenendum esse praedicimus, in Bucolicis Vergilii neque nusquam neque ubique aliquid figurate dici, hoc est per allegoriam. vix enim propter laudem Caesaris et amissos agros haec Vergilio conceduntur, cum Theocritus simpliciter conscripserit* (VVA 50). For allegory more generally in Servius, see e.g. Coffin (1921), Jones (1961); on specifically biographical allegory, Starr (1995).

dedit scriptam tragoediam, quam illa marito dedit tamquam a se scriptam, hanc recitavit Varus pro sua: quam rem dicit Vergilius per allegoriam; nam tragoediae praemium caper fuit...sed melius simpliciter accipimus: refutandae sunt allegoriae in bucolico carmine, nisi cum, ut supra diximus, ex aliqua agrorum perditorum necessitate descendunt.

(Servius *ad Ec.3.20*)

‘To be sure, some people want to see here unnecessary allegory, saying something nowhere else mentioned about Virgil. For they tell the following story. Varus, a writer of tragedies, had a most literate wife, with whom Virgil was accustomed to commit adultery. Virgil gave this woman a tragedy he had written; she gave it to her husband pretending she had written it; and Varus recited it as if it had been written by him. They say that Virgil is speaking about this incident by means of allegory, for a goat used to be the prize for a tragedy. But it is better for us to understand this episode simply, and allegorical interpretations in the *Eclogues* are to be rejected unless – as we said above – they derive from some necessity concerning the land confiscations.’

The story of Virgil’s alleged adultery and the plagiarism of his tragedy is in itself a fascinating story: if it is true, then we are being made party to an exquisite scandal; if it is nothing more than a fictional anecdote, then we are still compelled to try and explain how and why such a bizarre story was generated.³⁵⁰ But for our purposes the interesting thing to note is how Servius attempts to close down the meaning of the text and impose a form of control: the suggested *allegoria* is, in this instance, *superflua*; there is no *necessitas* for such a reading; here Virgil’s words are better (*melius*) taken at face value (*simpliciter*). In this guise as a controller and limiter of interpretation,

³⁵⁰ There would appear to be some connection with the following anecdote reported by Donatus, *VSD* 48: *quamvis igitur multa ψευδεπίγραφα, id est falsa inscriptione sub alieno nomine sint prolata, ut Thyestes tragoedia huius poetae, quam Varius suo nomine edidit, et alia huiusmodi*. On Virgil as an adulterer in the biographical tradition, see Hubaux (1934), Suerbaum (1983).

Servius seems a very different biographical reader of the *Eclogues* from Propertius and Martial.³⁵¹

Servius' approach to biographical allegoresis, although very different in particulars, is not, however, too far removed from one aspect of Martial's biographical reading in *Epigrams* 8.55. In that poem we witnessed how Martial uses a biographical approach to the *Eclogues* not as an end in and of itself, but rather as a platform upon which he can make literary-critical comments and, more importantly in this context, build-up his own self-image as a poet. Martial's biographical reading of the *Eclogues* contributes, in other words, to his own self-portrait. In this respect the Servian approach can be seen as similar: Servius' application of the biographical approach functions not only as a window onto an image of Virgil, but also assists in the construction of Servius' own self-portrait. For in his circumscribed use of biographical allegoresis, Servius is projecting an image of himself as a controller of interpretation: every time he either endorses or rejects a biographical extrapolation, he is telling us not only something about his conception of Virgil, but is also constructing his own self-image as a guardian of Virgilian interpretation.³⁵²

Although Servius might be seen as seeking to control biographical interpretation, his methods should not be misconstrued as wholly stifling or dogmatic: he often allows for the possibility of more than one interpretation, even if he generally indicates which reading he thinks preferable. Consider, for instance, the following comments on *Eclogue* 2.1 (*formosum pastor Corydon ardebat Alexin*):

³⁵¹ For other examples of Servius trying to restrict the application of biographical allegoresis, see e.g. his comments *ad* 3.71: *et volunt quidam hoc loco allegoriam esse ad Augustum de decem eclogis: quod superfluum est: quae enim necessitas hoc loco allegoriae?*

³⁵² Cf. Kaster (1988) 17-18: 'At the threshold of that achievement stood the grammarian, controlling the access to eloquence with his texts in one hand and his cane in the other. The grammarian's position is here captured in another recurrent metaphor, that of *custos*, or guardian. The grammarian was, first, the guardian of the language, *custos Latini sermonis*... He was to protect the language against corruption, to preserve its coherence, and to act as an agent of control... But by virtue of his command of the poetic texts, the grammarian's guardianship extended to another, more general area, as guardian of tradition (*historiae custos*). The grammarian was the conservator of all the discrete pieces of tradition embedded in his texts...'

Corydonis in persona Vergilius intellegitur, Caesar Alexis in persona inducitur. **ARDEBAT** id est impatienter diligebat et alebat et laudabat. **ALEXIM** dicunt Alexandrum, qui fuit servus Asinii Pollionis, quem Vergilius, rogatus ad prandium, cum vidisset in ministerio omnium pulcherrimum, dilexit eumque dono accepit. Caesarem quidam acceperunt, formosum in operibus et gloria. alii puerum Caesaris, quem si laudasset, gratam rem Caesari fecisset. nam Vergilius dicitur in pueros habuisse amorem: nec enim turpiter eum diligebat. alii Corydona, Asinii Pollionis puerum, adamatum a Vergilio ferunt, eumque a domino datum; Corydona a Vergilio ficto nomine nuncupari ex eo genere avis, quae corydalis dicitur, dulce canens; Alexin vero puerum quasi sine responsione ac superbum; hunc autem dilectum fuisse Pollionis, et Vergilium gratum se futurum existimasse, si eum laudaret, cuius forma Pollio delectabatur, qui eo tempore transpadanam Italiae partem tenebat et agris praeerat dividendis.

(Servius *ad Ec.2.1*)

‘Virgil is understood under the guise of Corydon, Caesar is introduced in the guise of Alexis. “he was ablaze” means he loved, supported and praised him impatiently. They say that Alexis is Alexander, who was a slave of Asinius Pollio – when Virgil, who had been invited to dinner, saw Alexander (the most beautiful of all those serving) he fell in love with him and received him as a gift. Some people think that Alexis is Caesar, who was beautiful in his deeds and in his glory. Others say that Alexis was a slave of Caesar, and that if Virgil had praised Alexis, he would have done something pleasing to Caesar. For Virgil is said to have had a passion for boys: but he did not love him shamefully. Others say that Corydon was a slave of Pollio who was loved by Virgil, and that he was given by his master to Virgil; they say that Corydon is a name made up by Virgil from that sweet-singing species of bird called the ‘corydalis’; Alexis is certainly a slave boy without reply and haughty; they say that this Alexis was

the beloved of Pollio, and that Virgil thought he would please Pollio if he praised the boy whose beauty Pollio was delighted by – at that time Pollio held northern Italy and was in charge of the land divisions.’

In this instance Servius presents us with a range of biographical possibilities: Alexis might be Caesar, or one of Pollio’s slaves with whom Virgil was enamoured, or one of Caesar’s slaves; and Corydon might be Virgil or a slave of Pollio. What is interesting for our purposes is not which, if any, of these stories are true, but rather the way in which Servius broaches the whole issue of biographical details hidden beneath the characters in the *Eclogues*. In this case Servius does not try to control our interpretation completely; instead he presents us with a range of possible options without suggesting which one we should follow.³⁵³

³⁵³ This technique of listing various interpretations without specifically endorsing one particular view is common in ancient commentaries and bodies of scholia; the following passage of St Jerome, *Contra Rufinum* 1.6 (to be found in *Patrologia Latina* 23.428-9) discusses the issue: *Commentarii quid operis habent? alterius dicta edisserunt, quae obscure scripta sunt, plano sermone manifestant: multorum sententias replicant, et dicunt: hunc locum quidam sic edisserunt, alii sic interpretantur: illi sensum suum et intelligentiam his testimoniis, et hac nituntur ratione firmare: ut prudens lector, cum diversas lectiones legerit, et multorum vel probanda, vel improbanda didicerit, iudicet quid verius sit: et quasi bonus trapezita, adulterinae monetae pecuniam reprobet. num diversae interpretationis, et contrariorum inter se sensuum tenebitur reus, qui in uno opere quod edisserit, expositiones posuerit plurimorum? puto quod puer legeris Aspri in Vergilium et Sallustium commentarios, Vulcatii in orationes Ciceronis, Victorini in dialogos eius et in Terentii comoedias, praeceptoris mei Donati aequae in Vergilium, et aliorum in alios: Plautum videlicet, Lucretium, Flaccum, Persium atque Lucanum. argue interpretes eorum, quare non unam explanationem secuti sint: et in eadem re quid vel sibi, vel aliis videatur, enumerent* (‘What is the function of commentators? They expound the statements of someone else; they express in simple language views that have been expressed in an obscure manner; they quote the opinions of many individuals and they say: ‘Some interpret this passage in this sense, others in another sense’; they attempt to support their own understanding and interpretation with these testimonies in this fashion, so that the prudent reader, after reading the different interpretations and studying which of these many views are to be accepted and which rejected, will judge for himself which is the more correct; and, like the expert banker, will reject the falsely minted coin. Will the person, who has quoted the interpretations of many individuals in a work that he is expounding, be held responsible for the different interpretations and contradictory views? I suppose that as a boy you read the commentaries of Asper on Vergil and Sallust, of Volcatius on the orations of Cicero, of Victorinus on his dialogues and on the comedies of Terence, as well as those of Donatus, my teacher, on Vergil, and of others on other writers, such as Plautus, to be sure, Lucretius, Flaccus, Persius, and Lucan. Condemn their commentators for not adopting one interpretation, and for quoting either what they themselves or others believed on the same point’ (trans. Hritz (1965)); on this passage see Grafton (1977) 187-88.

There is, of course, a proviso in all of this: Servius' admission of an element of indeterminacy is still bounded by the limiting frame of the land-redistribution topic; we are indeed given various options for how to read Corydon and Alexis, but each option relates in some way to the political events of the late 40s BC.³⁵⁴ Nonetheless, we might see Servius' admission of an element of indeterminacy (no matter how circumscribed) as one way in which his approach to the *Eclogues* mirrors that of Propertius and Martial. These two poets have been shown to feed off the oblique and indeterminate nature of the *Eclogues* as an autobiographical text, and in a certain sense Servius' approach is no different. For Servius too responds to the biographical indeterminacies of the *Eclogues*, only he articulates this awareness differently by listing the various competing readings of certain passages. What we see in Servius is a tension between closing-down the text and opening it out: and even on the occasions when he tries to close-down the text, this approach reveals that he knew the text could potentially be opened up – Servius' need to control meaning as a guardian of language is driven by a fear of a free-for-all in interpretation.³⁵⁵ This tension in Servius (between his desire to close down the text and his grudging admission that it is susceptible to opening out) reflects an important aspect of the

³⁵⁴ The role of Asinius Pollio in assisting Virgil during the land confiscations is a standard element in the biographical tradition; see e.g. *VSD* 19: *mox cum res Romanas inchoasset, offensus materia ad Bucolica transiit, maxime ut Asinium Pollionem, Alfenum Varum et Cornelium Gallum celebraret, quia in distributione agrorum, qui post Philippensem victoriam veteranis triumvirorum iussu trans Padum dividebantur, indemnem se praestitissent*; also *vita Servii: amissis ergo agris Romam venit et usus patrocini Pollionis et Maecenatis solus agrum, quem amiserat, meruit. Tunc ei proposuit Pollio ut carmen bucolicum scriberet...*; see the comments of Starr (1995) 133: 'the commentators assumed that the *Eclogues* needed to be understood in their own political and historical context, which they took to be the struggle between Octavian and Antony... They were not reading ahistorically, as might be the case with philosophical or moral allegory.'

³⁵⁵ Cf. the comments of Sharrock (2008) 9-10: 'I am wondering in this paper whether Servius was (or constructs himself as) a rival or a handmaiden to Virgil; and whether he sees criticism as something which closes or opens a text. I suspect that the conventional view would be that he is a "handmaiden" who "closes down" the text. As a "voice" in the Servian commentary, the presence of the "handmaiden" is probably undeniable, but I suggest that it is possible to hear other "voices" as well, voices which elucidate through rivalry and intertextuality rather than through dogmatic simplification.' Cf. Morello (2008) for another attempt to salvage Servius' reputation as a literary critic: Morello suggests that Servius offers a better (and fairer) reading of Camilla in the *Aeneid* than many modern scholars (who are either romantically over-sentimental or lazily misogynistic).

Eclogues themselves: they demand, on the one hand, to be read biographically to a certain extent (the addressees are real historical figures, the people in the pastoral world talk about these real figures, the tease of Tityrus and Menalcas as masks for Virgil), but at the same time as they tempt, their oblique and slippery nature pulls back and seem to resist straightforward biographical allegoresis.

Conclusions.

In the very first sentence of his introduction to his commentary on the *Aeneid*, Servius emphasises the importance of the author's life for an understanding of the oeuvre:

In exponendis auctoribus haec consideranda sunt: poetae vita, titulus operis, qualitas carminis, scribentis intentio, numerus librorum, ordo librorum, explanatio. Vergilii haec vita est...

'In the interpretation of authors the following things are to be considered: the life of the author, the title of the work, the type of poem, the intention of the writer, the number of books, the order of books, the explanation. The life of Virgil is as follows...'

The life of the author is fundamental to understanding the work; so fundamental that it takes first position in the interpretative process.³⁵⁶ In this chapter we have considered three approaches to the *Eclogues* which explore, in varied ways, the possibility of extracting Virgil's life from these poems. We have examined how Propertius probes the biographical potential of the *Eclogues* at a time before

³⁵⁶ Note also that the *vita* is also usually the first thing we physically encounter in manuscripts: the Life of the author precedes the oeuvre and forms a vital prerequisite for a proper understanding of the work to follow.

biographical exegesis of these poems had fully taken hold; we have investigated how Martial uses the biographical method as a conduit to explore the relationships between various poets; and we have seen how Servius attempts to control the biographical approach without completely stifling the ambiguities inherent in the *Eclogues*. The biographical readings of these three authors each tell us something about how they conceived Virgil as a poet, and are thus part of the wider Virgilian biographical tradition. But these biographical readings are never just about recovering an image of Virgil; they also reveal much about the reader who is performing the biographizing. The biographical images of Virgil found in these authors do not simply function as historical reconstructions, or aim at historical verisimilitude. For these authors also exploit biographical images of Virgil garnered from the *Eclogues* to further their own rhetorical goals and processes of self-definition. In the process of reading Virgil's life from the *Eclogues*, Propertius, Martial and Servius each project an image of themselves; their musings on the Virgilian biography can also be read as interesting moments of autobiography as their own lives are reflected in a Virgilian mirror.

Chapter 4.

Virgil in Tacitus' *Dialogus de Oratoribus*.

1. Introduction.

Tacitus' *Dialogus de Oratoribus* might not seem like the most fertile ground in which to dig for images of the poet Virgil. It is, after all, a dialogue concerned with oratory; more specifically, with the perceived decline of oratory under the principate. Virgil does, nonetheless, make an appearance in this unlikely setting; an appearance which is small in compass but, I will argue, large in resonance. My analysis of Virgil's appearance in the *Dialogus* comprises various strands. I shall explore how our reading of the small passage on Virgil cannot be divorced from our wider interpretation of the *Dialogus*. The portrait of Virgil we are offered is inextricably woven into the fabric of the *Dialogus*; to wrench it from its context and treat it in isolation is to bypass many of its most interesting features. I will, in addition, show how the Tacitean presentation of Virgil can be read as a subtle inquiry into the nature of that poet's relationship with Augustus. I will suggest that the *Dialogus* can be read as a provocation to think harder about the Virgil-Augustus relationship; and, indeed, about the relationship between literature and power in general. The questions which the *Dialogus'* treatment of Virgil raise in this area can, according to my interpretation, be seen to prefigure many aspects of modern academic debate over Virgil's relationship to Augustus. I shall, finally, be concerned with the ways in which Virgil's life is idealized in the *Dialogus*; and, furthermore, different ways in which we can respond to such idealization. In all of these areas I will not be pursuing any one dogmatic line in this enquiry; dialogue in the Platonic mould – which is what the *Dialogus* is – eschews dogma in any case. The reader is challenged actively to

construct interpretations, not passively to receive them: Tacitus invites us to enter the dialogue with him.³⁵⁷

2. Summary of the *Dialogus*.

A summary of the dialogue and a brief survey of some of the major critical approaches will be a useful launch-pad. Tacitus' *Dialogus de Oratoribus* is addressed to Fabius Justus, suffect consul in A.D. 102.³⁵⁸ Fabius, we are told, has often asked Tacitus to explain why previous ages were graced with so many eminent orators, whereas contemporary Rome seems lacking in this regard (1.1). Tacitus shirks the responsibility of trying to answer this question directly, proposing instead that he recount a debate which he heard take place in his youth between certain luminaries of the time; a debate which broached the self-same issue which is now occupying Fabius' mind (1.2-1.4). Tacitus recalls how in A.D. 75, during the reign of Vespasian, he had accompanied his mentors Marcus Aper and Julius Secundus – two of the leading orators of the day – to the house of Curiatius Maternus on the day following Maternus' recitation of his tragedy *Cato*; a recitation which was reported to have offended those in the imperial court (2.1).³⁵⁹ On entering Maternus' house they find their friend with a copy of his *Cato* before him, which prompts Secundus, evidently concerned for Maternus' safety, to enquire whether he is revising the play to make it a safer (*securiorem*) piece of work (3.1-3.2). Maternus replies that he is not making any cuts to the *Cato* which he recited, and indeed that any material which did not make it

³⁵⁷ Cf. the comments of Brink (1994) 276-77: 'the *Dialogus* is no tract for the times. It pursues no thesis, single or composite, nor does it answer a particular question, not even very fully the question posed at the outset. It pursues a number of theses...'

³⁵⁸ See Syme (1970) 110-18 for a detailed discussion of Fabius.

³⁵⁹ For the dramatic date of the dialogue, see *Dialogus* 17.3: *sextam iam felicis huius principatus stationem quo Vespasianus rem publicam fovet: centum et viginti anni ab interitu Ciceronis in hunc diem colliguntur*; discussion from Heubner *apud* Güngerich (1980) 196-97; see also Syme (1958) 670-71. For the political aspects of theatre in Rome, see e.g. La Penna (1979) 127-41; Leigh (1996).

into his *Cato* will appear in his next play, *Thyestes* (3.3).³⁶⁰ This response provokes Aper, who criticises Maternus for deserting his career as an orator in order to spend his time composing tragedies; it is a criticism which, Maternus tells us, Aper has frequently made before (3.4-4.1).

After this set-up we enter into the first major debate of the *Dialogus*, in which Aper champions the life of the orator over that of the poet, and Maternus argues for the opposite point of view (5.3-13.6). Aper speaks first, championing the life of the orator, and building his arguments around certain key terms: *utilitas* (5.5), *voluptas* (6.1), *fama* and *laus* (7.2). In Aper's eyes it is the oratorical life which can offer the greatest rewards in these areas (5-8). By way of contrast, the poet's life brings with it no *utilitas* and no *dignitas*; the poet's *voluptas* is *brevis*; his *laus* is *inanis* and *infructuosa* (9.1). Aper teases poets for their highfalutin self-presentation as *vates*;³⁶¹ raises eyebrows at how they have to slave-away all night on their masterpieces only to find audiences for their verse hard to come by (9.3); considers the poet's need for a patron as an inferior state of affairs to the orator's self-sufficiency (9.5); and laments how poets are compelled to abandon the *conversatio amicorum et iucunditas urbis* and must retreat *in nemora et lucos* if they want to produce anything worthwhile (9.6).³⁶² The orator achieves greater *fama* than the poet (10.1) and, what is more, oratory is a less dangerous field than poetry – if the orator offends those on high then he at least has the excuse of professional obligation, or loyalty to a client or friend (10.6). Aper also suggests that the poet's desire for the solitude, anonymity and political security of the *nemora et luci* is disingenuous – their choice of politically explosive topics reveals

³⁶⁰ A myth which was always 'useful for invective against palace and dynasty, for maxims of subversive statecraft', Syme (1958) 362.

³⁶¹ *egregium poetam vel, si hoc honorificentius est, praeclarissimum vatem*, 9.2.

³⁶² The phrase *nemora et lucos* has played a central role in debates over the authenticity and date of the *Dialogus*. The phrase, as Lange pointed out in 1814, is used by Pliny in a letter to Tacitus (*Ep.* 9.10.2) which dates from around A.D. 107. This has been used as incontrovertible evidence that the *Dialogus* is genuinely Tacitean. Some scholars (including those who believe the *Dialogus* is by Tacitus) have thought that the phrase is a commonplace and that no specific allusion to the *Dialogus* can be inferred from Pliny's use of the phrase. Heubner *apud* Güngerich (1980) 192 (which includes the reference for the Lange publication) and Sherwin-White (1966) 487-89 are among those who are sceptical that a specific allusion is meant; Luce (1993) 14 n.16 argues convincingly for an intended allusion.

how they really crave the limelight and want to cause a stir (10.7). Finally, we should note that Aper does not argue against poetry *per se*: poetry is fine as a pursuit, he concedes, but only for those with no oratorical talent – if you have oratorical skill like Maternus, then it is a criminal waste of talent to spend one’s days composing verse (10.3-10.5).³⁶³

Maternus responds to Aper’s assault with a rebuttal of his main points. On the question of fame, Maternus says that his renown stems more from his output as a tragedian than from his oratorical endeavours (11.2).³⁶⁴ On the question of safety, Maternus says that *innocentia* is a greater defence than Aper’s *eloquentia* (11.3). In chapter 12 Maternus describes the joys of poetic retreat, contrasting this existence with the maddening hubbub of the city. He draws a strong link between poetry and the golden age (*aureum saeculum*, 12.3). This paradisiacal state abounded in poets who were also the mouthpieces of oracles and enjoyed close bonds with gods and kings; but there were no orators because there was no evil in the world which might necessitate them (12.3-12.5). Returning to the question of fame and reputation, Maternus argues that Homer is no less honoured than Demosthenes, and that one can find more people willing to disparage Cicero than Virgil (12.5). In chapter 13 Maternus compares the *fortuna* and *felix contubernium* of the poet with the *inquieta et anxia vita* of the orator (13.1). He rhapsodises on the peaceful life of Virgil, and also on his favour with Augustus and his fame among the people (13.1-13.2). He denigrates contemporary orators as servile *delatores* (13.4). He then returns to the idyllic image of poetic rural retreat – a life ‘far from the madding crowd’s ignoble strife’ – before concluding by looking forward to the happy circumstances which he predicts will attend his death (13.5-13.6).

At this point a new character enters the room, Vipstanus Messalla (14.1), and the topic of conversation changes tack without any conclusion having been reached

³⁶³ Ovid’s father would have agreed with this sentiment; he chides his son for taking up the profitless pursuit of poetry: *studium quid inutile temptas? / Maeonides nullas ipse reliquit opes* (*Tristia* 4.10.21-22).

³⁶⁴ *hodie si quid in nobis notitiae ac nominis est, magis arbitror carminum quam oratorum gloria partum*, 11.2.

concerning the primacy of either the oratorical or poetical life.³⁶⁵ From this point on the interlocutors are concerned solely with oratory. After a brief period of transition (14.1-16.3), in which Messalla is characterized as a champion of old-style oratory and Aper as an advocate of contemporary trends (15.1), we have the next major pair of speeches. The topic of discussion now is the relative merits of ancient and modern oratory. Aper speaks in favour of modern practices (16.4-23.6).³⁶⁶ Having first suggested that the temporal distinction between *oratores antiqui* and *oratores novi* is not as clear-cut as many assume (16-17), Aper then contends that oratory has, in any case, not declined, but has simply changed (18.2); and that it is a common failing of humanity always to value what is in the past over what is in the present (18.3). In chapters 19-20 Aper cites some examples of the changes in oratorical fashions, before critically reviewing a selection of the so-called *oratores antiqui* (such as Julius Caesar and Cicero) in chapters 21-23. Maternus then prompts Messalla to speak, asking him not to perform a *laudatio antiquorum* (24.3), but rather to explain the reasons (*causae*) why modern oratory has declined in comparison with the old (24.3). Messalla's first major speech (25-27) is, however, just such a *laudatio antiquorum*; he praises the old orators such as Cicero and Caesar and lambasts more modern trends without explaining how the change has come about. Maternus therefore interrupts and recalls him to his task: to explain the decline in oratory, not simply state the fact of decline (27). In chapters 28-32 Messalla answers to the point, providing an argument for the decline in oratory which focuses upon the education system.³⁶⁷ Messalla contrasts the old-style education received by a Roman (from infancy to adulthood) with modern educational culture and locates the cause of decline in this difference. Put simply, oratorical standards have slipped because educational standards have slipped.

³⁶⁵ On Messalla, see *BNP* 15.449.

³⁶⁶ Aper has found many critics, both for his character and for what he says; Williams (1978) 28 is typical: 'The argument is very revealing of [Aper's] brashness and pragmatism and of his vulgar sense of values.' Champion (1994) and Goldberg (1999) are vigorous re-evaluations and defences of Aper.

³⁶⁷ On Roman education, see generally Bonner (1977).

The final speech (36-41) belongs to Maternus, who offers an explanation for the cause of oratorical decline different from that proffered by Messalla. Maternus argues that the quality of oratory is dependent on the political context. The political chaos of the dying Republic bred and necessitated great orators; *eloquentia* is, Maternus states, the *alumna licentiae, quam stulti libertatem vocabant* ('the foster-child of licence, which stupid men used to call freedom', 40.2).³⁶⁸ It is sick nations which require good orators, just as it is sick bodies that require good doctors (41). In well-ordered states, by way of contrast, there is simply no need for great orators. In Vespasian's Rome, where one man wisely holds the rudder of the ship of state (*sapientissimus et unus*, 41.4), there is no call for the kind of oratory witnessed in the death throes of the Republic: oratorical *fama* and political *quies* are simply incompatible – you can have either one or the other, but never the two together (41.5).³⁶⁹

After Maternus' speech the interlocutors exchange pleasantries, laugh together and depart (42); Tacitus makes no comment as to which of the arguments put forward (if any) he favours. Indeed, in a pleasingly enigmatic final sentence, Tacitus stresses his detachment from the dialogue we have just read: *cum adrisissent, discessimus* ('After they had laughed, we departed', 42.2) – Tacitus remains silent to the end, not even participating in the concluding bout of laughter.

3. Some major approaches.

The *Dialogus* has received considerable critical attention in certain areas.³⁷⁰ For many years the attribution of this work to Tacitus was doubted, but the *opinio communis* has

³⁶⁸ A reference to, and inversion of, the Ciceronian position set out at *Brutus* 45: *pacis est comes otique socia et iam bene constitutae civitatis quasi alumna quaedam eloquentia*; on this passage of Cicero, see Douglas (1966) *ad loc.*; on Tacitus' use of it in the *Dialogus*, see Güngerich *ad loc.*

³⁶⁹ See Syme (1958) 27 for the resonance of *quies* under the principate.

³⁷⁰ Bo (1993) is a vast survey of work on the *Dialogus* since the Renaissance.

for a long time been that the work is genuinely Tacitean.³⁷¹ The second major crux has been the dating of the composition of the *Dialogus*. Various dates from the late 70s A.D. through to the first decade of the second century have been proposed; and while nearly all agree that an early dating to the reigns of Vespasian, Titus or Domitian is highly improbable, no consensus as to where the work should be placed in the reigns of Nerva or Trajan has been reached.³⁷² In addition to problems of authenticity and date, the state of the text has exercised critics.³⁷³ Beyond these technical issues, a whole gamut of literary-historical analyses has been offered.³⁷⁴ Scholars have often sought for traces of Tacitus' own autobiography in the *Dialogus*: Maternus' retreat from politics to poetry has been interpreted in the light of Tacitus' retreat from politics to the writing of history. On top of this, Maternus' political views – however we might configure these – have often been thought to offer us a window into Tacitus' own soul and his views on the principate.³⁷⁵ Scholars have, in addition, tried to extricate Tacitus' personal views on rhetoric and oratory from the character-speeches in the *Dialogus*; interactions with Cicero and Quintilian loom large in this field.³⁷⁶ The *Dialogus* has, therefore, posed numerous questions for its readers, but perhaps none has been more problematic than how to read the character of Maternus: the problem of Maternus has almost become, for many readers, the

³⁷¹ 'There is no solid reason against Tacitean authorship. To call it in question strains (and perhaps discredits) the fair name of scholarly caution', Syme (1958) 670. For alternative views, see e.g. Paratore (1962) 165-67, who argues for Titinius Capito as the author; and Herrmann (1955) and (1965), who argues that the *Dialogus* is in fact Quintilian's lost treatise *de causis corruptae eloquentiae*. Mayer (2001) 18-22 succinctly outlines the debate over authenticity; Peterson (1893) ii-xi is also useful.

³⁷² Brink (1994) offers a full critical survey of the various proposed dates.

³⁷³ See e.g. Murgia (1977), (1978) 172-77, (1979a) and (1979b); Mayer (2001) 47-50 offers a useful overview.

³⁷⁴ Goldberg's aporetic questions in the conclusion to his appraisal of the *Dialogus* in the recent *Cambridge Companion* encapsulate the multifarious nature of such approaches: '...it is typical of the *Dialogus* to suggest more than it says and to point ahead as well as behind. Its own placement in a master discourse – intellectual biography? political commentary? rhetorical theory? literary history? – will likely remain unresolved, and that very ambivalence is central to its appeal. The dialogue continues' (2009) 84.

³⁷⁵ See e.g. Bartsch (1994) 98-125 and Penwill (2003) for political readings.

³⁷⁶ See e.g. Barwick (1954), who reads the *Dialogus* as a refutation of Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*, with Maternus voicing Tacitus' own views, and Messalla acting as Quintilian's mouthpiece; also Brink (1989) for comparison with Quintilian; for engagement with Cicero, see e.g. Santini (1968).

problem of the *Dialogus* itself. We need to appreciate this problem because it will form a vital foundation upon which my later arguments concerning Virgil are constructed.

4. The problem of Maternus.

The problem is simply put: is Maternus a consistent character or not? To many readers the answer appears to be a resounding no: Maternus appears to be a strikingly contradictory character. In the first part of the dialogue he is seemingly presented as some kind of political dissident: his enthusiastic reading of his *Cato* has got the hackles of the imperial court up and caused his friends to fear for his safety. Furthermore, such is his disgust at the grubby state of political and legal life in Rome that he advocates a retreat from the city to the peace and tranquillity of a poet's life in the countryside. Maternus' final speech, however, presents us with a seemingly incompatible image: Maternus now comes over as a political conformist and fully paid-up supporter of the imperial regime. He explicitly praises both Vespasian and the state of the city over which he holds sole sway. Maternus is, it is therefore alleged, inconsistent in his views; and explaining this inconsistency has been the task of many of those who analyse the *Dialogus*. A brief and selective survey of some approaches to this problem will be useful before we proceed further.

One way out has been to deny that there is any real inconsistency; or to argue that such inconsistency is perfectly explicable and thus not as problematic as many would have it. Peterson is an eloquent advocate of this school of thought. According to him, Maternus' 'regret for the old free state was tempered...by a practical acquiescence in the necessity for empire'; and the *Dialogus*' closing speech shows how the 'so-called "republicanism" of Maternus is reconciled and harmonized with existing political

conditions'.³⁷⁷ For Peterson, Maternus is Tacitus' own mouthpiece: 'Like Tacitus, he [sc. Maternus] had his regrets for the past, but he did not rebel against the present...His whole attitude is one of reconciliation...he is sensible also of the advantages which settled order and good government have secured for the state.'³⁷⁸ Maternus' fulsome praise of the emperor and the imperial system in his final speech is to be taken at face value as a sincere endorsement of the current political dispensation: 'There is no irony in all this, as some critics have supposed. The attitude of Maternus towards imperialism must have been common in the cultured society of the day. It was that of Tacitus himself'.³⁷⁹ The kind of interpretation proposed by Peterson finds more recent advocates in Mayer and Goldberg, who see no contradiction between Maternus' initial criticism of the principate and his later praise:

There is considerable debate about the tone of Maternus' final remarks: a contradiction is detected between his warm acceptance of the new dispensation and his fancied criticism of it in his dramas (*though it is hard to see why one should not be able to find fault in what one basically admires*). *Is he therefore now being ironical? Not necessarily...*³⁸⁰

³⁷⁷ Peterson (1893) xxxviii.

³⁷⁸ Peterson (1893) xxxix.

³⁷⁹ Peterson (1893) xxxix. That Maternus is a mouthpiece for Tacitus has been a persistent view; see e.g. Dudley (1968) 72: 'A poet and an idealist, [Maternus] places the delights of poetry and the company of the Muses above worldly values – as to fame, is Homer esteemed lower than Demosthenes, or Virgil than Cicero? It was a view to which Tacitus himself subscribed, and Maternus has been taken as a mouthpiece of Tacitus. Certainly his political insight seems concordant...' (emphasis mine).

³⁸⁰ Mayer (2001) 43, emphasis mine; cf. Goldberg (1999) 236-37: 'How can the man whose outspokenness provided the very occasion for this discussion now speak so submissively? Surely Maternus, like Aper, cannot mean what he says? His speech must be either an ironic "accommodation" to political realities or some kind of "doublespeak"? Taken by themselves, Maternus' words may well strike the reader this way, but they should not be isolated from their cultural context. Maternus' sentiments are hardly unique... Ironic readings of Maternus' words are predicated on (and necessitated by) not so much the argument of the *Dialogus* itself as too sweeping a sense of oratory's "decline". Accept a more nuanced view of decline, a view that finds a place for Maternus' equation of eloquence with verbosity and liberty with civil strife, and we are free to take his speech, like Aper's, at face value.'

Other critics, however, have felt that there is a deep contradiction in the positions advocated by Maternus, and they have sought to explain this aspect of the *Dialogus*. Köhnken sees Tacitean irony at play: Maternus' final speech is ironic and as such really constitutes criticism of the principate.³⁸¹ Bartsch, on the other hand, promulgates an interpretation based on the notion of 'doublespeak' – Maternus' final speech, with its praise of the current regime, is designed to please the ears of signed-up imperialists, while his earlier speeches might be read (and that 'might' is important) in more subversive tones. In other words, Maternus' constructs a series of speeches which can appear to be all things to all men – the supporter of imperial autocracy as well as the supporter of republican *libertas* can both find in Maternus' words the meaning they are looking for and want to hear.³⁸² Penwill argues in a similar vein to Bartsch, seeing Maternus as an exponent of 'coded discourse' who has one message for his 'thinking readers' (dissent) and another for his 'imperial reader' (conformity).³⁸³ Furthermore, Penwill thinks the change in tone and content between Maternus' early and later speeches is due to the introduction of Vipstanus Messalla, who turns up on the scene in chapter 14, just after Maternus has finished his opening series of speeches. Messalla was the step-brother of the notorious *delator*, Marcus Aquillius Regulus, and Penwill suggests that it is his suspicious presence which results in Maternus' *volte face*.³⁸⁴

³⁸¹ Köhnken (1973), who concludes: 'Das ironische Lob des Maternus, das den Gegensatz von Anspruch und Wirklichkeit im Prinzipat aufdeckt, ist keine nur eingeschränkte Anerkennung; es ist in Wahrheit eine viel wirksamere Kritik an den bestehenden Zuständen, als es die bloße Ablehnung hätte sein können', 50.

³⁸² Bartsch (1994), who differentiates doublespeak from irony thus: '...a more informative concept than "irony" for what Maternus is doing in offering a praise that asks not to be taken only at face value is that of "doublespeak." For characteristic of doublespeak is the appropriation of the ideological language of the court in such a way that, thanks to the peculiarities of the context in which it appears, allows its use to be understood as its opposite or at least as an uncomplimentary version of the original *although* this context does not irrefutably fix the content of what is said in one way or another for its audience', 115 (emphasis in original).

³⁸³ Penwill (2003) 138-39. The kind of readings proposed by e.g. Bartsch (1994) and Penwill (2003) owe much to theories concerning coded literary dissent set out in Ahl (1984a).

³⁸⁴ Penwill (2003) 130-32. For details on Regulus, see *BNP* 1.935. Syme (1958) 100-102; for Messalla's close bond with Regulus, see Tacitus, *Histories* 4.42.

It should now be clear that Maternus is a slippery character: for some he is a dissident who masks his opposition behind a smokescreen of obsequiousness; for others he is an imperial loyalist (who is, nonetheless, not above a little nostalgia for a bygone age).³⁸⁵ I am not interested in trying to decide which of these two readings is objectively correct – the true reading of the *Dialogus*, so to speak. For given the very nature of the *Dialogus*, we just cannot decide the matter in an objective manner. The *Dialogus* does not allow us categorically to assert that Maternus is either a rebel or a conformist: some of his comments and some of the descriptions of him suggest rebellion without doubt (2.1, 3.1-3.3, 27.3); but other passages equally strongly suggest political subservience (41 *passim*). The *Dialogus*, rather, constitutes a challenge to the reader to construct for himself a conception of Maternus: we are presented with multiple and conflicting angles on Maternus and challenged to come up with an image of him which seems the most plausible to us. Some readers have, as we have seen, constructed a loyalist Maternus; others have constructed a dissident Maternus; but the important point is that both these positions are subjective constructions, actively carried out by individual readers. Tacitus, the shadowy narrator of the dialogue, never tells us in his own voice how to read Maternus; we are left to do that for ourselves.

While, therefore, I am not interested in deciding which conception of Maternus is correct (if either), I am interested in how the conception we do choose to believe has consequences for our interpretation of Virgil in the *Dialogus*. That is to say, I want to argue that how we interpret Maternus colours how we interpret the presentation of Virgil in the *Dialogus*. This is because the portrait of Virgil offered by the *Dialogus* forms part of Maternus' argumentation: he introduces an image of Virgil to further his own rhetorical ends. What we take these rhetorical ends to be will therefore,

³⁸⁵ Such political readings of Maternus are not, of course, the only way to proceed. Luce (1993), for instance, has a different approach, reading the dialogue through the prism of ancient rhetorical theory and practice. He argues that the inconsistency of Maternus is perfectly in keeping with ancient rhetorical rules: speakers are required to put forward whatever arguments will be most persuasive in any given situation, whether they believe them to be true or not. On this reading, Maternus' inconsistency is simply a symptom of his rhetorical expertise, as he moulds different arguments for different phases of the debate.

necessarily, have an effect on how we interpret the portrait of Virgil he presents. It is to this theme I now turn my attention.

5. Virgil as a model for Maternus.

In chapter 12 of the *Dialogus* Maternus, who is in the process of extolling the life of the poet over that of the orator, associates poets with the golden age (*aureum saeculum*, 12.3).³⁸⁶ That 'blessed age' (*felix saeculum*, 12.3), he says, abounded in poets but was without orators, for there was no need of them in the absence of criminal behaviour (12.3). The poets of that age enjoyed the greatest levels of *honor* and *gloria*; furthermore, they hobnobbed with the gods and god-born holy kings (12.4). Orpheus and Linus (and even Apollo himself) are presented as examples of such blessed poets (12.4). Maternus suddenly worries that his disquisition on the golden age might seem rather fanciful and so much make-believe: *vel si haec fabulosa nimis et composita videntur...*³⁸⁷ He therefore introduces some more concrete examples of poets who have won great renown: Homer, Euripides, Sophocles, Virgil, Ovid and Varius (12.5). From this list of six famous poets, it is Virgil who is immediately singled out for special treatment as Maternus elaborates on the blissful nature of his life:

13.1 Ac ne fortunam quidem vatum et illud felix contubernium comparare timuerim cum inquieta et anxia oratorum vita. licet illos certamina et pericula sua ad consulatus euexerint, malo securum et quietum Vergili secessum, in quo tamen neque apud divum Augustum gratia caruit neque apud populum

³⁸⁶ On the golden age (or golden race), see e.g. Hesiod, *Op.* 109-26 (which begins χρύσειον μὲν πρότιστα γένος μερόπων ἀνθρώπων / ἀθάνατοι ποίησαν Ὀλύμπια δώματ' ἔχοντες...); Ovid, *Met.* 1.89-112 (which begins *aurea prima sata est aetas, quae vindice nullo, / sponte sua, sine lege fidem rectumque colebat...*); West (1978) 172-77 is a useful overview of the myth of the ages, with further bibliography; for modern discussion, see also e.g. Baldry (1952); Gatz (1967); Galinsky (1996) 90-121.

³⁸⁷ 'but if these things appear too legendary and fictional...', 12.5.

Romanum notitia. **13.2** testes Augusti epistulae, testis ipse populus, qui auditis in theatro Vergili versibus surrexit universus et forte praesentem spectantemque Vergilium veneratus est sic quasi Augustum.

(*Dialogus* 13.1-2)

‘**13.1** And I would not even fear to compare the fortune of the bards and that blessed companionship with the troubled and anxious life of the orators. Although their contests and lawsuits might carry them to consulships, I prefer the untroubled and peaceful retreat of Virgil; a retreat in which, however, he lacked neither the favour of the divine Augustus nor renown among the people of Rome. **13.2** The letters of Augustus bear witness to this, as do the people themselves; for when some verses of Virgil had been heard in the theatre, everyone rose to their feet and worshipped Virgil – who was by chance present and watching – as if he were Augustus.’

Maternus here clearly sets up Virgil’s life as an ideal model which he is desirous of emulating; it is the kind of life which he prefers (*malo*) above all others. This is not the only place where Maternus holds up the Virgilian life as a paradigm he seeks to repeat. Aper, in his speech extolling the oratorical life, had presented the orators Eprius Marcellus and Vibius Crispus as models worth imitating (8); he had also argued that the poetic life, represented by the poet Saleius Bassus, was an inferior type of existence (9-10).³⁸⁸ But now look at Maternus’ response to these arguments, especially the transition from 13.4 to 13.5:

13.4 nam Crispus iste et Marcellus, ad quorum exempla me vocas, quid habent in hac sua fortuna concupiscendum: quod timent, an quod timentur? quod, cum cotidie aliquid rogentur, ii quibus praestant indignantur? quod alligati omni adulatione nec imperantibus umquam satis servi videntur nec nobis satis liberi? quae haec summa eorum potentia est? tantum posse liberti solent. **13.5**

³⁸⁸ On Saleius Bassus, see Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 10.1.90 and Juvenal, *Satires* 7.80.

“me vero dulces”, ut Virgilius ait, “Musae”, remotum a sollicitudinibus et curis et necessitate cotidie aliquid contra animum faciendi, in illa sacra illosque fontes ferant; nec insanum ultra et lubricum forum famamque pallentem trepidus experiar.

(*Dialogus* 13.4-5)

‘For that Crispus and Marcellus, whom you call on me to imitate, what is desirable in their lot: The fact that they fear or are feared? The fact that when, everyday, they are asked something, those men whom they help hate them?³⁸⁹ The fact that, being constrained to curry favour in every direction, they never appear servile enough to their rulers or free enough to us? What is this great power of theirs? Freedmen are habitually able to do as much. “But as for me, may the sweet Muses”, as Virgil says, carry me to those sacred places and springs, removed from anxieties and cares and the necessity of everyday doing something against my inclination; may I have no more agitated dealings with the mad and hazardous forum or with pallid fame.’

Not only does Maternus here reject Crispus and Marcellus as models to be imitated, he also uses this rejection as a springboard from which to reiterate his preference for the Virgilian paradigm. Furthermore, Maternus makes no mention of Saleius Bassus, Aper’s example of the archetypal poet; for Maternus, the ideal poet is represented by Virgil alone. The Virgilian quotation which Maternus employs to show that he follows Virgil’s life as a model is also particularly apposite. The quotation is from *Georgics* 2.475 and constitutes a strongly autobiographical moment in that poem: Virgil has just praised the life of the farmer (*G.* 2.458-74), but at line 475 (*me vero*

³⁸⁹ The meaning of this sentence is problematic; I adopt the interpretation of Peterson (1893) *ad loc.*: ‘Not a day passes but they are asked something or other: yet successful suitors chafe under the obligations which they incur to such persons as these: their favours bring them in return nothing but bad blood’; thus also Mayer (2001) *ad loc.* Lipsius added *non* before *praestant*, so that the translation would be: ‘The fact that when, everyday, they are asked something, those men whom they do *not* help hate them?’ Some have followed Lipsius, e.g. Gudeman (1914).

primum dulces ante omnia Musae) he begins a passage in which he describes his wishes for his own life as a poet (2.475-92).³⁹⁰ Maternus is therefore describing his own ideal life with a quotation from Virgil in which Virgil describes his own ideal life; and again the implication is that Maternus wants to set Virgil up as his model for how a life ought to be lived.

If we accept that Maternus holds Virgil up as his personal paradigm for how to live a life, this necessarily has several implications for how we read the portrait of Virgil he provides in *Dialogus* 13. Firstly, if we think that Maternus has realized (or hopes to realize) a recreation of the Virgilian paradigm, one immediately asks the question: just what exactly is this Virgilian paradigm which Maternus has succeeded in (or hopes to succeed in) repeating, and why has he chosen to repeat it? Secondly, if we think that Maternus has in no way repeated the Virgilian model (or has no hopes of repeating the Virgilian model), then why does he claim that he has (or hopes to do so)? Thirdly, should we read Maternus' portrait of Virgil as a sincere attempt to distil something essential about the Virgilian life; or is he deliberately distorting the truth for his own rhetorical ends? I explore possible responses to these questions in the following sections.

6. Maternus as an imperial loyalist.

If we interpret Maternus as being essentially supportive of the principate, how might this impinge on our appreciation of the Virgilian portrait in chapter 13? Three possible approaches suggest themselves.

³⁹⁰ See Thomas (1988) *ad loc.* for discussion of these complex and controversial lines.

a) General assimilation to an 'Augustan' image of Virgil.

Maternus endeavours to assimilate his life to Virgil's; Virgil provides a model for the ideal life of the poet. How we interpret Maternus' life will therefore feed into our understanding of how he is presenting his Virgilian model. For if Maternus is read, broadly speaking, as an advocate of the principate, and if he takes Virgil as his preferred model for how to live a good life, then it plausibly follows that he has a conception of Virgil as likewise being a poet supportive of the imperial regime. Maternus can, therefore, be said to be making use of a strongly 'Augustan' image of Virgil. By an 'Augustan' Virgil I mean the image of Virgil as a poet supportive of Augustus and his political dispensation.³⁹¹ The 'Augustan' Virgil is the construction of what, along with Richard Thomas, we might conveniently label the 'Augustan reader':

By 'Augustan reader' I mean a reader who sees the writings of Virgil as endorsements of the aims and achievements of Emperor Caesar Divi filius Augustus...endorsements generated either by Virgil's own political and ideological conviction or by the application of external suggestion, chiefly from his "patron" Maecenas; that is, a reader who takes from Virgil what Augustus himself would presumably have wanted a contemporary reader to take.³⁹²

Maternus can, therefore, take his place alongside other 'Augustan' readers of Virgil; readers such as Servius, for whom Virgil's Augustan credentials are not in doubt:

*intentio Vergilii haec est, Homerum imitari et Augustum laudare a parentibus.*³⁹³

³⁹¹ For an interrogation of terms such as 'Augustan' and 'anti-Augustan', see Kennedy (1992); also Feeney (1992) 1-3, who emphasises that Augustus and Augustanism are not static, monolithic entities, but are dynamic and protean.

³⁹² Thomas (2001) xii.

³⁹³ *praef. ad. Aen.* (Thilo-Hagen vol.1 p.4); for a modern 'Augustan' reader of Virgil, see e.g. Morgan (1999), who comments in his introduction: 'the *Georgics*, far from being the bleakly pessimistic document envisioned by Thomas, can on the contrary be interpreted as a thorough-going exercise in Octavianic propaganda, a precise response to the requirements of the regime headed by Octavian which at the time of the poem's completion was emerging from the chaos of the Civil Wars; a text, in other words, capable of yielding a highly optimistic purport' (1).

b) Detailed construction of an 'Augustan' image of Virgil.

The second approach is similar to the first, but it attributes a greater degree of agency to Maternus in his use of the Virgilian biography. For in (a) it was simply suggested that Maternus' pro-imperial stance finds an analogue in Virgil's pro-imperial stance; the process of assimilation is rather passive. We can, however, look at things another way: Maternus, we might argue, actively constructs an 'Augustan' image of Virgil to suit his own rhetorical needs. This active construction can be illustrated by a careful observation of the details of Maternus' portrait. For when we look at how Maternus phrases his portrait of Virgil, we notice that he is insistent in his desire to link Virgil to Augustus at every stage; and that these connections are presented, on the surface, in entirely positive terms. So, although Maternus begins by eulogizing Virgil's quiet retreat from the political hothouse of the city, he immediately qualifies this by informing us that, despite this retreat, Virgil did not forfeit the *gratia* of Augustus (13.1). This mention of Augustus' *gratia*, furthermore, suggests that Virgil had done something to earn this *gratia* - a degree of reciprocity is suggested by the very term: *gratia* is owed to someone who has performed some kind of service or benefit for you.³⁹⁴ As evidence for the closeness of the Virgil-Augustus relationship, Maternus then mentions the epistolary exchange: Virgil might, on the one hand, be enjoying the seclusion of the countryside, but he is still, on the other hand, in direct communication with his beneficent patron.³⁹⁵ The climax to Maternus' Virgilian portrait brings us, once more, back to the figure of Augustus, even though the theatre anecdote is, ostensibly, about Virgil's popularity with the *populus* rather than the

³⁹⁴ Saller (1982) 21 defines *gratia* thus: '*Gratia*...represents an attitude rather than an action, and basically means "goodwill". It was used of animate and inanimate objects simply to mean "pleasing", while in connection with social exchange it took on a more specific sense analogous to *favor* or *voluntas*. *Gratia* was often provoked by a *beneficium* or *officium* for which it constituted a kind of repayment. Hence, it frequently appears with verbs such as *debere*, *referre*, *pendere*, *persolvere* and *reddere*, an indication that the relationship was thought of as something like that of debtor and creditor.'

³⁹⁵ White (1993) 117 contends that Virgil was 'the sort of [friend] with whom Augustus cared to correspond.'

emperor: *testis ipse populus, qui auditis in theatro Vergilii versibus surrexit universus et forte praesentem spectantemque Vergilium veneratus est sic quasi Augustum* (13.2).

Maternus is so eager to connect Virgil to Augustus that here, at the end of his mini-biography, he does a quite remarkable thing: he assimilates Virgil to Augustus himself. Maternus is so keen to connect poet and prince that he actually blurs the dividing line between the two.³⁹⁶

Why might Maternus be so keen to link Virgil to Augustus in such seemingly positive terms? A possible answer is that Maternus is constructing a defence for himself against the *maligni* who have questioned his loyalty to the imperial system.³⁹⁷ Maternus is, according to the reading we are currently considering, supportive of the principate. It is therefore useful for him to construct a pro-Augustan Virgil to whom he can assimilate himself. For if Virgil was pro-imperial, and if Maternus is like Virgil, then the implication is that Maternus is also pro-imperial. Maternus, on this reading, not only imitates Virgil's preference for the quiet life in the countryside; he also imitates his support for a monarchical system of government. Maternus' 'Augustan' portrait of Virgil does not, therefore, simply *reflect* his own pro-imperial stance (as in (a), above), but it also forms a carefully constructed part of his rhetorical argument aimed at *proving* his loyalty to the Flavian regime. Maternus actively constructs a strongly 'Augustan' image of Virgil to which he can claim an equivalence in order to repudiate allegations that he is a political dissident.

³⁹⁶ Cf. the proem to *Georgics* 3, where it has been suggested that Virgil blurs the distinction between Octavian's military triumph and his own poetic triumph; on this, see Morgan (1999) 56-57.

³⁹⁷ *Dialogus* 3.2: *Tum Secundus "nihilne te" inquit, "Materne, fabulae malignorum terrent quo minus offensas Catonis tui ames?"*. It is worth noting that neither Maternus nor any of the other interlocutors ever actually say that Maternus is an opponent of the regime. All we are told is that Maternus' detractors (his *maligni*) are spreading stories about him, *suggesting* that his *Cato* is an affront to the palace (3.2); and that offence has, reportedly, been taken in the imperial court (2.1). But this is not the same thing as the *Cato* *actually* being a piece of anti-imperial propaganda. Roman writers were well aware that mischievous interpretations could be put on all sorts of literary production, as Martial points out: *absit a iocorum nostrorum simplicitate malignus interpres nec epigrammata mea inscribat: improbe facit qui in alieno libro ingeniosus est*. ('Let the malicious interpreter keep away from my simple jests and let him not write commentaries on my epigrams: he who is a clever-clogs concerning another man's book is a scoundrel', Book 1, *praef.*).

Maternus' biographical snapshot of Virgil is thus an actively engineered part of his rhetorical plan: by making Virgil an imperial lackey, and by casting himself in the Virgilian mould, Maternus can brush off the slanders of his detractors who have tried to paint him as a political rebel.

Maternus' active construction of an 'Augustan' Virgil to further his own particular rhetorical needs can be seen as a continuation of a theme which took root with the Augustan poets. Propertius, commenting on the nascent *Aeneid*, goes out of his way to link Virgil's new epic composition to the emperor Augustus; and in the process draws a sharp distinction between himself and Virgil:

me iuvat hesternis positum languere corollis,
quem tetigit iactu certus ad ossa deus; 60
Actia Vergilio est custodis litora Phoebi
Caesaris et fortes dicere posse rates,
qui nunc Aeneae Troiani suscitatur arma,
iactaque Lavinis moenia litoribus.

(2.34.59-64)

'It is my pleasure to languish amidst yesterday's garlands; I whom the unerring god has struck to the bone with his missile. It is for Virgil to be able to sing of the Actian shores of Apollo and the brave ships of Caesar; Virgil who is now raising the arms of Aeneas and walls thrown up on Lavinian shores.'

Propertius' strategy here involves not only commenting on the close relationship between Virgil and Augustus, but also using this alleged relationship in order to further his own rhetoric of self-definition: Propertius' poetical and political

manifestoes are formulated in contradistinction to those of Virgil.³⁹⁸ The same sort of process is evident in the Ovidian corpus, especially in the following lines:

bella sonant alii telis instructa cruentis,
parsque tui generis, pars tua facta canunt. 530
invida me spato natura coercuit arto,
ingenio vires exiguasque dedit.
et tamen ille tuae felix Aeneidos auctor
contulit in Tyrios arma virumque toros,
nec legitur pars ulla magis de corpore toto, 535
quam non legitimo foedere iunctus amor.

(*Tristia* 2.529-36)

‘Others sing of wars arrayed with bloody weapons; some sing of the deeds of your family; others sing your own deeds. Nature has constrained me within narrow limits and has given to my genius scant powers. However, that blessed author of your *Aeneid* also brought his arms and the man to Tyrian couches, nor is any portion from the whole work more read than the love joined by an illegitimate pact.’

We do not need to immerse ourselves too deeply in these lines here; suffice it to say that Ovid is, like Propertius, constructing a very strong connection between Virgil and Augustus (the poem belongs to the emperor, according to Ovid, not the poet), and he does so as part of an elaborate game, one of whose goals is to assert his own

³⁹⁸ See e.g. Stahl (1985) 172-188 for Propertius’ engagement with Virgil in 2.34; Stahl comments that, in 2.34, we have ‘another of those self-definitions *e contrario* which Propertius gave in the first book when he felt challenged to stand and defend his ground. For there should be no doubt about the provocative contrast between what is Propertius’ desired pleasure (*iuvet*, 59) and what is Vergil’s “pleasure”, who has not been touched *ad ossa* by Amor...Vergil’s ability...to glorify Octavian’s victory at Actium can hardly be seen as something desirable if we try to define it in terms of Propertius’ own “ambitions” (180).

poetic identity.³⁹⁹ We can, finally, mention Horace, for he also contributes to the idea that Virgil was a poet who was especially strongly linked to the emperor:

At neque dedecorant tua de se iudicia atque
munera quae multa dantis cum laude tulerunt
dilecti tibi Vergilius Variusque poetae.

(*Epistles* 2.1.245-47)

‘And neither Virgil nor Varius – poets favoured by you [sc. Augustus] – have disgraced your judgements concerning them; and they have carried off gifts whilst bestowing much praise on the giver [i.e. Augustus].’

Here we see Horace suggesting not only that Virgil, along with Varius, was a poet who was especially valued by the emperor; but also that Virgil repaid this favour with effusive praise.⁴⁰⁰ Once again, however, we have a poet who has an ulterior motive in forging such a strong link between Virgil and Augustus. Richard Thomas has shown how, in *Epistles* 2.1, Horace constructs an image of Virgil and Varius as paid encomiasts of Augustus to ‘function as negative exempla’ and to work as ‘foils for Horace’s own self-depiction.’⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁹ Ovid’s lines on Virgil in *Tristia* 2 have generated much interest; see e.g. Barchiesi (1994) 18-19; Thomas (2001) 74-78; Ingleheart (2010) *ad loc.*

⁴⁰⁰ The translation of *multa dantis cum laude* is disputed. Wilkins (1885) *ad loc.* comments: ‘i.e. all men warmly praise such liberality, instead of laughing at it, as in the case of Alexander and Choerilus. Ritter oddly thinks that the words refer to the lively gratitude of the recipients.’ As my translation makes clear, I stand in the odd camp with Ritter: *haec accipienda sunt pro simplicitate antiquitatis, non pro nostris moribus, pro quibus in modestia nimii solemus esse. Hoc igitur dicit Flaccus: Vergilius et Varius tua munera multa laude in te collocata remunerati sunt* (Ritter (1857) *ad loc.*). Brink (1982) and Rudd (1989) *ad loc.* advocate the same interpretation as Wilkins.

⁴⁰¹ Thomas (2001) 66 & 68. See also Horace, *Odes* 4.12.15, where Horace refers to Virgil as *iuvenum nobilium cliens*; we might infer that one of these noble youths to whom Virgil acted a client was Augustus.

c) Political eulogy; using the past to praise the present.

The readings offered in (a) and (b) tend towards the defensive: Maternus constructs an 'Augustan' image of Virgil to which he then assimilates his own life in order to defend himself from imputations of dissidence. We can also suggest, however, a more offensive reading: Maternus, through his use of the Virgilian biography, goes out of his way actively to praise the current emperor, Vespasian. Maternus can be seen to achieve this eulogy of the present state-of-the-nation in the following way: he presents us with an idealized image of the past and implies that this ideal has been recreated in the present. For if Maternus plays the role of a *Vergilius redux*, he needs an *Augustus redux* to play the role of the beneficent patron; the implication being, of course, that Vespasian fulfils just such a role. In other words, the rosy picture of the perfect symbiosis of poet and prince instantiated in the Virgil-Augustus vignette can serve, on one reading of the *Dialogus*, as an analogue of Flavian Rome.

We might, perhaps, modify this reading slightly: rather than saying that the Virgil-Augustus relationship *has* been recreated in Flavian Rome, Maternus might be suggesting that such a harmonious coalition is *capable* of being recreated in the present climate; or, maybe, that it *should* be recreated. Maternus' biographical snippet might, therefore, be seen as having an almost normative function: he provides a model from the past of ideal poet-prince interaction which he thinks ought to be imitated in the present.

d) Parallels from the past: a potentially futile mode of defence?

In (a), (b) and (c) we have considered ways in which Maternus might be trying to defend himself against his detractors by using a particular version of the Virgilian biography. Maternus assimilates himself to a pro-Augustan vision of Virgil in order to exculpate himself from charges of dissidence. Even if we accept Maternus' arguments as ingenuous reflections of his imperial loyalty, assimilation to a 'safe'

figure from the past is not necessarily an effective mode of defence. That the defensive strategy of aligning yourself with a pro-imperial figure from the past was not necessarily very effective can be illustrated by the celebrated case of Cremutius Cordus.⁴⁰² In *Annals* 4.34-35 Tacitus recounts the fate of the historian Cremutius Cordus, who was charged in A.D. 25 for publishing a history in which he praised Brutus and called Cassius 'the last of the Romans'.⁴⁰³ In his *apologia* Cordus begins by pointing out that he has not, in fact, disparaged the emperor, Tiberius, or his father-by-adoption, Augustus; he has merely praised Brutus and Cassius.⁴⁰⁴ Cordus then draws an analogy between himself and Livy:

Titus Livius, eloquentiae ac fidei praeclarus in primis, Cn. Pompeium tantis laudibus tulit ut Pompeianum eum Augustus appellaret; neque id amicitiae eorum offecit. Scipionem, Afranium, hunc ipsum Cassium, hunc Brutum nusquam latrones et parricidas, quae nunc vocabula imponuntur, saepe ut insignis viros nominat.

(*Annals* 4.34.3)

'Titus Livy, preeminent for eloquence and trustworthiness, described Pompey in such laudatory terms that Augustus used to call him a "Pompeian"; but this was not detrimental to their friendship. Livy nowhere calls Scipio or Afranius or this very Cassius or this Brutus bandits and parricides – labels which are now attached to them – but often calls them illustrious men.'

Cordus attempts to defend himself by assimilating himself to an historian from the past, Livy, who was loyal to the emperor and to the idea of the principate (or whom

⁴⁰² Köhnken (1973) 41, Bartsch (1994) 106 and Manuwald (2001) 17 also mention Cremutius Cordus as a parallel figure to Maternus; but they do not discuss Cordus' use of Livy as a parallel to Maternus' use of Virgil, which is my main point here.

⁴⁰³ Tacitus, *Annals* 4.34.1: *Cremutius Cordus postulat, novo et tunc primum audito crimine, quod editis annalibus laudatoque M. Bruto C. Cassium Romanorum ultimum dixisset.* Cf. Suetonius, *Tiberius* 61.3 and Cassius Dio 57.24.2-4 for this episode.

⁴⁰⁴ See Martin & Woodman (1989) 179 for Cordus' defence and the *lex maiestatis*.

Cordus constructs as being loyal).⁴⁰⁵ Cordus argues that Livy's sympathy for Republican heroes such as Pompey did not mean that he opposed Augustus; indeed, he remained on close terms with the emperor. Cordus claims that his stance is the same as Livy's; he has praised Brutus and Cassius, but that does not mean that he is an enemy of Tiberius. Cordus' defence proves, however, futile; he is forced to take his own life (35.4).⁴⁰⁶

The fate of Cremutius Cordus serves, therefore, as a warning against putting too much confidence in arguments which are based on assimilation to figures from the past. Cordus' assimilation of himself to Livy might be neat rhetoric, but the outcome of his trial suggests that it was not effective rhetoric. We might allow ourselves to see the same idea at play in the *Dialogus*: for despite Maternus' assimilation of himself to the putative arch-imperialist Virgil, many readers have felt that he is walking in the valley of the shadow of death. They have thought this for several reasons. One is the ancient convention whereby philosophical dialogues are often set just before the death of one of the main interlocutors: we need only think of Plato's *Phaedo*, *Apology* and *Crito*, or of Cicero's *de Oratore* or *de Republica* to appreciate the pervasiveness of this motif.⁴⁰⁷ Another reason is Maternus' emphasis on his own death: at 13.6 he muses on the end of his life and provisions for his burial in an episode which many have read as being laden with dramatic irony.⁴⁰⁸ The final reason is the most contested, but perhaps the most intriguing: it is Cassius Dio's reference to a 'sophist' called Maternus who was executed by Domitian in A.D. 91 for speaking out against tyranny:

⁴⁰⁵ See Woodman (1988) 136-39 for Livy's supportive stance vis-à-vis the Augustan principate; he argues that 'the historian came to see Augustus as the realisation or personification of the ambitions which he personally entertained for the Roman state' (138).

⁴⁰⁶ Cordus' famous speech is, of course, in all probability the complete invention of Tacitus. Furthermore, it is unlikely that his historical works in isolation were what led to his downfall. See Syme (1958) 337 n.10: 'The speech is all Tacitus... Cremutius' writings were not the sole, or even the main, charge against him.

⁴⁰⁷ See Cameron (1966) 28-29 for this ancient convention in a different context; and Cameron (1967) for its specific application to the *Dialogus*.

⁴⁰⁸ Cameron (1967) 259.

Μάτερον δὲ σοφιστὴν, ὅτι κατὰ τυράννων εἶπέ τι ἀσκῶν, ἀπέκτεινε.

(Cassius Dio, 67.12.5)

‘Domitian executed the sophist Maternus because he had said something against tyrants while declaiming.’

Many have argued that this Maternus is to be identified with the Maternus of the *Dialogus*; others have argued to the contrary.⁴⁰⁹ But even those who think we should keep our Materni separate do concede that intimations of Maternus’ death pervade the *Dialogus*;⁴¹⁰ so we are, I think, justified in drawing the analogy with Cremutius Cordus. For just like Cremutius, Maternus tries to defend himself by aligning himself with a pro-imperial figure from the annals of the past; but this defensive strategy ultimately proves futile.

7. Maternus as an imperial dissident.

We have so far considered the possibility that Maternus constructs an image of an ‘Augustan’ Virgil in order to reflect, and to argue for, his own imperial loyalty. But what happens if we do not accept the characterization of Maternus as an imperial supporter? How might our conception of the presentation of Virgil in chapter 13 be altered if we are the kind of reader – of whom there are many – who sees in Maternus strong evidence of imperial dissidence or disaffection? Three possible responses would seem to be available on this reading, which I explore in the following sections.

⁴⁰⁹ Among those who argue for identification, see e.g. Mathiessen (1970) and Barnes (1981) (1986) 238-43; Cameron (1967) thinks identification, despite superficial attractiveness, is unlikely (he, after all, places the death of the Maternus of the *Dialogus* in 75/76, soon after the date of the dialogue). See also Syme (1958) 799 for a brief survey of the various positions; and Mayer (2001) 44 n.102.

⁴¹⁰ See e.g. Cameron (1967) 261.

a) Differentiation; Virgil as smokescreen.

The first approach begins by retaining the argument which we set out in sections 6 (a-c) (above): the argument that in chapter 13 Maternus has constructed a strongly 'Augustan' image of Virgil. We now have an obvious problem. For if Maternus is, according to the interpretation we are now considering, an anti-imperialist, why would he create an image of Virgil – the poet whose life he constructs as ideal and fit to be imitated – which is so strongly pro-imperial? Why would an imperial critic align himself with an imperial lackey? A solution is to argue that Maternus might be saying he is like the pro-imperial Virgil he has presented to us in order to create a smokescreen to mask his own imperial dissidence. Maternus pretends that he is like Virgil, a poet whom he has presented as being in tune with the emperor; but in reality he is the exact opposite, a poet out of kilter with the ideology of the palace.⁴¹¹ Maternus, on this reading, has therefore constructed a strongly 'Augustan' Virgil in order to disguise his own anti-imperial sentiments. Once again, we note, Maternus uses the Virgilian life as a convenient rhetorical tool: his construction of a certain image of Virgil forms part of his larger argumentative strategy.

Maternus' choice of the Virgilian model as his smokescreen and defensive cover should not pass without some comment; the choice itself - not just the use to which it is put - is significant, and builds upon an Ovidian precedent. In 6(b) we looked at how Ovid played an important early role in connecting Virgil to Augustus, especially in *Tristia* 2; this passage deserves another look:

⁴¹¹ Cf. the comments of Bartsch (1994) 119: 'By his own account, Maternus would rather be a poet than an orator because he prefers to the treacherous turmoil of the forum "the safe and quiet seclusion of Vergil, in which the poet nonetheless did not forsake the favor of the divine Augustus" (13.1). But this is emphatically not Maternus' choice, to pick a safe seclusion from which to seek the favor of the emperor; and it may be that what Maternus says about the poet's life and aims is dissonant with his own because Maternus here is voicing the disclaimer typical of those engaging in political poetry...For no practicing poet will say of his poetry point-blank that it is a site for criticism of the *present* ruler; under circumstances such as prevail in the *Dialogus* itself, the practice and claims of poetry remain always at odds.'

bella sonant alii telis instructa cruentis,
 parsque tui generis, pars tua facta canunt. 530
 invida me spatio natura coercuit arto,
 ingenio vires exiguasque dedit.
 et tamen ille tuae felix Aeneidos auctor
 contulit in Tyrios arma virumque toros,
 nec legitur pars ulla magis de corpore toto, 535
 quam non legitimo foedere iunctus amor.
 Phyllidis hic idem teneraeque Amaryllidis ignes
 bucolicis iuvenis luserat ante modis.
 nos quoque iam pridem scripto peccavimus isto:
 supplicium patitur non nova culpa novum. 540

(*Tristia* 2.529-40)

‘Others sing of wars arrayed with bloody weapons; some sing of the deeds of your family; others sing your own deeds. Nature has constrained me within narrow limits and has given to my genius scant powers. However, that blessed author of your *Aeneid* also brought his arms and the man to Tyrian couches, nor is any portion from the whole work more read than the love joined by an illegitimate pact. This same man, when young, had toyed with the passions of Phyllis and tender Amaryllis in bucolic strains. I also, long ago, sinned in this type of writing: a sin which is not novel is suffering a novel punishment.’

Ovid, like Maternus, is here also using a carefully constructed image of Virgil as a form of defensive cover. Ovid suggests that his *Ars Amatoria* – the sin for which he is being punished (539-40) – is really no different from Virgil’s *Eclogues*; and since Virgil retained the good graces of Augustus (*ille tuae felix Aeneidos auctor*, 533), the inference we are encouraged to draw is that Ovid’s relegation by the emperor is

unjust.⁴¹² Maternus is playing the same game as he retaliates against those who accuse him of dissidence with the following formulation: how can I be anti-imperial if I am simply following the Virgilian model? Maternus, like Ovid, is exploiting Virgil's perceived (or constructed) pro-Augustanism as a rhetorical tool to cover his own back.

b) Assimilation; implicating Virgil in imperial dissidence by analogy.

The second approach to our problem of why a dissident Maternus aligns himself with a loyalist Virgil is to reject the very argument that in chapter 13 Maternus does construct a strongly 'Augustan' image of Virgil. We might, indeed, be tempted to argue for the exact opposite: that Maternus actually presents us with an image of a 'Harvard' Virgil *avant la lettre*. By 'Harvard' Virgil, to simplify grossly, I mean the conception of Virgil as a poet who is ambivalent about the Augustan settlement, if not downright critical of it:

'In this reading of the poem the superior virtues and the high ideals of Aeneas are sometimes grudgingly allowed him, but he is in the wrong poem. His being in the wrong poem furnishes it with a kind of tragic greatness that calls into question not only the heroism of Homer's poems but also Augustan heroism and indeed any heroism...What did Virgil think of Augustus? What did he think of the Roman Empire? Is he not, at the very least, ambivalent in his attitude toward the Augustan peace? Is the poem not considerably darker than Eliot and Pöschl had suggested?'⁴¹³

⁴¹² Ovid's claim that his *Ars Amatoria* is like Virgil's *Eclogues* is, of course, disingenuous, as Ingleheart (2010) *ad loc.* notes: 'Ovid's defence that both he and Virgil wrote erotic poetry in their youth (*iuvenis*, 538; *iuveni mihi*, 543) is misleading: Virgil's early erotic poetry (unlike Ovid's *Ars*) was not didactic, nor did it treat adultery.'

⁴¹³ Johnson (1976) 11, who coined the phrase 'Harvard school'; his references are to Pöschl (1950) and Eliot (1944) and (1951).

How can we argue for intimations of a 'Harvard Virgil' in Maternus' portrait? One way is to take Maternus at his word when he says he strives in his own life to imitate the Virgilian model. For if we read Maternus as a dissident, and if we accept as ingenuous his argument in chapter 13 that Virgil is his privileged model, then it can follow that Virgil too was, according to Maternus' rhetoric, a dissident. Although nothing in the text of chapter 13 explicitly says that Virgil was anti the principate, the very fact that Maternus – a man whom we are now treating as an imperial renegade – equates himself to Virgil might contaminate the image of Virgil we construct for ourselves as readers. For if we think of Maternus as a politically oppositional character, his tactic of assimilating himself to Virgil challenges us to consider why he might be doing this. And while he might be using Virgil as a smokescreen (as suggested above), it is also possible that he is challenging us as readers to construct a potentially anti-Augustan Virgil who pre-figures his own anti-imperial ideology.

Such a reading – if we choose to run with it - can be bolstered by a careful examination of the words Maternus uses to articulate the Virgil-Augustus relationship. For although his words are most readily taken as depicting a mutually affectionate relationship between poet and prince, closer scrutiny might suggest that we are not *compelled* to accept this initially plausible reading. As we have already seen, Maternus tells us that Virgil enjoyed the *gratia* of Augustus and that there are letters which demonstrate this; and the popular veneration received by Virgil was on a par with that received by the *princeps*. But we must be careful here: although Maternus closely connects the poet and the prince, he does not actually tell us what attitude Virgil had towards Augustus. We are told that Virgil enjoyed the *gratia* of Augustus – his esteem or favour - but we are not told how Virgil reacted to this beneficence. Was the esteem reciprocated?⁴¹⁴ The same sort of one-sidedness is evident in the reference to the letters: we are told that the *epistulae Augusti* bear witness to the *gratia* the emperor bestowed on the poet, but what do the *epistulae*

⁴¹⁴ *gratia* as a term implies reciprocity, as Saller (1982) 21 shows (see the quote from Saller in n. 394 above): Augustus must have felt *gratia* towards Virgil for some benefit he had received from the poet. However, on our current reading, that benefit has to be thought of as *perceived* rather than *real*: i.e. Augustus favoured Virgil because he *thought* the *Aeneid* was a poem which praised him – when, in *reality*, the poem actually criticized him.

Vergilii say? We are not, of course, told about any letters of Virgil in the *Dialogus*, and that is the point: Augustus' letters testify to the regard he had for Virgil; but what might Virgil's letters have told us about his opinion of Augustus? Finally, we are told that Virgil was worshipped as if he were Augustus: this analogy testifies to the fame and popularity of Virgil, but tells us nothing about what Virgil thought about his emperor.

On this scrupulously literal reading the relationship between Virgil and Augustus is, therefore, a rather imbalanced and one-sided affair: we discover that Augustus was a fan and champion of Virgil; that Augustus wrote letters to Virgil which provide evidence of his support; and that Virgil received emperor-like adulation. But that is all we find out; Virgil's reaction to all of this support and adulation is curiously absent. Although this one-sidedness might dilute the image of a strongly 'Augustan Virgil', it does not in itself constitute an image of a 'Harvard Virgil' – for we are simply not told what Virgil's attitude to the emperor was. It can however, form a complement to the previous suggestion that Maternus' dissidence tempts us to find an analogous strain in the biography of Virgil.

It is worth noting at this stage that the flow of the current argumentation (including the argumentation in part 6) can be reversed: instead of thinking about how our interpretations of Maternus feed into our readings of Virgil in chapter 13 of the *Dialogus*, we can think more generally about how our extra-textual conceptions of Virgil colour our readings of Maternus.⁴¹⁵ For instance, if we bring to our reading of the *Dialogus* an image of an anti-imperial Virgil, this can influence our interpretation of a character who claims allegiance to a Virgilian way of life. Penwill, for instance, allows his extra-textual conception of Virgil as an anti-Augustan poet to function as a model for how we should interpret Maternus:

⁴¹⁵ By 'extra-textual' I mean simply our preconceived notions of Virgil which we bring with us to our reading of the *Dialogus*.

‘For [Maternus] as for Tacitus in the *Annals*, Virgil is the model – the Virgil not of the *Georgics*, as Maternus is made to suggest to Aper through the allusion to *Georgics* 2, but of the *Aeneid*. There are passages in the *Aeneid* which appear to be fully and unreservedly pro-Augustan, but which when examined closely and put in context (including intertextual context) reveal a very different message.’⁴¹⁶

Penwill’s conception of a ‘Harvard’ Virgil feeds into his interpretation of an anti-imperial Maternus; rather than our reading of Maternus colouring how we think of Virgil, for Penwill it is how we read Virgil which can colour how we think about Maternus. If, on the other hand, we bring with us an ‘Augustan’ conception of Virgil to our reading of the *Dialogus*, this might feed into how we view Maternus. For if we view Virgil as a poet who was broadly supportive of the Augustan programme – albeit a poet who was capable of nostalgia for the past and not above a little human doubt about the future – this paradigm can condition our reading of Maternus as an imperial loyalist.

8. Idealizing Virgil’s life; one approach.

So far we have been approaching the problem of Virgil in the *Dialogus* from a specific, political angle. We have considered how Maternus sets up Virgil as his paradigm for the poet’s life, and how, consequently, our overall appreciation of Maternus’ political self-positioning will impinge upon our understanding of his use

⁴¹⁶ Penwill (2003) 139; see Penwill (1995) 5-26 for his detection of anti-Augustan subtexts in the Virgilian oeuvre. Tacitus’ Virgilian inheritance in general has provoked comment: Benario (1967) and Bews (1972-73) discuss how Virgilian optimism is succeeded by Tacitean pessimism; Baxter (1972) 268-69 sees in the *Annals* traces of an anti-*Aeneid*; Putnam (1989) recruits Tacitus into the ‘Harvard’ school of Virgilian interpreters on the basis of an intertextual reference in *Annals* 1; Pagán (1999) sees Virgilian pessimism repeated in Tacitean pessimism.

of the Virgilian portrait. It is now time to introduce another reading strategy; a strategy which will open up some new perspectives on Maternus' presentation of the Virgilian biography. This strategy involves considering how an appreciation of the conventions of ancient rhetoric affects our reading of the Virgil biography in *Dialogus* 13. In the following paragraphs I want to explore the following theme in particular: how Maternus idealizes the Virgilian life to further his own rhetorical ends, and how this idealization can be laid bare by comparison with evidence from the wider biographical tradition on Virgil.

My observations in this area build upon the arguments set out by Luce in an article on the rhetorical nature of the argumentation in the *Dialogus*.⁴¹⁷ Luce shows how an understanding of the conventions of ancient rhetoric can further our appreciation of what is going on in the *Dialogus*. Several points from Luce's article are worth recapitulating. The first point is that speakers present their best possible case for the specific argument they are engaged in; a rather obvious point to make, but an important one, none the less.⁴¹⁸ A related point is that this renders our search for consistency across the various speeches of a single speaker a red herring: rhetorically trained speakers will naturally alter their stance according to the requirements of the argument at hand. For Luce this means that the 'problem of Maternus' (discussed above) is not a really a problem at all in ancient terms: Maternus seems down on political life in his first speech because that formulation bolsters his case in his argument with Aper over the relative merits of poetry and oratory; in his final speech he is upbeat on politics because the terms of the debate have changed (they are now considering the reasons for a decline in oratory, not the relative merits of oratory and poetry) and new arguments are required to make a persuasive speech in this new context.⁴¹⁹ Luce also reminds us of various stock-in-trade tactics employed

⁴¹⁷ Luce (1993).

⁴¹⁸ 'The job of the speaker is to defend a point of view with an appearance of full certainty, using all the weaponry from the rhetorical arsenal that he can muster', Luce (1993) 28.

⁴¹⁹ 'In fact, the concentration by scholars on the individuals in the *Dialogus* has created much needless confusion because of the twentieth-century assumption that, in order for each interlocutor to be consistently characterized, the arguments given to him must be consistent also. The characters are indeed "consistent," but in ancient, not modern, terms. By training,

by the skilled rhetorician to make his case persuasive, such as selectivity, exaggeration and humour.⁴²⁰ The successful orator must select his material carefully; he must exaggerate where it will prove effective; he must employ humour to charm his listeners into acquiescence. One final observation of Luce needs careful consideration before we can return to Virgil; it is an observation which will provide the basis for much of what follows in this chapter. He discusses how an educated audience can both appreciate finely-wrought rhetoric and also see this rhetoric for what it really is – a carefully constructed argumentative edifice which need not necessarily reflect the whole truth of the matter:

When educated people heard speeches such as those in the *Dialogus*, therefore, they judged them on two broad levels. On one, they listened as knowledgeable practitioners and as connoisseurs, looking for ingenuity and plausibility: are the arguments apt and clever, are the examples telling, has the opponent's case been adroitly impugned, is the language choice and apposite? Yet a case that is clever and plausible will not necessarily convince. Hence they also listened on a second level: namely, does the speaker have a *good* case? Do I myself believe it? The listener recognizes easily the rhetorical cosmetics the speaker is using, since the listener regularly employs them himself. He will be aware of how the speaker has attempted to camouflage the weaker aspects of his case. And because you cannot identify the weaker aspects without being aware of the

habit, and volition the speakers aim to present the strongest case they can for a particular point of view. This results in what moderns perceive to be exaggeration and contradictions, but what the ancients would have regarded as a natural and obligatory result for any speaker worth his salt. Thus, when Maternus give two quite dissimilar pictures of contemporary public life, the differences are due chiefly – probably wholly – to the different rhetorical aims of his two speeches. In the first he describes it as dangerous and bloody (*sanguinans*, 12.2) because he wants to justify his abandoning public life. In the second he wants to show that great oratory flourishes in times of political upheaval; hence he must describe his own age, in which great oratory no longer thrives, as secure and peaceful. Paradoxically put, Maternus is being consistent in his inconsistency', Luce (1993) 33.

⁴²⁰ Luce (1993) 29, 30 and 36-37 for thoughts on selectivity, exaggeration and humour respectively.

stronger, the listener will also be alert to the speaker's effectiveness in playing to the real strengths of his case.⁴²¹

It is this last contention - that educated listeners (including the modern reader) are alive to the distortions of rhetoric and can weigh the arguments of a particular speech against their wider store of knowledge so as to decide whether a particular argument is believable or not - together with the first contention set out above - that speakers make their best possible case - that I especially want to make use of in the following paragraphs. I propose to explore how Maternus' moulds the Virgilian biography into an idealized vision in order to make it serve his own rhetorical agenda the most usefully; and to reconstruct how an educated listener (or reader) would have responded to Maternus' portrait of Virgil on the two levels set out by Luce: rhetorical ingenuity and ultimate believability. We shall see that an educated listener, though impressed by the verve of Maternus' Virgilian portrait and its skilful manipulation of the evidence, need not necessarily have been convinced by it. Maternus presents an idealized vision of the Virgilian life because that is what is required for his argument; but an informed reader will be able to see how he achieves this idealization by a careful process of selection and omission.

Maternus' first speech has a clear rhetorical agenda: to extol the life of the poet above that of the orator. And just as Aper had idealized the life of the orator, so too does Maternus idealize the life of the poet. This idealization is most obvious in chapter 12, where Maternus associates poets with the golden age; but it continues into chapter 13 with the portrait of Virgil. Maternus clearly presents the Virgilian life, on the surface, as something exemplary and idyllic: exemplary in that he holds it up as the quintessential poetic existence, and one that he himself strives to imitate; idyllic in that it is presented in terms which would seem to be wholly positive. To aid such a presentation, Maternus employs various tricks of the rhetorical trade; and he employs them to great effect: his image of Virgil is seductive and has a certain plausibility. But is it convincing to the educated listener who has the ability to

⁴²¹ Luce (1993) 31, emphasis his.

interrogate Maternus' presentation and to see through the rhetorical veneer? How would a culturally sophisticated Roman have reacted to this image of Virgil's perfect life? Below I reconstruct a possible set of responses.

As part of his argument to show that poets enjoy greater *honor, gloria* and *fama* than orators, Maternus favourably compares Virgil with Cicero:

plures hodie reperies qui Ciceronis gloriam quam qui Vergilii detrectent...

(*Dialogus* 12.5)

'You will find more people nowadays ready to damn the reputation of Cicero than that of Virgil...'

Maternus' elevation of Virgil above Cicero in this example is a neat rhetorical device: by choosing the pre-eminent Latin orator and placing Virgil above him, Maternus scores a powerful hit for the cause of poetry; and he rebuts Aper's contention that it is orators (such as Eprius Marcellus and Vibius Crispus, 8) who enjoy greater renown than poets (such as Saleius Bassus, 9-10). The point is neatly and adroitly made; but a careful reader might pause for a moment before swallowing Maternus' rhetoric whole. For is Virgil's superiority to Cicero all that we can take away with us from this example? Perhaps not. For is it not also the case that the very words Maternus uses point us to the fact that Virgil, like Cicero, had his *obtrectatores* – they were both criticized, Maternus admits, but at least Virgil was less criticized than Cicero. By admitting that Virgil had critics, Maternus allows a negative trait to enter his portrait of Virgil; a negative trait which will be picked up by the astute reader. Simply by mentioning the practice of *obtrectatio*, even if only to say that Virgil fares better in this regard than Cicero, Maternus inadvertently reminds us that Virgil was often a figure targeted for abuse. Indeed, the biographical tradition informs us that Virgil was even

heckled at a recitation of the *Georgics* he was giving - hardly the kind of blissful existence Maternus' skilful rhetoric is at pains to construct in the *Dialogus*.⁴²²

Maternus goes on to say that Virgil enjoyed a *secessus* which was both *securus* and *quietus* (13.1). Again, the rhetorical thrust of this is that Virgil's life was idyllic: a blissful retreat from the chaos of political life and an existence free from anxiety. It is another seductive and plausible picture, and one that, once again, carefully rebuts Aper's contention that the poet's life is uncertain and stressful (9.3-9.4); but is it one which will automatically convince the thinking listener who can weigh this image with other material from the biographical tradition? Perhaps so, for in one sense this does accord with other evidence from the biographical tradition: Virgil himself, in the autobiographical *sphragis* to the *Georgics*, conveys an image of himself as a poet of leisured ease and retreat;⁴²³ the Suetonian biography also mentions his retreat from the city.⁴²⁴ However, the biographical tradition is also insistent on a related matter: this peaceful retreat came after a turbulent youth in which Virgil was evicted from his family farm by a veteran of Octavian's army and, indeed, nearly lost his life over

⁴²² VSD 43-46: *Obtrectatores Vergilio numquam defuerunt, nec mirum, nam nec Homero quidem. prolatis Bucolicis Numitorius quidam rescripsit Antibucolica, duas modo eglogas, sed insulsissime παραδόξως, quarum prioris initium est: "Tityre, si toga calda tibi est, quo tegmine fagi?" sequentis: "Dic mihi, Damoeta: cuium pecus, anne Latinum? / non. verum Aegonis nostri sic rure loquuntur." alius recitante eo ex Georgicis: "nudus ara, sere nudus" subiecit: "habebis frigore febrem." Est adversus Aeneida liber Car<v>ili Pictoris, titulo "Aeneomastix." M. Vip<s>anius a Maecenate eum suppositum appellabat, novae cacozeliae repertorem, non tumidae nec exilis, sed ex communibus verbis, atque ideo latentis. Herennius tantum vitia eius, Perellius Faustus furta contraxit. sed et Q. Octavi Aviti Ὅμοιοτελεύτων octo volumina quos et unde versus transtulerit, continent. Asconius Pedianus libro, quem contra obtrectatores Vergilii scripsit, pauca admodum obiecta ei proponit, eaque circa historiam fere et quod pleraque ab Homero sumpsisset; sed hoc ipsum crimen sic defendere adsuetum ait: "cur non illi quoque eadem furta temptarent? verum intellecturos facilius esse Herculi clavam quam Homero versum surripere"; et tamen destinasse secedere, ut omnia ad satietatem malevolorum decideret. It is important to note that Virgil, according to the VSD, was abused in his own lifetime by *obtrectatores* – the abuse was not simply something which sprung up after his death and at a time when he had become firmly entrenched in the Latin curriculum. On the *obtrectatores Vergilii* Ribbeck (1865) 96-113 is still useful; see also Scarcia (1969), Bettini (2001) 123-30 and EV s.v.*

⁴²³ G.4.563-64: *illo Vergilium me tempore dulcis alebat / Parthenope, studiis florentem ignobilis oti.*

⁴²⁴ VSD 13: *habuit domum Romae Esquiliis iuxta hortos Maecenatianos, quamquam secessus Campaniae Siciliaeque plurimum uteretur.*

the matter.⁴²⁵ Maternus conveniently glosses over this point (a clear case of rhetorical selection) as he presents his idyllic image of Virgil, but the story of Virgil's turbulent younger days was so well-known that it cannot have failed to have entered the mind of an educated reader of this passage. One of the most insistent trends in ancient exegesis of the *Eclogues* was exploration of how these poems related to the land evictions in the aftermath of Philippi, evictions in which Virgil, it was universally thought, personally suffered greatly. The informed reader would, therefore, be aware that Maternus has presented a very one-sided version of affairs to suit his rhetorical needs. He has concentrated on the peaceful era of Virgil's later years to present an ideal image of the poetic existence; but he has left out the earlier years of trauma and distress. Such selectivity might dupe the ill-informed listener; the cultured auditor might offer a knowing smile in appreciation of Maternus' rhetorical skills, but he is otherwise un-convinced by such a rosy picture of the poetic life.

Let us now turn to Maternus' comment on Virgil's fame (*notitia*) and the anecdote about the standing ovation in the theatre. Maternus here does two things: one, he presents us with concrete evidence for the reach of Virgil's fame; two, he suggests that Virgil's fame was an unequivocally good thing. Maternus' insistence on the reach of Virgil's fame functions as a rejoinder to Aper's claim that poets enjoy only limited and fleeting renown (10.1-10.2). While it would be difficult to contest the existence of Virgil's fame, Maternus' presentation of this fame as a blessing might raise the eyebrows of the listener well-versed in the Virgilian biographical tradition. How is this so? How can a standing ovation in the theatre – tangible proof of one's fame and popularity - be anything other than a good thing to the one who receives it? One way is to set against this image of a worshipful audience paying homage to Virgil the following story from the Suetonian *Vita*:

ac si quando Romae, quo rarissime commeabat, viseretur in publico, sectantes demonstrantesque se suffugere<t> in proximum tectum.

⁴²⁵ See e.g. *VSD* 19-20. The secondary literature on Virgil's experience in the evictions is enormous; Wilkinson (1966) and Winterbottom (1976) are as good a place as any to start; Horsfall (1995) 12-13 is typically sceptical.

(VSD 11)

‘And if, when he (Virgil) was in Rome, – to which he came very rarely – he was seen in public, he used to flee from those following him and pointing him out into the nearest dwelling.’

Virgil’s shy and retiring nature, as well as his timidity and valetudinarianism, were integral components of his character as conceived by the biographers and commentators.⁴²⁶ Seen in this light, when Maternus tells us about the standing ovation received by Virgil and presents this as a welcome occurrence and part of the joy of being a famous poet, we, as informed listeners, might hesitate for a moment and ask: actually, wouldn’t Virgil have loathed this kind of reception and felt ill-at-ease being the centre of attention? Indeed, in Maternus’ anecdote we are not told what Virgil’s reaction to the veneration is; as students of the Virgilian biography, we might speculate that Maternus decides not to tell us because Virgil habitually responded adversely to such a public display of approbation – he might have fled from the scene, loathing the limelight his success as a poet had brought him. Educated readers will, therefore, recall from the wider biographical tradition Virgil’s reputed social awkwardness and shunning of the limelight; and Maternus’ over-idealized portrayal of the Virgilian life will, once again, be revealed as a carefully constructed rhetorical facade.

I turn now to the intriguing mention of letters from Augustus to Virgil – letters which, according to Maternus, vouch for the *gratia* Virgil received from Augustus. Maternus’ rhetorical thrust is, once again, the same: the fact that Virgil received such

⁴²⁶ For his valetudinarianism, see VSD 8; also Horace, *Satires* 1.5.48-49. For his sensitivity of soul, see Horace, *Odes* 1.24. The story of Virgil fleeing from finger-pointing crowds is also found in *Vita Philargyriana I* (VVA 177); for Virgil as a poet who despised glory, see Donatus Auctus 68: *gloriae vero adeo contemptor fuit, ut, cum quidam versos quosdam suos sibi ascriberent eaque re docti haberent, non modo aegre non ferebat, immo voluptuosum id sibi erat*. For Virgil’s timidity when faced by an aggressive centurion, see e.g. VSD 63, *Vita Philargyriana I* (VVA 180)

letters from Augustus serves to idealize his life: to receive imperial correspondence is an unequivocal blessing which contributes to the happy lot in life of the poet. But, once again, a listener who enjoys a wider and deeper understanding of the Virgilian biographical tradition might pause before too easily accepting the thrust of Maternus' rhetoric. A comparison with the Suetonian *Vita* will give us food for thought:

Augustus vero, nam forte expeditione Cantabrica aberat, supplicibus atque etiam minacibus per iocum litteris efflagitaret, 'ut sibi de Aeneide', ut ipsius verba sunt, 'vel prima carminis ὑπογραφή vel quodlibet κῶλον mitteretur'. cui tamen multo post, perfectaue demum materia, tres omnino libros recitavit...

(VSD 31)

'Indeed Augustus – who happened to be away on an expedition in Spain – demanded through entreaties and even through mock-threatening letters that he should 'send him either the first outline of the poem or whatever chunk of it he wished' (these were his own words). After a long time, however, Virgil recited three books in total when he had finally finished some material...'

This Suetonian anecdote concerning epistolary communication seems to offer a rather more complex treatment of the relationship between Virgil and Augustus than Maternus' glib formulation. In Maternus' speech it all seems, on a first reading, so simple – we have letters from Augustus which, Maternus assures us, demonstrate the regard the emperor had for Virgil. In Suetonius things are presented differently: Augustus demands (*efflagitaret*) to see portions of the *Aeneid*, issuing entreaties and even threats – threats, we are told, which were meant as a joke (*per iocum*). This mention of the jocular tone of Augustus' letters is interesting. Now it is certainly plausible that Augustus did mean his threats to be taken as light-hearted joviality – he meant them *per iocum*. For the old idea that Augustus in any sense of the word

'ordered' the composition of the *Aeneid* is certainly too crude a formulation.⁴²⁷ But even if Augustus meant his mock-threatening enquiries as friendly banter, we have evidence to suggest that Virgil found it rather harder to see the funny side of the mighty project he had undertaken:

ipsius enim Maronis epistula, qua compellat Augustum, ita incipit: 'ego vero frequentes a te litteras accipio'; et infra: 'de Aenea quidem meo, si mehercle iam dignum auribus haberem tuis, libenter mitterem, sed tanta inchoata res est ut paene vitio mentis tantum opus ingressus mihi videar, cum praesertim, ut scis, alia quoque studia ad id opus multoque potiora impertiar'.

(*Saturnalia*, 1.24.10-12)

'For there is a letter of Virgil, addressed to Augustus, which begins with these words: 'I am getting many letters from you' (and goes on) 'as for my Aeneas, if I now had anything worthy of your attention, I should gladly send it; but the subject on which I have embarked is so vast that I think I must have been almost mad to have entered upon it; all the more so since, as you know, there are other and much more important studies which claim from me a share in the work'.⁴²⁸

Far from the *securus et quietus secessus* which is presented as the typical feature of Virgil's life in Maternus' version, this letter presents us with a very different image: a poet being badgered (the *litterae* are *frequentes*) by the emperor to produce results and agonizing over the Sisyphean labour he has taken on. Indeed Virgil's life, according

⁴²⁷ See White (1993) for the most comprehensive treatment of poets and patrons in Augustan Rome; esp. 112-118 for Virgil and Augustus and their epistolary communication, on which theme White notes the following: 'That they communicated so often by letter is in itself significant. When Augustus' cultural proclivities come into play, Vergil and Horace stand on the same footing with him as Atticus or Maecenas: they are intimates whom he teases, cajoles, consults, and strives to envelop' (113); and that Augustus' 'interventions with these people [sc. Virgil, Horace and Atticus] reflect above all the consciousness that he is dealing with respected friends' (116).

⁴²⁸ trans. Davies (1969), who suggests in a footnote that this letter is 'perhaps a reply to the letters from Augustus to which Suetonius refers in his life of Virgil.'

to this letter, appears to be *inquieta et anxia* – terms which Maternus had reserved rather for the oratorical life.

To round off our look at the letters, we might mention the one other epistolary fragment which has been preserved (by Priscian), and which is addressed from Augustus to Virgil: *excucurristi a Neapoli* – ‘you have run off from Naples’.⁴²⁹ It is difficult to say much with any certainty on such a meagre fragment, but in the light of our previous discussion it is tempting to envisage a scenario in which Virgil is going out of his way to avoid meeting the emperor – the emperor whose eagerness to see the *Aeneid* completed is piling unbearable pressure on Virgil. Furthermore, Naples and the surrounding Campanian countryside was the area most favoured by Virgil for his *secessus*: for this we have his own testimony in the *sphragis* to the *Georgics*, as well as numerous references in the ancient biographies and commentaries.⁴³⁰ We have, therefore, a possible reference to an imperial visit to Naples causing Virgil to remove himself from the scene: the emperor disrupting his cherished *secessus* – the complete opposite of the scenario presented by Maternus.

This excursus on the *epistulae* is not meant to cast doubt on the favour Virgil held with Augustus, or even to suggest that Virgil was less than keen on the emperor; that is a matter for individual readers and will always remain a subjective judgement.⁴³¹ The point is, as above, to expose Maternus’ rhetorically motivated and distorted presentation of Virgil’s life. Maternus casually mentions the letters as evidence of the idyllic relationship between poet and *princeps*, and fits this into his larger picture of the tranquil life enjoyed by Virgil while still maintaining imperial favour. Maternus is idealizing Virgil’s life, and the existence of letters between the poet and the prince is meant to confirm this ideal scenario. Yet all of the epistolary fragments which have chanced to survive present a very different picture, one in which it is precisely Virgil’s closeness to the emperor which prevents him from achieving his desired

⁴²⁹ in *GL* 2.533.13.

⁴³⁰ *G.4.563-4; VSD* 13.

⁴³¹ See e.g. White (1993) 115-17, who discusses the letters as evidence for the respect and friendship which existed between Virgil and Augustus.

quietus secessus. Maternus wants to suggest that Virgil enjoyed both tranquil retreat and imperial benefaction; but our other evidence suggests that it was precisely this imperial benefaction which prevented Virgil's retreat from being tranquil. The letters which have survived, far from supporting Maternus' argument, actually serve to undermine it – or, if that is too strong a term, at least to complicate the picture and hint at alternative interpretative paths.

Thus far we have considered how Maternus' idealized references to Virgil's *secessus*, to his *notitia*, to the *epistulae* and to the *obtrectatores* can all be complicated if they are brought into contact with material from the wider Virgilian biographical tradition. Maternus' one-sided, rhetorically motivated spin on these events is apparent to the well-informed reader. Before we move on, there is one final point to be made in this area; a point concerning last wills and testaments. Towards the end of his speech Maternus uses a quotation from the *Georgics* to extol the life of rural retreat which he is now intent on living (13.5). This retreat, he avers, will remove him from the hothouse of Rome, with its law suits (*insanum...lubricum forum*, 13.5) and its imperial commissions (*anhelans libertus*, 13.6).⁴³² It will, furthermore, mean that he does not have to worry about the contents of his last will and testament because he will not possess very much to hand over to his descendants:

nec incertus futuri testamentum pro pignore scribam, nec plus habeam quam
quod possim cui velim relinquere, quandoque enim fatalis et meus dies veniet.

(*Dialogus* 13.6)

'May I not, uncertain of the future, have to write a will which will serve as a guarantee, and may I have no more than I can leave to whomever I want when my time comes.'

⁴³² Note also how *insanum forum* recalls *Georgics* 2.502: *insanumque forum*. *libertus* refers to an imperial freedman, as Peterson (1893) *ad loc.* shows ('an imperial messenger with a pressing commission') with further references.

Maternus here refers to the widespread imperial practice among wealthy individuals of leaving a part of their estate to the emperor in order to ensure that their other testamentary provisions were honoured.⁴³³ Maternus seems to suggest that he will not have to worry about writing the emperor into his will because he will not have an estate large enough to attract the attention of the imperial inheritance tax man: Maternus' legacy will be small enough that he can leave it all to whomsoever he might wish (*cui velim*). Once again, this sounds like an enviable state of affairs: Maternus' renouncement of conspicuous wealth and fame will mean that he can write whatever will he likes with the sure confidence that his wishes will be honoured. And this enviable position is the direct result of pursuing a Virgilian model of existence; we remember that this section was introduced by the *Georgics* quotation about the charms of poetic retreat. But is Maternus pulling the reader's leg in this instance? For one of the most famous stories from the Virgilian biography concerns Virgil's will and how its stipulations were overridden by the commands of Augustus: Virgil had ordered the unfinished *Aeneid* to be burnt, but Augustus vetoed this desire: *divus Augustus carmina Vergilii cremari contra testamenti eius verecundiam vetuit*.⁴³⁴ So when Maternus says that a Virgilian style poetic retreat will ensure that his last will and testament will be honoured, we might be entitled to a wry smile: we know from our wider knowledge that if there was one thing Virgil's poetry did not guarantee him, it was the ability to have his last will and testament honoured. Once again, therefore, Maternus' portrait of Virgil is unmasked as an idealization: Maternus confidently claims that poets who live a life like Virgil's can make their wills in the knowledge that their desires will be honoured; but our wider knowledge of the Virgilian life allows us to see this for what it is: idealized spin.

⁴³³ 'Maternus refers to the practice of including the emperor among the beneficiaries to ensure the will's execution', Mayer (2001) *ad loc.* Gudeman (1914) *ad loc.* provides copious evidence for grasping emperors keeping an eagle-eye on the provisions made in the wills of the wealthy.

⁴³⁴ Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis* 7.114. The story is well attested: see for instance VSD 37-41; Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 17.10.7; Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 1.24.6; various poems in the *Anthologia Latina* are discussed by Stuart (1917) 376-82; Ovid has been thought to riff on the theme – see esp. *Tristia* 1.7.15-40.

9. Idealizing Virgil's life; a second approach.

In the previous section we considered how Maternus' idealized portrait of the Virgilian biography need not be swallowed hook, line and sinker by the educated reader; our wider knowledge of the traditions of the Virgilian biography allows us to detect where Maternus might be trying to pull the wool over our eyes to further his aim of idealizing the poetic life. In this section I want to look again at the reasons why Maternus idealizes Virgil's life. We have already encountered one possible answer to this question: Maternus' role in the debate is to champion the life of the poet over that of the orator, so it suits his rhetorical agenda to idealize the life of Virgil – the poet whom he sets up as the quintessential embodiment of the poetic life. There is, however, another way of looking at this issue: if we are receptive to the idea of Maternus as an imperial critic (set out above), we can give his idealization of Virgil's life a political motivation. I want to consider how Maternus' idealized portrait of Virgil might be interpreted as 'an attempt to comment on the present through the interpretation of the past':⁴³⁵ Maternus' idealized portrait of Virgil – especially as it relates to his relationship with Augustus - can, I shall argue, be interpreted as an attempt to condemn the contemporary state of poet-prince relations by means of contrast with a perfect past.⁴³⁶ This strategy of using an image of the past as a means of criticizing the present is also used by Messalla in his speeches outlining the reasons for the decline of oratory (28-32; 33.4-35.5); he idealizes the training received by the budding orator in the old days in order to damn by comparison present methods of oratorical instruction. It is an argumentative strategy which does

⁴³⁵ Martin (1981) 66.

⁴³⁶ Such a position is a modification of the commonplace view that Tacitus, in much of his historical writings, presents a bleak image of the past as an oblique way of criticizing the present. See e.g. Penwill (2003) 138: 'Tacitus [presents] the contrast between past and present in a way that appears to flatter the present, but will represent the past in a way that cannot but draw attention to the flaws in the present.'

not go unnoticed by Aper: *vitio autem malignitatis humanae vetera semper in laude, praesentia in fastidio esse* (18.3).⁴³⁷

The tactic of idealizing Virgil's life in order to lament the contemporary existence of the poet seems to have been especially prevalent around this time (the turn of the first and second-centuries A.D.). Martial several times plays on the theme:

Saepe mihi dicis, Luci carissime Iuli,
'scribe aliquid magnum: desidiosus homo es.'
otia da nobis, sed qualia fecerat olim
Maecenas Flacco Vergilioque suo:
condere uicturas temptem per saecula curas 5
et nomen flammis eripuisse meum.

(*Epigrams* 1.107.1-6)

'You often say to me, dearest Lucius Iulius: 'write something grand: you are a lazy man'. Provide for me the leisure which Maecenas once provided for his Horace and his Virgil; then I would try to create things which would live through the centuries and snatch my name from the flames.'

Temporibus nostris aetas cum cedat auorum
creuerit et maior cum duce Roma suo,
ingenium sacri miraris deesse Maronis
nec quemquam tanta bella sonare tuba.
sint Maecenates, non deerunt, Flacce, Marones 5
Vergiliumque tibi uel tua rura dabunt.

⁴³⁷ 'It is a defect of human malice always to praise the old and despise the present.' See also Aper's similar comments at 15.1: *non desinis, Messalla, vetera tantum et antiqua mirari, nostrorum autem temporum studia inridere atque contemnere.*

(*Epigrams* 8.55.1-6)

‘Since the age of our grandfathers has given way to our own times and Rome has grown greater with her leader, you are amazed that the genius of a Maro is lacking and that nobody sounds wars with such a great trumpet. Let there be Maecenases, Flaccus, and Maros will not be lacking: your own fields will even provide you with a Virgil.’

Martial suggests that if only he enjoyed the same kind of support which Virgil received from Maecenas, then he too could compose impressive epic poetry in the Virgilian manner. Martial idealizes the position of Virgil in order to take a swipe at the stingy patrons of his own day. Juvenal also has a say on the matter in *Satires* 7, where he too insinuates that it was the generous patronage received by Virgil which allowed him to create great poetry; patronage which is all too lacking, according to Juvenal, in contemporary society.⁴³⁸ Both of these poets, naturally, have their own particular axes to grind and agendas to promote; but the point is that they are using an idealized image of the Virgilian biography to make these points. For them, as for Maternus in the *Dialogus*, the Virgilian biography proves to be a useful rhetorical tool because it is easily idealized; and an idealized model is always a useful rhetorical prop to have up one’s sleeve for purposes of contrast or comparison.

When we turn back to Maternus’ portrait of Virgil, we can appreciate how his insistently positive presentation of the Virgil-Augustus relationship might serve to highlight a contrast: we are invited to compare what Virgil and Augustus had with other poets’ experiences of the imperial court. Maternus’ idealized portrait of Virgil has an almost normative function: it depicts the life of the poet (any poet) as it should be in an ideal world, especially in respect of a poet’s relationship with the emperor. Virgil was supported by the emperor and worshipped like the emperor; his peaceful life was untroubled by concerns about offending those in the imperial palace. But this idealized portrait might be seen to jar with the reality of poets’ lives in post-

⁴³⁸ *Satires* 7.66-71; on Virgil in *Satires* 7, see Braund (1988) 41-43.

Virgilian imperial Rome, especially in its rosy picture of a harmonious relationship between poet and *princeps*. Lest we forget, this whole debate is only taking place because Maternus' friends have turned up at his house to warn him that his play has offended the imperial court.⁴³⁹ Maternus' image of the harmonious relationship between Virgil and Augustus could not be further from the reality of Maternus' own life; the idealized nature of the Virgil-Augustus relationship only serves to highlight how far short of this ideal Maternus' own life falls. This line of interpretation is the flipside of that which we set out in section 6(c) (above). There we considered how the idealized portrait of Virgil and Augustus might be read in a eulogistic vein:

Maternus, the imperial supporter, was holding up the relationship between Virgil and Augustus as a mirror-image of his own relations with Vespasian. Here, on the other hand, we have the reverse scenario: Maternus, the imperial critic, is holding up the relationship between Virgil and Augustus as an image of something admirable which, lamentably, no longer exists.

We can develop this theme if we expand our horizons somewhat and consider the following thought: not only does Maternus criticize his own perilous situation by means of contrast with an idealized image of the past, but he can also be seen to be criticizing more generally the frequently fraught relations between authors and emperors in post-Virgilian Rome. We can begin by taking another look at the startling revelation that the people worshipped Virgil as if he were Augustus (*populus...Vergilium veneratus est sic quasi Augustum*, 13.2). Within imperial discourse this statement must necessarily strike the reader as rather unusual: in imperial discourse nobody, surely, can approach the exulted level of the *princeps*? And yet in this story that is exactly what Virgil does – he is venerated 'as if he were Augustus'. The image is striking precisely because it is so unusual; it doesn't seem to tally with our wider understanding of how poets and emperors interact.⁴⁴⁰ For poets praise emperors; and emperors can patronize poets; but poets cannot (anymore) compete with emperors for the love and approbation of the people.

⁴³⁹ *offendisse potentium animos diceretur*, 2.1.

⁴⁴⁰ Cf. the persistent fawning of Martial and Statius to Domitian.

To illustrate this fact, we need only consider the temporal setting of the *Dialogus* – the sixth year of Vespasian’s reign, that is to say A.D. 74 or 75 (17.3). We are in the early years of the Flavian era, but it is vital to recognise that the shadow of Neronian Rome still looms large over the debate.⁴⁴¹ The way, for example, in which Aper refers to the contemporary political dispensation as the ‘sixth year of the blessed principate in which Vespasian is nurturing the state’ makes a very clear link to the disastrous reign of Nero which went before: the current *principatus* is *felix* precisely in comparison with the *infelicitas* of Neronian Rome.⁴⁴² Moreover, Aper’s chosen representatives of outstanding contemporary oratory – Eprius Marcellus and Vibius Crispus – are two figures who both came to prominence as *delatores* under Nero. Finally, Maternus recollects how it was under Nero that he had first achieved renown by breaking the pernicious influence of Vatinius (11.2).⁴⁴³ The dialogue, therefore, has a discernibly post-Neronian setting, and the interlocutors and the subjects of their debate have numerous points of contact with Nero’s Rome. Given this Neronian context, and given the fact that so much of the first part of the *Dialogus* is concerned with the interaction of poets and emperors, we might permit memories of the stormy relationship between Lucan and Nero to enter our minds. The very fact that Maternus’ idyllic picture of the Virgil-Augustus relationship is delivered in post-Neronian Rome challenges the critically minded reader to consider whether such a model is relevant or applicable anymore; or whether it is, in reality, an exception that proves the rule.

Lucan’s life, after all, could not deviate further from the idealized image Maternus gives us of the Virgilian life in respect of relationships with the emperor. Our sources for the life of Lucan suggest that Nero resented and envied his poetic talent; and that

⁴⁴¹ Mayer notes the importance of the post-Neronian atmosphere while discussing Maternus’ perceived naivety: ‘[Maternus] may strike the reader as somewhat naïve when he speaks, so soon after the reign of Nero, of his confidence that he is secure (13.5-6), or that the Princeps is very wise, as if by definition (41.4)’ (2001) 47; so also Matthiessen (1970) 177.

⁴⁴² *ac sextam iam felicitis huius principatus stationem qua Vespasianus rem publicam fovet* (17.3) (‘now the sixth year of the blessed principate in which Vespasian is nurturing the state’).

⁴⁴³ Whether Maternus broke Vatinius’ power by a speech or by a tragedy is unclear; the text at 11.2 is uncertain. Bartsch (1994) 200-202 surveys the problem in a useful appendix.

Lucan, in turn, resented Nero's envy.⁴⁴⁴ Nero, of course, considered himself to be the consummate artist (*qualis artifex pereo!*),⁴⁴⁵ and was not the kind of emperor to brook a rival in his quest for popularity:

maxime autem popularitate efferebatur, omnium aemulus, qui quoquo modo
animum vulgi moverent.

(Suetonius, *Nero* 53)

'But he [sc. Nero] was greatly carried away by (a desire for) popular acclaim; he was jealous of anyone who in any way stirred the emotions of the populace.'

Indeed, Suetonius informs us that one of Nero's motivations for murdering Britannicus was envy of his superior voice;⁴⁴⁶ and it was also alleged that he had the actor Paris killed because he viewed him as a dangerous rival to his own theatrical talents.⁴⁴⁷ Furthermore, a story has been preserved which shows Nero's reaction to someone other than himself receiving plaudits in the theatre:

ac spectaculis theatri clam inlatus cuidam scaenico placenti nuntium misit abuti
eum occupationibus suis.

(Suetonius, *Nero* 42.2)

⁴⁴⁴ Griffin (1984) 159.

⁴⁴⁵ Suetonius, *Nero* 49.1.

⁴⁴⁶ Suetonius, *Nero* 33.2: *Britannicum non minus aemulatione vocis, quae illi iucundior suppetebat, quam metu ne quandoque apud hominum gratiam paterna memoria praevaleret, veneno adgressus est* ('he attacked Britannicus with poison not merely because he was envious of his voice – which was more charming than his own – but also because he was afraid that Britannicus would become more ingratiated with the people because of the memory of his father').

⁴⁴⁷ *et sunt qui tradant Paridem histrionem occisum ab eo quasi gravem adversarium* (Suetonius, *Nero* 54) ('There are even those who say that the actor Paris was killed by him on the grounds that he was a serious rival'); cf. *Nero* 23.2 and 24.1 for further evidence of his *aemulatio adversariorum*, which was, naturally, carried to excess.

‘After he had been secretly carried in to a show in the theatre, he sent word to a certain actor who was pleasing the crowd that he was taking advantage of his [i.e. Nero’s] preoccupations [i.e. Nero was too preoccupied by other business to be on stage himself].’

The Suetonian *vita Lucani* also recounts a story which furthers the case for a perceived rivalry between Lucan and Nero in the poetic sphere:

revocatus Athenis a Nerone cohortique amicorum additus atque etiam
quaestura honoratus, non tamen permansit in gratia: si quidem aegre ferens,
quod Nero se recitante subito ac nulla nisi refrigerandi sui causa indicto senatu
recessisset, neque verbis adversus principem neque factis excitantibus post
haec temperavit...

(*Vita Lucani* 332.9-333.2)⁴⁴⁸

‘Having been recalled from Athens by Nero, Lucan was added to his circle of friends. He did not, however, remain in his good graces. For Lucan was none too amused when Nero, while Lucan was reciting, called a meeting of the senate with no other motivation than to pour cold water on the performance. After this Lucan moderated neither his words against the emperor nor his provocative actions...’

In this episode Nero’s slighting of his poetry is made the ultimate cause of Lucan’s political rebellion. To complete this picture of poetic rivalry and dangerous envy we can call upon Tacitus himself, who likewise sees the root cause of Lucan’s political disaffection in poetic rivalry:

Initium coniurationi non a cupidine ipsius fuit; nec tamen facile memoraverim,
qui primus auctor, cuius instinctu concitum sit quod tam multi sumpserunt...et

⁴⁴⁸ References are to page and line number in Hosius (1905).

Lucanus Annaeus Plautiusque Lateranus vivida odia intulere. Lucanum
propriae causae accendebant, quod famam carminum eius premebat Nero
prohibueratque ostentare, vano adsimulatione

(*Annals* 15.49)

‘The beginning of the conspiracy did not stem from his [sc. Piso’s] desire. But I could not easily record who was the first instigator, or whose will stirred something up which so many joined in with...but it was seething hatred which brought Lucan and Plautius Lateranus into the conspiracy. Lucan had his own reasons for being incensed, for Nero was constraining the fame of his poetry and had banned him from reciting – all this because of Nero’s vain rivalry.’

There is no need to press the point further, or even to assess the historical veracity of the claim that Lucan’s fall from grace really was the result of a poetic rivalry. What matters is that there was a common perception that it was so at the time when Tacitus and Suetonius were writing: Nero, it was widely believed, simply could not tolerate other poets and performers stealing his thunder; his artistic supremacy could not brook a rival.⁴⁴⁹

In the light of this common perception of the Lucan-Nero relationship, the passage in the *Dialogus* on how Virgil received the same level of popular acclaim as Augustus might begin to appear somewhat anomalous: an extraordinary state of affairs which is no longer a possibility. The Lucanian precedent of a poet who paid with his life for rivalling the popularity of an emperor offsets the picture of Virgil receiving the adoration of the public on an imperial scale. To attract the level of acclaim usually only accorded to an emperor is presented as a blessing in the case of Virgil; but our memories of Lucan – still fresh in the mind – remind us that the Virgilian scenario

⁴⁴⁹ Griffin (1984) 169: ‘The Emperor who at first did so much to encourage literature ended by attacking it at its root. His feud was not with what writers said or how they wrote, but with their excellence and success. It is difficult enough to produce good literature when the content is circumscribed, but it is impossible, according to the rules of logic as well as those of human nature, when it is quality itself that is proscribed.’

was something exceptional and, perhaps, unrepeatable. Once again, we can see how an idealised picture of Virgil's life is being used by Maternus in an ironical way. And, as above, the point of the irony is not some sort of anti-Virgilian polemic which claims that Virgil did not enjoy popular fame (he did), or that Augustus resented this popularity (he didn't, so far as we can tell). The point is rather that this is only a partial view, a blinkered vision, a tendentious rendering of how poets and *principes* might sometimes interact in ideal conditions. The paradigm of Virgil and Augustus is part of Maternus' rhetorically motivated and deliberately idealized conception of how poets and *principes* would operate in an ideal world; the intrusion of the Lucanian precedent – still fresh in the memory in the early Flavian context of the dialogue - reveals a harsher and more dangerous possibility. Once again, by reading between the lines of Maternus' fairy-tale rendering of the Augustus-Virgil relationship, fundamental issues about the problems of literary autonomy under autocratic regimes begin to emerge. The idealized image of Virgil and Augustus serves to draw a contrast with the usual state of affairs under the principate: the idealized image throws the reality into sharper focus.

The Lucanian precedent, therefore, serves to throw a contrastive light upon Maternus' idealized image of Virgil: the harmonious relationship between poet and *princeps* imagined for Virgil and Augustus seems a long way from the usual state of affairs in imperial poet-prince relations. To illustrate this point further we can consider the other poet whom Maternus sets alongside Virgil as an instantiation of the ideal poetic life: Pomponius Secundus. Look at how Maternus introduces this last example:

13.2 testes Augusti epistulae, testis ipse populus, qui auditis in theatro Vergili versibus surrexit universus et forte praesentem spectantemque Vergilium veneratus est sic quasi Augustum. **13.3** ne nostris quidem temporibus Secundus Pomponius Afro Domitio vel dignitate vitae vel perpetuitate famae cesserit.

(*Dialogus* 13.1-3)

13.2 The letters of Augustus bear witness to this, as do the people themselves; for when some verses of Virgil had been heard in the theatre, everyone rose to their feet and worshipped Virgil – who was by chance present and watching – as if he were Augustus. 13.3 Nor indeed in our own age has Pomponius Secundus given way to Domitius Afer in either the dignity of his life or the longevity of his fame.

An implicit analogy is drawn between Virgil and Pomponius by the juxtaposition: from the days of yore, Virgil provides a model for the lovely poetic life; from recent times, Pomponius provides just such a model. The analogy can be read as a rather *recherché* joke on Maternus' part for a simple reason: Pomponius' life was in no way similar to the Virgilian model which Maternus has just sketched for us. Pomponius was certainly a poet, and a widely admired one at that; but he was also a consul and soldier.⁴⁵⁰ If we turn to Tacitus' other works, we see that Pomponius' life in no way came close to achieving the Virgilian ideal set out by Maternus. From Tacitus we learn that Pomponius was almost purged by Tiberius in the aftermath of the fall of Sejanus and was only saved by the intercession and dodgy dealings of his brother; that he was abused in the theatre (for which he wrote plays) by the audience, with the result that Claudius issued edicts to curb unruly spectators; that he was a successful military commander who was awarded *triumphalis honos* for defeating marauding Chatti in Germany.⁴⁵¹ Everything which is idyllic in the portrait of Virgil's life is overturned in Pomponius' life. Virgil's quiet poetic life is contrasted with the frenetic existence of those seeking a consulship; Pomponius was a consul and military man. Virgil's life was free from danger and he enjoyed the support of the emperor; Pomponius was very nearly executed by Tiberius. Virgil was so loved by the people that they gave him a standing ovation in the theatre; Pomponius was abused and ridiculed by the audience. Once again, therefore, the idealized image of Virgil serves to highlight a contrast: Maternus' idealized construction of the Virgil-

⁴⁵⁰ Favourable judgments on Pomponius the poet from Quintilian 10.1.98, Pliny the Elder, *Nat. Hist.* 13.83, Tacitus, *A.* 12.28.

⁴⁵¹ References to these events are as follows: *Annals* 5.8 and 6.18; 11.13; 12.27-8.

Augustus relationship reminds us of the precarious position of the artist which was the more usual state of affairs under the principate.

Indeed, the overwhelming image from the first-century A.D. is not of poet-emperor harmony (as in the Virgil-Augustus scenario), but in fact the complete opposite, as a brief survey of the evidence will show. For while he might have patronized Virgil, Augustus notoriously exiled Ovid for his *carmen et error*;⁴⁵² Tiberius, prompted by Macro, had the playwright Mamercus Scaurus executed after one of his tragedies was interpreted as being seditious;⁴⁵³ Caligula, in his own inimitable way, attacked writers already long dead;⁴⁵⁴ under Nero it was not only Lucan from the world of letters who perished, but also Seneca and Petronius;⁴⁵⁵ Domitian not only purged Junius Rusticus for publishing a eulogy of Thrasea Paetus, but also Herennius Senecio for extolling the elder Helvidius Priscus, and also the younger Helvidius Priscus for a play he had written in which Domitian detected mocking references to his own divorce.⁴⁵⁶ We might, finally, recall the sometime held belief that the Maternus of the *Dialogus* is to be identified with the sophist Maternus who, according to Cassius Dio, was executed by Domitian in A.D. 91 for speaking out against tyranny.⁴⁵⁷ If this identification is correct, then there is of course an additional irony in Maternus' eulogy of the cordial relations between Virgil and Augustus: the reality of his own life does not match the idealized image he promotes. In any case,

⁴⁵² *Tristia* 2.207. See Ingleheart (2010) 2-5 and her notes to lines 103-10 and 207-10.

⁴⁵³ Tacitus, *Annals* 6.29.3, with Martin (2001) *ad loc.*; Cassius Dio 58.24.3-4 reports the same episode. Suetonius, *Tiberius* 61.3 tells of a tragedian who was executed after presenting Agamemnon in a bad light in one of his plays; the playwright is not named by Suetonius, but is presumably to be identified with Scaurus.

⁴⁵⁴ Suetonius, *Caligula* 34.2: *Sed et Vergili ac Titi Livi scripta at imagines paulum afuit quin ex omnibus bibliothecis amoveret, quorum alterum ut nullius ingenii minimaque doctrinae, alterum ut verbosum in historia neglegentemque carpebat* ('More than that, he was not far off removing the writings and busts of Virgil and Livy from all the libraries, railing at the former as a man of no talent and very little learning, and the latter as a verbose and careless historian').

⁴⁵⁵ For the death of Seneca, see *Annals* 15.60-65; for Petronius, see *Annals* 16.18-20. That so many literary artists perished under Nero has given rise to the notion of a 'literary opposition'; see Griffin (1984) 155-60 on this topic.

⁴⁵⁶ For Junius Rusticus and Herennius Senecio, see *Agricola* 2.1, with Ogilvie (1967) *ad loc.*; for the demise of the younger Helvidius Priscus, see Suetonius, *Domitian* 10.4, and also *Agricola* 45.1 (with Ogilvie (1967) *ad loc.*).

⁴⁵⁷ See n. 409 for bibliography on the identification of Maternus.

all of these instances are a far cry from the happy relationship of Virgil and Augustus, which is thus shown to be something of an anomaly: the exception that proves the rule. Virgil and Augustus represent an ideal, but it is an ideal which has not found any imitations.

We can conclude this section by considering Maternus' own conclusion to the *Dialogus*. Maternus closes his disquisition on the reasons for the decline in oratory with the following thought:

nunc, quoniam nemo eodem tempore adsequi potest magnam famam et magnam quietem, bono saeculi sui quisque citra obtrectationem alterius utatur.

(*Dialogus* 41.5)

'Nowadays, since nobody is able to achieve at the same time both great glory and great tranquillity, let each man make use of the blessings of his own age rather than criticizing other epochs.'

Maternus is, at this moment, talking specifically about oratory; but his formulation that fame and tranquillity are incompatible under the principate has a wider resonance. We have already seen how Lucan's fame brought him into conflict with Nero; we might also think of Agricola, whose outstanding merits incurred the odium of Domitian.⁴⁵⁸ And yet Virgil – the man whom Maternus had earlier held up as his model for life – did, according to Maternus, achieve this seemingly impossible combination. Virgil, we are informed, achieved both tranquillity (*securum et quietum Vergilii secessum*, 13.1) and fame (*apud populum Romanum notitia*, 13.1). Once again we can see how Maternus' portrait of Virgil presents an idealized image of how things ought to be in order to draw a contrast with how things are in reality: Virgil's combination of peace and fame must remain the exception that proves the rule.

⁴⁵⁸ The *Agricola* as a whole constitutes an enquiry into ramifications of leading a virtuous life under a vicious ruler; see esp. chapters 39-41 for Domitian's pathological resentment of Agricola's military successes in Britain.

10. Conclusion.

In this chapter I have examined the various ways in which we can respond to Maternus' mini-biography of Virgil. I have argued that our interpretation of the Virgilian portrait is inextricably linked with our overall interpretation of Maternus as a character: how we read Maternus impinges upon what we think he is doing with his Virgilian material. If we think of Maternus as a figure generally supportive of the principate, then we can see his Virgilian biography as part of the 'Augustan' reception of Virgil: Maternus can be seen to be inheriting, or even constructing, a strongly 'Augustan' image of Virgil which acts as a precedent for Maternus' own imperial acquiescence. I have explored the various strands of interpretation which derive from such a reading. But if we read Maternus as some kind of imperial dissident or critic, then our understanding of what he is doing with his Virgilian portrait can reflect this fact: Maternus might be seen to be challenging the reader to interrogate his conceptions of Virgil and Augustus; or he might be using an 'Augustan' image of Virgil as a defensive smokescreen. Throughout the chapter I have stressed Maternus' use of the Virgilian life as a useful rhetorical tool. And I have shown that it is a rhetorical tool which has a great degree of malleability about it: those who see a loyalist Maternus can fit the Virgilian portrait neatly into their understanding of Maternus' argumentative strategy; and those who see a dissident Maternus can also accommodate his use of the Virgilian biography in their appreciation of his rhetoric. I have, finally, considered ways of looking at Maternus' idealization of the Virgilian life; how this idealized image jars with other images from the Virgilian biographical tradition, and also how idealized images make useful rhetorical tools.

Conclusion.

In this thesis we have explored various responses to aspects of the Virgilian biography. In the first chapter we analysed how the Virgilian poetic career was not a static entity in antiquity, but was rather something moulded by individual readers with their own agendas to promote. In the second chapter we looked at the tomb of Virgil and the Virgilian cult, examining how the identities of Virgil's epic successors are constructed in a Virgilian mirror. In the third chapter we considered how the *Eclogues* were used by later writers as a window onto Virgil's life. The final chapter was dedicated to Tacitus' presentation of Virgil in the *Dialogus*, as we investigated how the historian problematizes Virgil's political aspect and questions the idealization of his life. The essential over-arching theme which connects these chapters is the following: the creative appropriation of the Virgilian life. In each of the chapters we have witnessed how various writers respond to aspects of the Virgilian biography in creative ways; they are not passive inheritors of the Virgilian life, but active manipulators.

The first chapter was concerned with the Virgilian career. The main aim was to highlight how the notion of a Virgilian career was something contested in antiquity: different poets put different spins on this concept, and these varying permutations tell us as much about the receiving poets as they do about Virgil. Our focus was especially on the *Culex* and how this poem was implicated in the poetic autobiographies of three post-Virgilian poets: Lucan, Statius and Martial. In the case of Lucan we analysed how his interaction with the *Culex* can be fitted into a wider discourse concerning his status as a post-Virgilian epicist: issues of deference and superiority, decline and excess were discussed in this context. Some of these issues recurred in our exploration of Statius' take on the *Culex*, although we now also had to factor in the point that Statius' reaction to Virgil's *Culex* is also a reaction to Lucan's reaction to Virgil's *Culex*: Statius constructs his own image vis-à-vis Virgil through a Lucanian prism. In the final chunk of this chapter we veered-off down an

epigrammatic path as we looked at Martial's presentation of the *Culex*. We considered how the *Culex* fits into Martial's tendentious rendering of the Virgilian career in *Epigrams* 8.55: Virgil is made to move straight from a trivial epyllion, the *Culex*, to a mighty epic, the *Aeneid*, as Virgil's career is comically reduced to two works. And in the *Apophoreta* we considered how Martial's contrast between a deluxe edition of the *Culex* and a bog-standard edition of Virgil's complete works might be read as a mischievous attempt to assign greater literary value to Virgil's most trivial work.

In chapter two we examined how Virgil's tomb was used by his epic successors in their own processes of self-definition. Lucan's epitaph serves to continue his imitation and emulation of Virgil beyond the grave as it self-consciously re-works its Virgilian model. In the case of Statius we explored the resonance of the fact that he locates himself at Virgil's tomb in *Silvae* 4.4. While this gesture has conventionally been read as a deferential tribute from the Flavian poet to his Augustan forerunner, we explored ways in which this deference masks more ambitious sentiments concerning poetic succession: Statius can be seen as usurping the place once held by Virgil. We also considered the setting of this poem in a landscape ravaged by the eruption of Vesuvius: although at the time of writing the surrounding area is a deathly wasteland, the allusions to the end of *Georgics* 4 and the regeneration of Aristaeus' bees might be read as sounding a note of optimism that life will, one day, return. In the final part of this chapter we considered Silius' interaction with the tomb of Virgil. We first considered how Silius himself plays with Virgil's tomb by means of his allusion to the Virgilian epitaph in his presentation of Ennius: Silius' presentation of Ennius in the language of the Virgilian epitaph can be read as an ingenious inversion of Virgil's presentation of himself in the language of the Ennian epitaph in the proem to *Georgics* 3. We then looked in some detail at Martial's hatchet-job on Silius' Virgilian pretensions: Martial ridicules Silius' ownership of, and worship at, the Virgilian tomb; and he constructs an image of Silius as a wannabe Virgil with the sole intention of mocking the very notion.

In the third chapter we considered biographical readings of the *Eclogues*. Propertius 2.34 was analysed as an early approach towards the biographical method: the elegiac poet probes the biographical potential of the Virgilian poems in a manner which mirrors Virgil's own strategy in its obliqueness and teasing suggestiveness. Martial 8.55, on the other hand, marks a progression: the epigrammatist wholeheartedly and humorously embraces a biographical reading of the *Eclogues*, while at the same time using this approach to make some ingenious literary-critical comments about Ovid's appropriation of Virgil, and about his own Ovidian inheritance. In the final part of this chapter we introduced Servius as a point of comparison. We noted how he makes explicit the problem which was only implicitly tackled by Propertius: namely, the validity or otherwise of biographical approaches to the *Eclogues*. And we also looked at how his attempts to circumscribe biographical allegoresis feed into his own self-presentation as a guardian of Virgilian interpretation.

The final chapter was given over to Tacitus. It was suggested that the mini-biography of Virgil that we find in the *Dialogus de Oratoribus* raises numerous questions about the political nature of Virgil, specifically his relationship with Augustus. We considered how our interpretation of the presentation of Virgil in this passage cannot be easily divorced from our wider interpretation of the *Dialogus*, especially our reading of Maternus as a character. The ambiguities and contradictions that readers have detected in Maternus – is he an imperial dissident or a supporter of Vespasian? – have an effect on how we read the biography of Virgil and how we interpret its meaning. Furthermore, the conception of Virgil which we bring with us to a reading of the *Dialogus* can influence how we interpret Maternus – a poet who presents himself in Virgilian colours. The way in which Tacitus throws the spot-light on Virgil's political positioning (without, however, providing us with any definitive answers) can be seen as a forerunner of a pervasive strand of modern Virgilian criticism which has obsessed over Virgil's political allegiances.

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