

The Poet at Work

Concepts of Authorship in the Ancient Reception of Virgil



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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how Virgil's readers imagined the authorial techniques and biographical persona of Virgil, the most canonical – yet extraordinarily elusive – Latin poet. While ancient biography is often dismissed as transparently fictional, this thesis makes a case for taking biographical reports of Virgil's authorial techniques seriously – if not as historical fact, then as sites where later readers creatively explored conceptions of authorship, negotiated literary practices, and constructed an author worthy of reading. These shifting portrayals of 'the poet at work' interact with interpretations of his works in complex and sophisticated ways. By re-evaluating them as fragmented traces of interpretation and creative engagement, we can not only reassess the reception of Virgil, but radically alter our understanding of ancient literary criticism too.

After an introduction outlining the theoretical and methodological premises of this study, the thesis falls into two halves. The first two chapters explore biographical accounts of Virgil's authorship which purport to be factual, focusing especially on scholarly texts such as commentaries, biographies, histories and miscellanies. Chapter 1 tackles anecdotes of Virgil's methods of composition and revision, tracing the uses later authors made of them and examining how they interact with Virgil's texts; I argue that they reflect a keenly observant reading of Virgil's own metapoetic modes of authorial self-fashioning. The second chapter shifts from the written to the oral, investigating reports of the performance and recitation of Virgil's works, particularly by the poet himself. The third, fourth and fifth chapters, by contrast, investigate explicitly fictional representations of Virgil: those in which he is openly represented as a character from his own works, by means of biographical allegory. This section focuses principally on poetic texts (Propertius, Calpurnius Siculus), and explores the pendulum-swing of attribution, as these poets attribute the allegorising move now to Virgil, now to their own creativity.

PREFACE

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration. It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or that is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted or is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution. I make minor references to work submitted for my MPhil degree (Faculty of Classics, University of Cambridge, 2013-14) on pages 4 and 12, and mark these references as such in the text of the dissertation.

The length of this dissertation is exactly 80000 words, the word limit required by the Degree Committee of the Faculty of Classics.

CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>page</i>	ii
<i>Abbreviations and short citations</i>		iv
<i>List of figures</i>		vi
Introduction		1
1 'Like a Beare': anecdotes of poetic composition and revision		23
2 Virgil's voice: song, recitation and performance		59
3 Reading Virgil's (self-) allegorising		101
4 'A taste for masks and mirrors': Propertius' Virgil		105
5 <i>sit Tityrus Orpheus</i> : Calpurnius Siculus' Virgil		129
Epilogue		149
<i>Texts and translations</i>		152
<i>Bibliography</i>		153

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Tight-lipped Virgil leaves us no prefaces; his influences, friends, patrons, favoured haunts and writing methods have to be gleaned from between the lines of his poems. But I claim the un-Virgilian luxury of a personal voice and autobiographical preface. And where Virgil occludes the collaborative processes that surely lay behind his solitary poetic voice, I count myself lucky to have so many friends, mentors and colleagues to thank. This thesis could not have been written without all those who have helped me every step of the way, from hoisting the initial struts of this thesis in place to licking it into real shape. I am very grateful to them all.

Not if I had a hundred tongues, a hundred mouths, a voice of iron, could I possibly recount all I owe to Emily Gowers, who supervised this thesis, or offer her adequate thanks. Emily remains the most exhilarating reader of Latin literature I've encountered; it has been a true privilege to have been taught by her since my time as an undergraduate. I thank her for her generosity with her time and conversation; for heroically reading multiple drafts of all my work (right up to the eleventh hour!), going far beyond the call of duty in the thoroughness of her comments; for always pushing me to say what I mean and say it well; and for spurring me on through four difficult years with patience, warmth and unfailing good humour. If my own writing comes near to acuity, originality or the expression of sheer literary pleasure, that is Emily's influence at work. She tells me I cite her too much; if I don't cite her even more, it's only because she is already written on every page of this thesis.

I have been so fortunate in the kindness of those who have read my work and given feedback. My examiners, Philip Hardie and Fiachra Mac Góráin, read this thesis with the kind of generosity, rigour and enthusiasm most doctoral students can only dream of. Ingo Gildenhard, my second supervisor, gamely tackled everything I sent him, returning it with characteristically perceptive and encouraging comments. I'm particularly grateful for his knack of throwing off casual remarks which, though I often only realise it later, fundamentally reshape the direction and scope of my work. Partial drafts of this thesis and related pieces were also read by Yelena Baraz, Tom Geue, Ana Maria Guay, Bob Kaster, Francesca Martelli, Sebastian Matzner, Candy Parfitt, Irene Peirano Garrison, Hannah Silverblank and Gail Trimble; my deepest thanks to them all for their careful reading, their invaluable suggestions and their excitement and belief in the project at times when my own confidence was waning. Conversations with Emma Greensmith, Rebecca Lämmle, Rebecca Lees, Tom Nelson, Carrie Vout, Tim Whitmarsh and Chris Whitton helped me to clarify and develop substantial elements of my research at just the right moments. And the eagle eyes of Rosalie Bower, Ian Kearey and Hanneke Salisbury (not to mention the ever-vigilant Emily Gowers) saved me from countless errors; any that remain are to be laid only at my door.

The graduate common room in the Faculty was, despite all physical appearances, a real *locus amoenus* both for sprawling high-powered academic conversations and for the solidarity and friendship that made it possible to survive the doctorate. I am grateful to my fellow students, particularly Graham Andrews, Olivia Elder, Tom Nelson, Valeria Pace, Hanneke Salisbury, Henry Tang and Christina Tsaknaki, who all filled the last four years with companionship, laughter, support and boundless intellectual thrill. Outside the Faculty, Mounia Abousaid, Ben Allport, Katie Burnham, Sarra Facey, Tom Foxall, Kay Gabriel, Ana Maria Guay, Jenny Harris, Joanna McCunn and Bronwyn Wallace taught me the meaning of academic community, intellectual brilliance and scholarly integrity. I've been trying to keep up with Clara Gleeson since our first Latin class together; she showed me what a classicist should be. Emma Greensmith and Rebecca Lees, my academic sisters and comrades-in-arms, are in a category of their own: neither I nor this thesis would be in much shape at all without them, and I owe them more than I can say.

Teaching has been a consistent delight throughout the last three years. My students have held me to the most stringent of standards and challenged me to develop precision of thought and clarity of expression. I've learned as much from them as they from me, and teaching them did much to shape and sharpen my research. I thank them too for their enthusiasm and forbearance when the more obscure topics of my thesis slipped inevitably into my supervisions.

Without the financial support offered by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, I would not have been able to undertake MPhil or PhD study in the first place. I'm also immensely grateful for the additional scholarships and grants I have received from the University of Cambridge, Clare College and the Faculty of Classics. Bursaries from the Roman Society and the Fondation Hardt allowed me to spend five productive weeks in the bucolic seclusion of the Fondation in Geneva; the AHRC's sponsorship also sent me to Princeton as a visiting scholar for six weeks, where I learned much from both the faculty members and the postgraduates of the Classics department. It was always a relief to come home to the Faculty, though, and its incredible library. A thousand heartfelt thanks to Lyn Bailey, Tony Brinkman, Stephen Howe, Carmen Preston, Lina Undicino and the rest of the administrative and library staff, for everything they do; no fledgling academics were ever nurtured better.

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This thesis is dedicated to the memories of four people who I wish could have seen it finally finished: Rachel and Cyril Zoob (z"l), my grandparents, and Mounia Abousaid and Negar Miralaei, my friends. I miss them dearly.

ABBREVIATIONS AND SHORT CITATIONS

Abbreviations of primary sources conform to those used in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, and abbreviations of journals to those in *L'Année Philologique*.

- BGM: A. Westermann (1845), *Biographoi vitarum scriptores Graeci minores*, Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert. (Reprinted 1964.)
- Courtney: E. Courtney (1993), *The Fragmentary Latin Poets*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Drachmann: A. B. Drachmann (1903), *Scholia vetera in Pindari carmina*, Leipzig: Teubner.
- EV: F. Della Corte (ed.) (1984-91), *Enciclopedia Virgiliana*, 5 vols., Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana.
- FGrHist: F. Jacoby (1923-58), *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, 13 vols., Berlin: Weidmann.
- Funaioli: G. Funaioli (1969), *Grammaticae Romanae fragmenta*, Stuttgart: Teubner.
- Helm: R. Helm (1898), *Fabii Planciadis Fulgentii V. C.: Opera*, Leipzig: Teubner. (Reprinted 1970.)
- Inwood: B. Inwood (1992), *The Poem of Empedocles*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- LIMC: *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* (1981-2009), 8 vols., Zürich: Artemis.
- Morel: W. Morel (1927), *Fragmenta poetarum Latinorum epicorum et lyricorum praeter Ennium et Lucilium*, Leipzig: Teubner. (Reprinted 1975.)
- OCD⁴: S. Hornblower, A. Spawforth, and E. Eidinow (edd.) (2012), *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 4th ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- OLD: P. G. W. Glare (ed.) (1982), *The Oxford Latin Dictionary*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Pfeiffer: R. Pfeiffer (1949), *Callimachus*, vol. 1, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- PIR²: E. Groag, L. Petersen, A. Stein and K. Wachtel (edd.) (1933-70), *Prosopographia Imperii Romani saec. I, II, III*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- PL: J.-P. Migne (1844-65), *Patrologia Latina*, Paris: Garnier.
- Radt: S. Radt (1977), *Tragicorum Graecorum fragmenta*, vol. 4 (Sophocles), Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht.

- Ribbeck: O. Ribbeck (1898), *Scaenicae Romanorum poesis fragmenta*, vol. 2: *Comicorum Latinorum praeter Plautum et Terentium*, 3rd ed., Leipzig: Teubner.
- Riese: F. Bücheler, A. Riese, E. Lommatzsch (1894-1926), *Anthologia Latina: siue poesis latinae supplementum*, Leipzig: Teubner.
- Skutsch: O. Skutsch (1985), *The Annals of Q. Ennius*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Vahlen: J. Vahlen (1928), *Ennianae poesis reliquiae*, 3rd ed. (1963), Leipzig: Teubner.
- VVA: G. Brugnoli and F. Stok (1997), *Vitae Vergilianae antiquae*, Rome: Tipys Officinae Polygraphicae.
- VE R. F. Thomas and J. M. Ziolkowski (2014), *The Virgil Encyclopedia*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Wendel: C. Wendel (1935), *Scholia in Apollonium Rhodium uetera*, Berlin: Weidmann. (Reprinted 1974.)

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page	Details and source
1	1	<i>Cod. Vat. Lat. 3225</i> ('Vatican Virgil'), fol. 7v. Image from Wright 1993:14.
2	3	<i>Cod. Vat. Lat. 3225</i> ('Vatican Virgil'), fol. 8v. Image from Wright 1993:16.
3	3	<i>Cod. Vat. Lat. 3867</i> ('Roman Virgil'), fol. 3v. Image from Wright 2001:16.

INTRODUCTION

One of the few surviving pages of the ‘Vatican Virgil’ codex – a luxurious manuscript of Virgil’s three works from around 400 CE, written in grand rustic capitals and magnificently illustrated throughout¹ – preserves an illustration immediately preceding Virgil’s description, in the fourth book of the *Georgics* (4.125-48), of the ‘old man of Tarentum’ and his little garden:

Image removed for copyright reasons. See ‘List of Figures’ above for bibliographical information.

Figure 1: *Cod. Vat. Lat.* 3225 (‘Vatican Virgil’), fol. 7v.

It shows the old man seated at the left of the picture, surrounded by blooming flowers, verdant meadows and trees laden with abundant fruit.² His pose reflects none of the hard toil that Virgil describes in subsequent lines (134-45), but emphasises instead his peaceful retirement (*regum aequabat opes animis*, ‘in happiness he equalled the wealth of kings’, 132). In a departure from Virgil’s description, this old man is not isolated in his Tarentine garden.³ Instead, he addresses

¹ *Cod. Vat. Lat.* 3225 (standard siglum F), our oldest extant Virgilian codex manuscript. Partial facsimile and discussion in Wright 1993 (from which the image reproduced here is taken); full facsimile online at https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.lat.3225. 75 folios survive of (probably) 440 originals, with 50 illustrations of (probably) 280 originals. Wright 1993 dates the manuscript to ‘within a couple of decades of the year 400’, though Cameron 2004 argues for substantially more doubt regarding date and place of production. It is certainly about a century earlier than the other ancient illustrated Virgilian manuscript, the ‘Roman Virgil’ (*Cod. Vat. Lat.* 3867); cf. Wright 2001 (again with Cameron 2004).

² On the old man, see (e.g.) Perkell 1981, Gowers 2000:131-2, Nappa 2005:171-7, with further bibliography.

³ Cf. Nappa 2005:175 on the old man’s isolation in contrast to the bees’ communal activities.

two rustic figures, whose posture shows their eager attentiveness to his words: they face him, their right hands held open at hip-height in the standard iconographic gesture of listening.⁴ The old man, in turn, holds up his hand with two fingers and a thumb extended, the oratorical gesture used throughout the manuscript to indicate which figures in an illustration are speaking.⁵ The old man's status here as a speaker perhaps picks up on clues already in the poem. Virgil's description of the *senex* seems to paint him as a peculiarly Virgil-like figure: he claims primacy (*primus*, 134, 140), plants trees in stichic rows (*in uersum distulit*, 144) and provides closural *umbrae* (146).⁶ For this illustrator, the old man's prowess in gardening demands an audience: he takes over the poet's role as didactic speaker, passing on his practical wisdom to the farmers who visit him.⁷

But the old man of the illustration does not *entirely* usurp Virgil's poetic role. At the far right stands another figure, facing the old man but slightly removed from the scene of instruction, and towering over the rustic audience members in height. Two other illustrations in this manuscript include similar witnesses to the depicted narrative scenes: on fol. 6r a man leans back on his staff, watching another man watering his flocks (*G.* 3.322-7), and on fol. 8v, in a scene illustrating the simile of the Cyclopes' forge (*G.* 4.170-4), a man crouches behind the Cyclopes' cave and peers round towards their anvil (figure 2 below). David Wright argues convincingly that these three figures are to be taken as author-portraits: that is, they depict the poet, Virgil himself.⁸ The illustrator has taken the narrator of the *Georgics* at his word and preserved his eyewitness authority: in each of the three illustrations, he shows Virgil as a witness to the events that he claims to have seen, assimilating him into the agricultural world of the poem as a farmer or countryside-dweller.

⁴ The gesture is conventional throughout the illustrations: cf., e.g., fol. 45v, where Aeneas and Achates perform the same gesture while listening to the Sibyl (*Aen.* 6.45-50).

⁵ Corbeill 2004:50-1: the gesture is used throughout the 'Vatican Virgil' (compare, for example, Latinus and Ilioneus in conversation at fol. 60v, illustrating *Aen.* 7.195-200). Corbeill 2004:51 n.39 collects bibliography on this oratorical gesture in ancient vases, sarcophagi, paintings and mosaics.

⁶ These details are from Gowers 2000:131-2; cf. Perkell 1981. *umbras* (146) shapes the digression as effectively a Virgilian poem in miniature: compare *umbrae* as a closural motif at *Ecl.* 1.83, 10.75-6, and *Aen.* 12.952.

⁷ Perhaps assimilating the sympotic visitors of *G.* 4.146 to the rest of the passage, as if they come not only to drink but to be instructed – or taking up Virgil's hint that others should be the ones to discuss gardening instead of him: *haec... praetero atque memoranda relinquo* (*G.* 4.147-8; cf. Gowers 2000 on Columella's efforts to take up Virgil's poetic wheelbarrow).

⁸ Wright 1993:12-17, 102. Add too fol. 1r, a schematised table of illustrations for *G.* 3.1-15; this page is severely damaged, but the top-right panel seems to show Virgil addressing a throned figure, illustrating his address to Apollo (or, perhaps, Augustus).

Image removed for copyright reasons. See 'List of Figures' above for bibliographical information.

Figure 2: *Cod. Vat. Lat. 3225* ('Vatican Virgil'), fol. 8v.

Image removed for copyright reasons. See 'List of Figures' above for bibliographical information.

Figure 3: *Cod. Vat. Lat. 3867* ('Roman Virgil'), fol. 3v.

Virgil's garden digression in Book 4 contains one of his strongest statements of personal experience in his works, *memini me... uidisse* ('I remember I saw...', *G.* 4.124-6);⁹ it makes a particularly suitable scene for the inclusion of Virgil as a diegetic character. His avatar's distance from the illustrated scene as an observer rather than a participant, too, illustrates the narrator's regret that he is 'shut out' (*exclusus*, 147), unable to dwell on (or in) the old man's horticultural idyll (147-8):¹⁰

uerum haec ipse equidem spatiis exclusus iniquis
praetereo atque aliis post me memoranda relinquo.

I myself, for my part, must pass this topic by, shut out by space and time's unfair constraints, and leave it for others after me to record.

But the avatar's quasi-exclusion also reflects another facet of his authorial status. This author-portrait differs from the other two witness-figures in the 'Vatican Virgil' (foll. 6r and 8v) in that 'Virgil' is not wholly incorporated into the scene of the narrative, but rather retains an explicitly narratorial function. Note that the figure on the right holds his hand in exactly the same way as the old man on the left, the conventional pose for the speaker(s) in a scene. Unlike other scenes of dialogue in this manuscript's illustrations, though, no conversation takes place in this part of the *Georgics*, and certainly not between Virgil and the *senex*. Instead, this author-portrait seems to show Virgil in the act of *narrating* the *Georgics*, while that same narrative takes place around him – an almost postmodern slip between diegetic levels. His hand gesture both indicates his status as narrator and visually points us towards the scene of the *Georgics* passage, demarcating it as the topic he here narrates. The figure is neither assimilated wholly into the georgic scene nor kept entirely distant from it, as he is in the author-portraits found in the other ancient illustrated manuscript of Virgil's works, the 'Roman Virgil' (figure 3 above).¹¹ This, by contrast, is no less than the authorial voice made manifest.

⁹ First-person singular use of *uideo* only at *G.* 1.193/197, 1.318 and here (second-person, and first-person plural, are more frequent). When Virgil re-uses the second of these passages, the apocalyptic description of the Eridanus in flood, in Aeneas' narration of the fall of Troy (*Aen.* 2.498-9 ~ *G.* 1.482-3, picking up on the similar scene at *G.* 1.324-6), the narrator recapitulates the assertion of eyewitness authority: *uidi ipse* (*Aen.* 2.499). I investigated Virgil's self-quotations in a 2013 MPhil essay, arguing that they both help to construct Virgil's authorial persona and are part of a larger project of authorial elusiveness within Virgil's works.

¹⁰ Cf. Gowers 2000:129 and Nappa 2005:175 on the poet's exclusion.

¹¹ The 'Roman Virgil' manuscript (*Cod. Vat. Lat.* 3867; standard siglum R) is a few decades younger than the 'Vatican Virgil' (cf. Wright 2001); it can be viewed at https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.lat.3867. It has three author-portraits at foll. 3v, 9r and 14r, all of which repeat the same formulaic image of a man holding a furred papyrus roll, seated between a box (presumably containing his works) and a lectern. The images depict a generic Roman author, with little to mark them out as uniquely Virgilian, but their placement perhaps reflects some degree of interest in Virgil's authorial voice: they fall in the texts of *Ecl.* 2, 4 and 6, all of which have a strong first-person voice and were associated with Virgil himself in antiquity. Fol. 3v, figure 3 above, is captioned *POETA CORYDON*, blurring the distinction between Virgil (*poeta*) and Corydon, the fictional narrator of *Ecl.* 2.

Imagining the poet at work

How does the way we think about authors alter the way we read their works? Conversely, how do poetic texts invite us to imagine an author-figure, and to invest their biographical existence with literary significance? And why does it matter who the author of a particular work is in the first place? These are questions of deep importance for literary studies. The relationships between author, text and audience lie at the heart of literary and critical endeavour; the interplay between fact and fiction, reality and imagination, is fundamental both to poetry and to our responses to it. And if we can learn anything from the ‘Vatican Virgil’s illustrations of the poet – half-erased, mysterious and partial as they may be – it is that the ancient world’s answers to these questions are rarely simple, and rarely aligned neatly with our own.

This thesis confronts issues of authorial representation head-on. Turning now from artistic to literary reception, it finds that Virgil’s ancient readers approached his poetry with exuberant creativity, and that the textual artefacts they themselves produced combine sophisticated systems of literary interpretation with a real sense of imaginative play. I seek in particular to demonstrate that a fundamental sense of Virgil as an author, present and actively creating, lies at the heart of ancient responses to his work. To read Virgil’s poetry, according to these literary cultures, is to encounter the author himself; to speak of Virgil’s life is to discuss his literary works. In the following chapters, I will make the case that the way these readers represented Virgil in his role as author – as a ‘poet at work’ – are worth taking seriously: if not as direct portals to discovering the truth of Virgil’s historical existence, then as both literary interpretation and literature in their own right. My special interest is in re-examining how biographical modes of reading rest not only on techniques of biographical allegory – that is, interpreting aspects of the literary text as if they pertained directly to the author’s life and times – but on metapoetics too. Ancient audiences, I will argue, consistently read elements of Virgil’s poems metapoetically, as coded comments on their own creation. The biographical accounts of Virgil’s poetic processes appropriate the same metaphorical vocabulary of literary criticism that they find in the Virgilian texts, inviting their readers to set Virgil’s life alongside his poetry and to let new meaning arise from that juxtaposition.¹²

¹² My formulation here is indebted to Henkel 2014, which argues for a similar process in Virgil’s own literalisation of the metaphorical language of literary criticism in his *Eclogues* and *Georgics*.

Author, text, reader: approaches to ancient biography

‘If we turn out to know next to nothing of Virgil’s “life and times”, that matters little if at all to our understanding of the poetry.’

(Nicholas Horsfall)¹³

“I want to know how Ferrante’s house is decorated. What does she wear when she writes?”

(Kat Stoeffel)¹⁴

Modern scholarship has long been squeamish about the importance of an author’s biographical existence – the course of their life, their personality and opinions, their social-historical context – for the analysis of their works. A distinctive hallmark of academic literary criticism of the last century or so has been a wholesale shift away from interpretative constraints based on authorial identity. The pitfalls and deficiencies of biographical criticism and authorial intentionality, so vociferously articulated by the New Critics (among others), are indeed hard to deny. It is clearly naïve to expect every perceivable element of a text to offer simple insight into the mind or life of its author, as if characters and narratorial *personae* could have no perspective distinct to their author’s, or as if sheer fantastical invention had no part to play in literature.¹⁵ Similarly, it is untenable to decree that the only legitimate meaning of a text is that which its author put there directly and deliberately, and that this authorial intention can be discerned not only from (what we know of) the author’s life and other works but, by a circular process of deduction, from the very piece of literature under discussion. Armed with a structuralist and post-structuralist array of critical tools, scholarly attention has instead turned to other models: reception theorists assign more power to the audience, deconstructionists home in on the text to the exclusion of its author. ‘Poems, understanding of, not dependent on outside information’ became the order of the day (as one index entry in Eduard Fraenkel’s *Horace* reads),¹⁶ and author-biographies were largely relegated from the sphere of literary criticism to historical or cultural studies. Having killed off the author and stemmed the flow of his influence, modern critics find themselves free to forge new, radically decentralised hermeneutic pathways.¹⁷

¹³ Horsfall 1995b:1.

¹⁴ Stoeffel 2014, two years before the apparent unveiling of Elena Ferrante’s true identity in October 2016 (Gatti 2016).

¹⁵ An interpretative strategy violently rejected, for example, by Catullus (16.3-4).

¹⁶ Fraenkel 1957:458.

¹⁷ This section skims rapidly over an enormous and ever-growing body of theoretical and methodological thinking. Among Classical takes on this nexus of literary theory, Martindale 1993, Hinds 1998 and Oliensis 2009 remain clear expositions of the problems under discussion. The theoretical discussions of Butler 2002 and 2011, Gurd 2005 and 2012, Peirano 2012a, 2012b and 2013 and Martelli 2013 are particularly influential on my approach; Fletcher and Hanink 2016, De Temmerman and Demoen 2016 (especially the chapters by De Temmerman and Laird) and Powell and Hardie 2017 (especially the chapters by Peirano and Powell) contextualise the problem in the field of ancient biography.

Every narrative of progress inevitably sets up the idea of a previous state of unenlightenment. For many classicists, this is to be found not just in their immediate predecessors' work, but even in antiquity itself. Alongside the methodological shift away from reliance on authors' intentions, a major scholarly project of reassessing ancient author biographies – and finding them wanting – has gathered momentum in the last half-century.¹⁸ The work of Janet Fairweather and (most prominently) Mary Lefkowitz made a decisive intervention in the study of ancient biographies of Greek poets and dramatists, seeking to establish the historical unreliability of almost every detail contained within them.¹⁹ Ancient biographies, they argued, fall short of factual accuracy in four main ways. First, their reports of their subjects' lives are often self-contradictory or historically impossible. (A Latin example: the *Vita Terenti* reports that Terence was invited to read his first play, the *Andria*, to the dramatist Caecilius, when Caecilius had in fact died two years before the *Andria* had its debut performance.)²⁰ Second, nearly all details lack any sort of corroborating evidence, whether external and extant (Lefkowitz's gold standard is 'a contemporary independent source', such as an inscription)²¹ or simply gestured to within the text (among ancient biographers, Suetonius is unusually scrupulous in his use of documentary archives, and in recording written sources or chains of oral transmission: e.g. *Nisus grammaticus audisse se a senioribus aiebat...*, *Vita Suetonii-Donati* [VSD] 42).²² Third, many elements turn out to be conventional biographical building-blocks, stodgily repetitive in their use within and across different poet-biographies: a suspicious number of authors seem to have suffered sore throats, to have been fed honey by bees in their infancy, to have dodged falling trees, to have been buried far from their homelands.²³ Indeed, at a more fundamental level, even the shaping of the poets' lives into the form of 'biography' involves the distorting imposition of standard narrative order: the ancient supposition was that 'poets... should have lives like heroes', Lefkowitz argues, and the narrative structure of biography was just as formulaic as myth or epic, or even more.²⁴ And fourth and finally, ancient author-biographies derived their information about their subjects from those poets' own works: not just using the first-person statements in the voice of the poet, but indiscriminately, apparently without consideration for genre, character, or basic

¹⁸ This is familiar ground to tread; cf. the accounts of (e.g.) De Temmerman 2016, Peirano 2017, Powell 2017.

¹⁹ Fairweather 1974 and 1983, Lefkowitz 1981; cf. Horsfall 1995b. Lefkowitz 1981:viii: 'I hope to show that virtually all the material in all the lives is fiction'.

²⁰ *Vit. Ter.* 2; cf. Gowers 2004:150.

²¹ Lefkowitz 1981:vii. Very few sources of this kind survive for Virgil: the discovery that the papyrus fragment of Philodemus in P. Herc. Paris 2 (cf. Gigante and Capasso 1989) corroborates Horace's frequent grouping of Virgil, Tucca, Varus and Varius Rufus (e.g. *Sat.* 1.6.40, 54-5, 1.10.80) is a rare example.

²² VSD = *Vita Suetonii-Donati*, our main biographical source, discussed at further length below (20-1).

²³ Voices: Lefkowitz 1981:78, Fairweather 1983:325. Bees: Lefkowitz 1981:9 n.35, 59 n.12. Trees: Peirano 2017:2. Burials: Lefkowitz 1981:55.

²⁴ Lefkowitz 1981:ix.

plausibility.²⁵ Thus, for instance, Virgil's representation of rustic characters mourning the loss of their farms in the land confiscations provides the most enduring element of his ancient biography, that he too suffered the same fate and, like Tityrus, had it restored to him by the benevolence of a godlike politician-patron.²⁶ Lefkowitz gives many more illustrations: Homer's reported blindness, for example, is that of his character, the bard Demodocus.²⁷ The nature of Euripides' death – the 'woman-hater' dismembered by a pack of hunting hounds descended from a bitch whose death he himself had sanctioned (*Vit. Eur.* 50) – bears a strong resemblance to the death of his misogynistic character Pentheus in the *Bacchae*, dismembered by a pack of women led by his own mother.²⁸

The task of tackling the historical reliability of the Virgilian biographical tradition was taken up with particular gusto by Nicholas Horsfall, who set out to demolish any lingering belief in the value of the *VSD* and other ancient *Vitae* as evidence for Virgil's life, family, personality, poetic activities and death.²⁹ Barely a single detail of the *VSD*, beyond the dates of Virgil's birth and death, emerges from his analysis unscathed: in his eyes, 'the *VSD* [is] a mere congeries of inventions, fictions and embroideries, sprinkled with stray citations from documents (not necessarily false) and occasional, almost embarrassing facts, each requiring justification and explanation for its almost freakish survival.'³⁰ Horsfall's stringent criteria for reliability, or even plausibility, resemble Lefkowitz's; he adds, too, a perceived tendency on the part of biographers' towards unsupported fancy or whimsy, and his stance is to assume falsification unless there is copious evidence to the contrary. For Horsfall, like Lefkowitz before him,³¹ the fourth category listed above is by far the most damning: any resemblance, however slight, between a biography and Virgil's works is to be taken as a sign that the former is allegorising the latter to manufacture its biographical narrative, and it should therefore be discarded entirely. The picture of the Virgilian biographical tradition – and of ancient literary culture and scholarship – that arises from Horsfall's analysis is remarkably credulous, naïve, critically clumsy and entirely lacking in self-awareness: in his words, 'but a step from

²⁵ Lefkowitz 1981:67 notes that tragic poets' biographies are most dependent on this type of reading, since in the absence of first-person narration attributable to the author's own voice (unlike in Comedy), the plays themselves are the sources.

²⁶ *Passim* in the biographical tradition, but cf. esp. Martial 8.55.8-10, *VSD* 60-3, Servius *ad Buc.* 1.

²⁷ Graziosi 2002:238 is stringently critical of Lefkowitz' lack of literary curiosity on this detail; she instead offers substantial discussion of Homeric blindness (125-63).

²⁸ Lefkowitz 1981:90.

²⁹ Horsfall 1995b. This chapter was not the first modern re-evaluation of the Virgilian biographical tradition – Horsfall begins by citing a 'dismaying bibliography' on the question from the 1930s onwards (1995b:1 n.3) – but it is certainly the most vehement. I will assume familiarity with Horsfall's analysis throughout this thesis.

³⁰ Horsfall 2006:xxii-iii. As Powell 2017:174-6 notes, even though 'chronology is an unusually vulnerable aspect of memory' (175) and numbers are prone to distortion in transmission, Horsfall gives no reasoning for classing Virgil's dates of birth and death in the *VSD* as 'facts', instead simply assuming a position of aggrieved common sense.

³¹ Lefkowitz 1981:92: only biographical reports with *no* perceptible connection to the subject's own writings can be free of suspicion, and therefore possibly hold 'historical significance'.

unabashed fantasy’, or ‘guilty of simple stupidity’.³² The ancients, according to Horsfall, may have believed this nonsense, but we certainly should not.

There are certainly merits to this reassessment of ancient author-biographies: it was high time for cobwebs to be swept away and shaky foundations re-examined. Subsequent scholarship, though, has pushed back at this strict approach and severe scepticism.³³ For one thing, it is not at all clear that the biographies do in fact fall quite so short of feasibility. According to certain recent studies, Horsfall’s revisionary zeal may have wrongly ejected at least a few elements of the Virgilian biographical tradition from the domain of historical truth.³⁴ For another, even if every word of ancient author-biographies were completely false, to simply banish them altogether – and condemn their authors as liars and their readers as fools, in contrast with modern-day enlightenment – is to ignore in its entirety a fundamental part both of those authors’ reception and of ancient literary culture. Neither Lefkowitz nor Horsfall is particularly interested in *why* the biographies took the forms they did, or what they can tell us about how these poets’ earliest readers engaged with their poetry, or the extent to which they were ever taken as gospel truth about authors’ lives; their inquiries, for the most part, stop and start with questions of historical accuracy.³⁵ But these questions open up rich seams of interpretative possibilities. The very existence of these strains of biographical tradition demonstrates how closely authors and their texts were bound together in antiquity; the ease with which readers slip between analysing poetry and discussing its author’s life is testament to the strong gravitational pull exerted by the *idea* of an author, generated partly in the text and partly in its readers’ imaginations.³⁶

Approaching authors’ biographies from this angle allows us to move away from positivistic attitudes to historical ‘truth’. If our focus is on literary reception and reading culture, rather than on Virgil’s historical existence, it is almost irrelevant whether Virgil actually grew up in Cremona (*VSD* 6), or preferred boys to women (11), or wrote juvenilia (17), or died mid-way through writing his epic (35-42). What matters is that later generations apparently *thought* that he did, and chose to repeat and transmit these factoids as important elements of his authorial identity. We are dealing here with representations of Virgil, not Virgil himself. So, for example,

³² Horsfall 1995b:19, 20.

³³ In particular Graziosi 2002 and 2009, Peirano 2012, De Temmerman and Demoen 2016, Powell and Hardie 2017.

³⁴ See Smolenaars 2017 and Powell 2017 in particular, both bravura revisions of Horsfall’s approach which persuade more in theoretical argument than in practical application to case studies.

³⁵ Graziosi 2002:17 notes that Lefkowitz 1981 is largely uninterested in theorising (or reformulating) biographical modes of interpretation. Indeed, ‘the only reason why [she does] not use Homer’s biography in order to interpret the poems is that [she does] not believe it is true’. The same goes for Horsfall: note, e.g., his confident language of authorial intentionality (Virgil’s representation of patronage in the *Georgics* is ‘remarkably, and one supposes deliberately, impalpable’, 1995b:4).

³⁶ This is a Foucauldian formulation (1977): the idea of the ‘author-function’, the collection of textual traits that give rise, in the reader’s mind, to a hypothetical figure that controls and produces meaning, which is in turn assimilated to the biographical author. I shall return to this throughout this thesis; cf., too, Peirano 2012:11 and 2017:1, Martelli 2013:146.

the report of the main Virgilian biography (the *Vita Suetonii-Donati*, or *VSD*) that Virgil composed parts of the *Aeneid* at public recitations by means of *ex tempore* improvisation (*VSD* 34) does not constitute proof that Virgil habitually recited his unfinished poems, that he recited parts not yet completed, that he was capable of *ex tempore* composition, or that the two lines in question (*Aen.* 6.164-5) were ever left as hemistichs in a draft of the poem.³⁷ Instead, this narrative of authorial process serves a discursive function in the text in which it is found, and in its sociocultural context. This anecdote is of far more use to us in exploring the perceived social role of literature in the early empire from the perspective of later readers, changing attitudes to literary ‘genius’ and the effect of the *Aeneid*’s supposedly unfinished nature on its textual, literary, and cultural reception, than in uncovering some form of accurate historical knowledge about how Virgil actually composed and circulated the *Aeneid*.

This approach also offers a way to redeem Virgil’s readers from Horsfall’s charges of gullibility, lack of nuance, mendacity or outright ‘stupidity’ – a strikingly reductive assessment, given what we know of the sophistication, complexity and subtlety of other genres of ancient Virgilian reception. Considering author-biographies not as faulty transmissions of what ought to have been reliable historical insight, but rather as artefacts of a different time’s literary culture and as pieces of poetic reception in their own right, complete with their own generic conventions and readers’ expectations, allows us to view them with a productive sense of alterity: their aims are not those of modern biography, nor are their methods. This thesis argues that the question of biographical ‘truth’ is not confined to individual elements of each biography, but extends to the genre itself. To what extent did the writers and readers of the *Vitae* expect them to be truthful in the first place? Was the process of biographical allegory (that is, reading elements of poets’ works as if they were direct reflections of their lives) invisible to those readers, so that they took the resulting biographies as factual reports – or were the similarities between the biographical anecdotes and elements of the poems just as apparent to ancient readers as to modern scholars? And if the biographies are not wholly for the purpose of giving a truthful account of their subjects’ lives, what *are* they for?

To be sure, different kinds of biographical writing, and different individual biographies, make claims of objectivity and precision to varying degrees. The *VSD* is particularly scrupulous: it frequently flags certain points of detail as more or less reliable than others, attributes the more fantastical elements of Virgil’s *Life* to hearsay and legend (e.g. *ferunt*, *VSD* 4), and makes a performance of scholarly hesitance or doubt – what Anton Powell nicely calls ‘the precision of imprecision’.³⁸ But just as much as this rhetorical style shores up the scholarly

³⁷ Chapter 2 further explores such reports of Virgil’s recitations.

³⁸ Powell 2017:180-1. Powell’s example here is the *VSD*’s assessment of Virgil’s wealth, *possedit prope centies sestertium ex liberalitatibus amicorum* (*VSD* 13): *prope* ‘may equally hint at imprecise information scrupulously acknowledged or at exact figures known to the author but here rounded’. The *VSD*’s imprecision hints at its author’s honesty and meticulous methodology. See too the references to authenticity debates regarding the *Aetna*

authority of the biographer and asserts the existence of recoverable biographical *facts*, it also invites its audience to participate in the process of evaluating competing narratives, sifting through evidence, negotiating importance. Rather than presenting its account as top-down certainty, it lets its readers in on the game. What's more, it repeatedly nudges us to look to Virgil's poetry itself when we need validation (or otherwise) of the truth of its account. We are told that Virgil wrote the *Eclogues* – but, if there is doubt about that, to find confirmation of it at the end of the *Georgics* (*VSD* 48). The proof of Virgil's refusal of Augustus' gifts (*VSD* 12), the reader infers, is in his poetic *recusationes* of Augustan encomium (*G.* 3.1-39, 4.559-64). In choosing between three varying accounts of Virgil's reasons for writing the *Eclogues* at *VSD* 58-63, we are nudged towards favouring the final explanation, which follows the familiar narrative contours of land confiscation and poetic persuasion from *Ecl.* 1 and 9 (58-60: *aut enim... aut... an ideo potius...*). When push comes to shove, the substance of Virgil's life is ultimately to be found by reading his poetry, not in external documentation, orally-transmitted hearsay or contemporary accounts. For all that the biographies claim to offer us a truthful view of Virgil, they in fact allow us access to a *different kind of truth*: that is, a reading of Virgil's poetry, literary criticism disguised as life-history. In a sense, we are encouraged to read them as if they were poetry, especially in terms of their inter- (or intra-?) textual relationship with the master-text of Virgil's own works.³⁹

The elusive author: hunting for Virgil

The ancient reception of Virgil is extraordinarily fertile terrain in which to plant the seeds of these inquiries. Virgil occupies a unique position in the ancient Roman imagination, perhaps only paralleled in English culture by Shakespeare (and then only partially). As with the Homeric texts, it is difficult to overestimate the importance of Virgil's poetry for later Greek and Roman culture and literature. It was taught in schools, used as an educational tool and reference point from basic alphabetical instruction to the giddy heights of poetry, grammar and rhetoric; it provided a foundational national myth for the emerging Roman empire; it set the tone and pace for subsequent literature in all forms and genres; it stretched its tendrils of influence into all spheres of cultural, political and social life.⁴⁰ But where Homer himself still remained an

(19) and *Eclogues* (48), which give the reader an overall impression of reason and consideration on the part of the *VSD*'s author – a performance of scholarly scruple (cf. Peirano 2012a:65-7 on a similar dynamic in Statius's discussion of the *Culex* at *Silv.* 1 *praef.*).

³⁹ For other recent accounts of 'fiction' versus 'fact' in ancient biography – and ways of moving beyond this stale dichotomy – see especially De Temmerman 2016, Laird 2016, Peirano 2012a (esp. 29-31), 2012b and 2017. I follow Laird and Peirano especially in viewing biography as a form of literary criticism.

⁴⁰ See, e.g., Ziolkowski and Putnam 2008, and multiple entries in *EV* and *VE*.

ungraspable, semi-mythical figure for ancient readers, whose reality was occluded by centuries of quasi-anonymity,⁴¹ Virgil ought to have been a tantalisingly solid historical presence. He wrote in a clearly defined and extraordinarily well-evidenced historical epoch; he named himself within his poetry (*Vergilium me*, *G.* 4.563),⁴² he was mentioned by his contemporaries⁴³ and mentioned them in turn.⁴⁴ Archival and institutional mechanisms swung into action during his lifetime and immediately after his death to preserve his poems and attest to his existence: his letters and papers were preserved in imperial archives and libraries, his poems copied on a vast scale. In terms of abundance of material, it is hard to think of a better case study than the Virgilian reception: no other author in antiquity is the subject of more biographical writing, more intense scholarly scrutiny or more quotation, excerption, allusion or reference on the part of his readers.

Nonetheless, Virgil himself remains a shadowy presence, seen only dimly on the sidelines of his own poetry.⁴⁵ Unlike the effusively autobiographical Catullus, Horace, Propertius or Ovid,⁴⁶ Virgil mostly avoids first-person voice. When he does use it, he slips immediately into explicitly fictionalised scenarios (*Ecl.* 2, 6; *G.* 4.599-66),⁴⁷ or resorts to the impersonal conventions of didactic and epic genre; most often, explicit authorial statements rely on metaphorical discourse, or are displaced onto internal characters in his poetry. Virgil's poems repeatedly challenge assumptions about any straightforward coincidence of *persona* and

⁴¹ The 'Homeric Question', more familiar in modern scholarship, was lively – self-consciously so – throughout antiquity; cf. Graziosi 2002, Peirano 2013. Mentions of Homer as a historical figure frequently parody scenes of scholastic inquiry (note especially in novels: *Luc. Ver. Hist.* 2.20, Heliod. *Aeth.* 3.14.2–4).

⁴² This moment of self-naming is well placed: it authenticates as Virgilian but the *Eclogues* and *Aeneid* too, by means of self-quotation (*Tityre, tu/te patulae... sub tegmine fagi*, *Ecl.* 1.1 ~ *G.* 4.566) and theme (*Caesar... uictor*, *G.* 4.560-1). The *VSD* already recognises this authenticating role of the *sphragis*: *ipse poeta, tamquam hoc metuens, principium huius operis et in alio carmine suum esse testatus sit* (*VSD* 48). Other, more dubious signatures have also been suggested: acrostic *Ma(ro)-Ve(rgilius)-Pu(blius)* at *G.* 1.429-33 (Brown 1963:96-114, with Haslan 1992, Feeney and Nelis 2005 and Somerville 2010), boustrophedon acrostic *A STILO M(aronis) V(ergili)* at *Aen.* 1.1-4 (Castelletti 2012), initialism *M(aro)-Ver(gilius)-P(ublius)* at *G.* 2.475 (Katz 2016).

⁴³ *Hor. Sat.* 1.5.40, 1.6.55, 1.10.45, 81, *Carm.* 1.3.6, 1.24.10; *Prop.* 2.34.63-80; Domitius Marsus fr. 7 Courtney, Philodemus in *P. Herc.* Paris 2.

⁴⁴ E.g. Gallus (*Ecl.* 6, 10), Maecenas (*G.* 1.2, 2.41, 3.41, 4.2), Pollio (*Ecl.* 34-8, 4.12), Cinna (*Ecl.* 9.35), Varius (*Ecl.* 6.7-12, 9.26-35), Augustus (*G.* 1.18-25, 3.16-39, 4.559-62, *Aen.* 1.286-96, 6.788-807, 8.678-728). The pseudo-Virgilian poems in the *Catalepton* mimic this element of Virgil's poetry, extending it to figures such as Tuca and Varius who are of such great importance in the biographical tradition, if not in Virgil's own poetry (*VSD* 39, *Catal.* 1, 7).

⁴⁵ This paragraph and the next are more fully developed in my MPhil essay, 'Self-Quotation in Virgil' (2013), in which I argue that Virgil's self-quotations – a characteristic technique of his – play into this larger project of authorial elusiveness, repeatedly tantalising us with promises of self-revelation only to recede from sight each time.

⁴⁶ By this I mean that these poets gesture towards possible, often clearly fictional autobiographies and encourage autobiographical modes of interpretation, not that their poetry offers real insight to the events of their life. Cf., e.g., Gowers 2003 on Horace's similar wavering between self-revelation and self-concealment in the *Satires*; Graziosi 2009 on how he uses the tropes and commonplaces of Greek poet-biographies in creating his own poetic autobiography. The essays in Hardie and Moore 2010 explore this self-reflexive aspect of ancient literary career-fashioning in more detail.

⁴⁷ Cf., e.g., Thomas 1986.

extratextual author; throughout his works, a fascination with anonymity and a distaste for the limelight coexist with grandiose proclamations of poetic power.

Ancient biography abhors a vacuum; anecdotes, speculation and whole life-stories rush in to fill the gap.⁴⁸ Virgil's authorial reticence seems to have goaded his readers into imaginative response: the proliferation of biographical material so soon after Virgil's death makes up for the absence of it within his poetry.⁴⁹ (By contrast, the *Vita Horati* attributed to Suetonius struggles to say much that is not already found within Horace's own poems, and it supports its points with methodical quotations to a degree not found in the Virgilian *Vitae*.)⁵⁰ Indeed, certain elements of the biographies seem to dramatise Virgil's authorial reserve itself. The *VSD* depicts him as a crowd-shy, fan-phobic author, so protective of his own privacy that he would turn tail and flee at the merest sight of his reading public,⁵¹ and his *uerecundia* and *probitas* are tenacious features of his characterisation in the *Vitae* and elsewhere.⁵² And the lurid stories of Virgil's untimely death (*VSD* 37-42) both stage authorial absence in its ultimate form and, in a self-reflexive move, address fundamental problems of reception. As we shall see in Chapter 1, this anecdote – especially Tucca and Varius' reported editing of the *Aeneid*, at Augustus' behest – both foregrounds Virgil's intentions (we are told what Virgil wanted for his poem) and utterly discounts them (to read the *Aeneid* is already to go against Virgil's wishes): a strange paradox, but one which gives Virgil's readers free rein for imaginative responses to his poetry and life.

Was this all deliberate, on Virgil's part? Was the prophet of *Ecl.* 4, the omniscient *uates* of Rome's past and future in the *Aeneid*, so clear-sighted about his reception – and even his own death – that he was able to nudge and guide it pre-emptively to suit his fancy? The language of authorial intention inevitably creeps back in – but despite scholarly qualms, there does seem to be a certain level of knowing self-awareness to Virgil's playful avoidance of self-exposure within his works. Joseph Farrell has recently argued that the *Eclogues* respond not only to Theocritus' *Idylls* but to the burgeoning commentary-industry on the *Idylls* that emerged during Virgil's lifetime: Virgil nods to Theocritean controversies and variant readings, casting himself as a diligent student of the *Idylls*, but also sets up, within the *Eclogues*, the same kinds of knotty

⁴⁸ On ancient creativity and literary gap-filling, cf. especially Peirano 2012a:10: 'Creative supplements... treat authors and their lives as textual entities whose gaps can be productively filled with new texts.' (N. 34 on the same page summarises earlier scholarship.)

⁴⁹ Graziosi 2016 reflects eloquently on the ways authorial absence, in this case of the pseudonymous author Elena Ferrante, can prompt more fervid imaginatory engagement on the part of readers. (See the Epilogue for further discussion.)

⁵⁰ The elements independent of Horace's own self-presentation are all either exaggerations or reversals of elements of his poetic persona.

⁵¹ *VSD* 11: *si quando Romae, quo rarissime commeabat, uiseretur in publico, sectantes demonstrantesque se suffugere[t] in proximum textum*. The biography traces his shyness to earliest infancy: he was born *adeo miti uultu* (*VSD* 4). Cf. Tac. *Dial.* 13.1-2 on Virgilian retreat from public life. On Virgil's shyness: Peirano 2012a:96-7, Laird 2009:1-2.

⁵² *VSD* 11; cf. Plin. *HN* 7.114, Serv. *ad Aen. praef.*, Macr. *Sat.* 1.16.44, *VSD* 39.

interpretative problems that are catnip to scholars and commentators.⁵³ John Henkel, too, has noted how Virgil's bucolic and georgic language systematically literalises the metaphorical discourse of literary criticism current at the time (*liber* 'bark' and *libri* 'books'; *silua* 'wood' and 'raw material'; *caudex* 'trunk' and *codex* 'writing tablets, book'; *planta* 'plants' or '[sole of] the foot' and *pes*, '[metrical] foot'), all but inviting his own readers to re-invest his other narratives and descriptions with allegorical or metapoetic meaning and apply them back to his own biography.⁵⁴ The question of whether Virgil's early readers recognised these tactics in his works and attributed their allegorising methodologies to Virgil's intentions, or whether they claimed them for their own creativity, is one to which I will return, particularly in the second half of this thesis (Chapters 3, 4 and 5).

Works in progress: Virgil mid-creation

Most of the Virgilian biographies follow the pattern established in the ancient authorial *Vita*-tradition. Like other accounts of Greek and Roman poets, they outline Virgil's birth, parentage, career, acquaintances, interactions with major political and social events of the day, reported miracles and death. So far, so conventional; but where they differ from the biographical norm is in an unwavering fascination with Virgil's authorial processes, unparalleled in other ancient *Vitae*.⁵⁵ Lefkowitz notes, 'Ancient [Greek] biographies preserve no records of working arrangements... Poems are composed instantaneously or are recited when already completed: if a poet is seen in the process of working, it is in isolation, like Euripides in his cave by the sea.'⁵⁶ The situation is similar in extant biographies of Roman authors: Terence simply 'wrote' his six comedies (*scripsit*, *Vit. Ter.* 2),⁵⁷ and there is even less interest in the nuts and bolts of how Horace, Tibullus, Lucan, Juvenal, Pliny the Elder or Passienus Crispus went about creating

⁵³ Farrell 2016. Cf. 2016:417: 'It is very tempting to infer that Virgil's interest in Theocritean exegesis extended to a desire to summon up a neo-Theocritean scholarly tradition to complete his own poetic achievement.' Casali 2004 makes similar arguments for Virgil's use of Homeric scholia in his 'Doloneia' of *Aen.* 9; cf. more generally Schlunk 1974, Schmit-Neuerburg 1999.

⁵⁴ Henkel 2014. Where he considers that this mode of 'metapoetic allegory' went unnoticed by Virgil's earliest critics (2014:62), though, this thesis argues that it was the dominant mode of biographical reception.

⁵⁵ The only authorial biography that comes anywhere close to this fascination with authorial processes is the *Vita Persi* (Clausen 1992), commenting on his pace and frequency (*scriptitavit et raro et tarde*), and the fact that he died with it unfinished (*hunc ipsum librum imperfectum reliquit*), requiring posthumous editing by his teacher (*leuiter contraxit Cornutus*). Crucially, apart from the detail that Persius wrote *raro*, this is the same narrative as found in Virgil's *Vitae*: the account of how the poets wrote is adduced to explain the apparent lack of finish in their poetry. I discuss this further in Chapter 1.

⁵⁶ 1981:x. Lefkowitz 2016 walks back this claim, exploring (in the words of her title) 'ancient biographers' representations of the creative process'.

⁵⁷ There is some interest in his collaboration or plagiarism, but the biographer notes that this is mostly rumour, the flames fanned by Terence's own prologues (*non obscura fama... ipse auxit numquam nisi leuiter refutare conatus, ut in prologo...*, *Vit. Ter.* 3), and immediately dismisses the reports of collaborative authorship (*si modo in scribendo adiutoribus indiguerit, non tam Scipione et Laelio uti potuisse*, 4). On Terence's prologues and the biography, see Gowers 2004:150-1.

their works.⁵⁸ But in the case of Virgil, by contrast, the ancient biographies repeatedly return to the processes by which he produced his works – from the causes and motives of the texts’ genesis to the physical and mental details of his methods of composition and writing, from the revisionary and editorial process to the various methods of circulation (or ‘publication’) of the text.⁵⁹

This mass of biographical material is unique, not only among other ancient author-biographies, but in the privileged glimpse it offers us of ancient working methods, and of the literary and cultural discourses of authorship. Both in antiquity and today, the smooth edifices of completed, published, authorially sanctioned works of literature are the usual forms in which texts are encountered by readers and scholars. There is a set of expectations and assumptions involved here: that the author’s intentions are realised in a single, final version; that this is the only version with which readers should engage; and that any previous or parallel versions are illegitimate or unnecessary objects of study or reading. This traditional view, however, has been challenged in the last few decades by the rise of ‘genetic criticism’, a reaction to dissatisfaction and unease in literary studies with these ideas of objectivity. Various schools of literary interpretation – ‘Radikalphilologie’, ‘critique génétique’, ‘new bibliography’ – began to look at authorial manuscripts, different editions and paratextual material such as external editorial activity, ‘not as witnesses helpful in establishing the exact words of a work but as the traces of an adventure of creation’.⁶⁰ *Il y a de hors-texte*, it seems – or, at least, texts exist in multiple states, and through attention to the dynamics of this multiplicity we can learn something about them, their authors and the socio-cultural contexts of literary activity.

The documentary techniques of genetic criticism cannot, of course, be imported wholesale into ancient literary studies, since the original material on which such an approach depends – drafts, corrected proofs, different editions, authors’ notebooks, and so on – no longer survives. Indeed, we lack not only the documents that might have surrounded the oeuvres of notable individual authors, but almost any material traces of compositional and revisionary activity at all: a few papyrus fragments bearing traces of authorial corrections – but little else.⁶¹ Despite the absence of extant material, though, what we do have is ancient authors’ own discourse of authorial activity, revision and circulation: points at which they detail their processes of composition, express hopes or expectations regarding the circulation of their texts, or

⁵⁸ The only hint in the *Vita Horati* is the mention of Augustus prompting him to write *Epist.* 2.1. The *Vita Iuuenalis* gives some information about Juvenal’s compositions and recitations, but with very little detail. The latter can be found in Clausen 1992; the other *Vitae* in the second volume of Rolfe’s Loeb of Suetonius (1914/1998).

⁵⁹ Due caution regarding terms such as ‘editing’, ‘publication’, even ‘writing’: ancient and modern systems of literary production and circulation cannot be assumed to resemble one another, not least in minor details of terminology. Cf. Zetzel 1981, Starr 1987, Reynolds and Wilson 1991, McDonnell 1996, Johnson and Parker 2009.

⁶⁰ Gurd 2012:3; Gurd 2005 explores textual multiplicity in action, through the lens of textual criticism. Cf. Hay 1979 and 1988, McGann 1983, Bowman 1990, Bornstein and Williams 1993, Martelli 2013:1-3. Sullivan 2013 gives a stimulating account of Modernist authors’ approaches to textual revision.

⁶¹ Cf. Gurd 2012:4, 11.

characterise their texts as already revised. Though this discourse does not necessarily tell us anything about the historical reality of these authors' production of their texts – a distinction most marked in fictional and poetic texts, but also in supposedly 'factual' texts such as scientific or historical works, since in these too the discourse of authorship serves rhetorical or self-fashioning ends – it is nonetheless a fertile field for further exploration. In recent years, for example, 'career criticism' has made great strides in this area, examining the ways in which authors might be seen to shape their textual output in its totality into a 'career', whose shape might be either conventional and emulative or dissident and self-consciously innovative, but which nonetheless explicitly connects the oeuvre to the existence of a living, writing author.⁶²

Two recent publications have explored a topic close to but not entirely overlapping with career criticism.⁶³ Sean Gurd's 2012 monograph, *Work in Progress*, has opened up the narrow topic of authorial presentation of textual revision and editorial activity to wider discussion. In his diachronic survey of revisionary discourse from Greek rhetoric and drama to Pliny's letters, via Plato, Hellenistic writers, Cicero, Horace and Quintilian, Gurd focuses on the changing functions of textuality and revision as media of social exchange and community formation. He situates ancient systems of literary revision not only within constructions of authorial agency and self-fashioning but within expressly political contexts. Thus Cicero's idealisation of the republic finds echoes in his presentation of friendly collaborative revision among peers, in which he values the process of literary production over the finished product and instantiates a community driven by common literary goals and mutual critique.⁶⁴ Horace, on the other hand, betrays something of a more paranoid approach to revision, portraying the self-revising poet engaging in necessary self-censorship (*at qui legitimum cupiet fecisse poema, | cum tabulis animum censoris sumet honesti*, 'but the man who wants to produce a proper poem will take up the spirit of an honest censor along with his writing-tablets', *Epist.* 2.2.109-10). Self-criticism is as potent a motivating factor as the fear of an audience's reception: "having to revise meant not getting it right the first time – but the good poet always had to revise, and therefore bore the weight of constantly falling short."⁶⁵ Gurd connects Horace's anxiety over literary revision with the changing political circumstances of the time, despite the liberty granted to him by the parrhesiastic possibilities of satire.⁶⁶

⁶² Cf. esp. Lipking 1981, Helgerson 1983, Cheney and de Armas 2002, Hardie and Moore 2010, Marmodoro and Hill 2013, Scheidegger Lämmle 2016, and the ongoing 'Living Poets' project headed by Barbara Graziosi at Durham. Cf., *contra* these, Volk 1997.

⁶³ Add too the collection of essays in Marchesi 2015, exploring Pliny's presentation of self-editing and publishing in his *Letters*.

⁶⁴ Gurd 2012:49-76.

⁶⁵ Gurd 2012:77.

⁶⁶ Lowrie 2013:369, however, rightly comments that Gurd over-exaggerates the contrast between Cicero's Republican and Horace and Pliny's imperial attitudes. A counter-example to Gurd's reading of imperial pressure is found in Geisthardt's argument (2015:83-145) that Pliny's revision of the *Panegyricus* for publication, as opposed to disseminating it only by live performance in the Senate, serves the rhetorical function of endowing it

Francesca Martelli's *Ovid's Revisions: The Editor as Author* (2013) focuses instead on a single author, exploring Ovid's presentation of his own revisions, the traces of those revisions found in his poems themselves, and Ovid's 'revisions' of his authorial persona. Her study takes its starting point from Ovid's assertion that the *Amores* as we have them now were already a revised 'second edition', which introduces the need to read the circulated text against a backdrop of change, textual instability and the 'absent presence' of a supposed earlier edition. Extending this backdrop of self-revision to the rest of Ovid's *oeuvre*, she argues that authorial narratives of revision are a form of self-commentary, in the sense of commentary both on one's own texts and on one's own authorial persona: they reconfigure readers' assumptions about relationships between author and text, text and oeuvre, oeuvre and author. In contrast to Gurd's analysis of ancient authors' discussions of collaborative revision and creation, which situate the individual author's revisionary process in the context of a broader social environment, Martelli sees in Ovid an absorption of external collaborative processes 'into the figure of the revising author' alone, a blurring of the identities of author and editor.⁶⁷ Her approach is particularly valuable in that it opens up the *discourse* of revision for analysis, seeing it as a fundamental part of the poet's self-fashioning, rather than keeping it more strictly tethered to the historical realities that surround ancient texts' production and dissemination; indeed, as Martelli comments, 'the "original" [text] may be nothing more than an idea, but revision, when advertised, makes of this idea an extremely powerful fiction.'⁶⁸

Each of these recent studies, however, focuses on *self*-revision – or, at any rate, on the individual author's self-reported attitude to their own revision of their work.⁶⁹ The author remains at least nominally in a position of control over both the changes made to their text and the discourse surrounding this process of revision. Something different occurs in the ancient biographies of Virgil: here we find what we might term 'allographic' discussions of authorship, composition and revision – that is, reported by later readers and critics of an author's works. Just as (in Gurd's words) 'writing about literary genesis allowed [ancient authors] to think through problems of selfhood, textuality, and social context,' so too are similar problems explored in allographic writing about the processes of (another's) authorship.⁷⁰ But, crucially, the allographic nature of these biographical details introduces dynamics of a different nature from those found in an author's own reflection on and discussion of his authorial process. Later

with authentic sincerity and integrity. Pliny's revision and publication take place in the private sphere of *otium*, implying voluntary effort rather than the compulsory Emperor-praise required on the political stage.

⁶⁷ Martelli 2013:4.

⁶⁸ Martelli 2013:14.

⁶⁹ While Gurd's examination of collaborative and social revision does occasionally unearth instances of reciprocal revision, or one author writing about his revision of other's works, the vast majority of his material is self-reported self-revision. Martelli briefly treats the usual allographic nature of revisionary prefaces in antiquity (2013:14) before focusing on Ovid's autographic revisions.

⁷⁰ Gurd 2012:4.

readers' discussions of a canonical author *qua* author, I will argue, prove to be sites for examining conceptions of authorship, for negotiating hermeneutic practices and for thinking through the role and nature of literature in different historical and cultural contexts; that is, they provide key insights into the dynamics of literary reception.

Thesis outline

This thesis, then, investigates representations of Virgil as a 'poet at work'. In Chapter 1 I explore a variety of approaches to the allographic discourse of composition and revision that surround Virgil. I begin by isolating one aspect of this discourse – the idea that Virgil was thorough, slow, hardworking and meticulous in his literary composition – and contextualising it within ancient systems of poetics, with particular attention to dynamics of praise or criticism. I then trace it through Virgil's biographical reception in antiquity, with particular attention to a central simile frequently found in accounts of Virgil's revisionary methods, that of the mother bear licking her cubs (*VSD* 22), and investigate the rhetorical strategies and purposes of each individual author's reference to Virgil. Finally, I address the metapoetic significance of the simile itself, noting too that it is one of a group of three similes of poetic revision attributed to Virgil's own speech in the biographical tradition (*VSD* 22-4, 46) and exploring possible poetic and political implications of the similes.

Chapter 2 is closely linked with the first chapter. It turns from the written to the oral, from reports of Virgil's initial efforts at composition to his dissemination of his poems. Virgil's poems play with the first-person voice, rapidly switch between presenting the narrator as a singer or as a writer, present their audiences with a dizzying array of scenarios of recitation, performance and conversation. This chapter asks how ancient readers *responded* to these elements of Virgil's self-fashioning, and how they portrayed Virgil reciting, singing and performing his works, or the extent to which they assimilated him to his pastoral or vatic characters to consider him primarily as a singer of his own works. Biographical treatments of Virgil represent him performing in a number of different ways: they portray the original genesis of his poetry, or of parts of it; specific significant performances; Virgil in full flow, or interrupted, or silenced; the nature of his audiences; and his audiences' reactions to his poems. I argue that common to all of these is a concern with problems of textual authority (who is able to control the circulation, the meaning, or even the actual words of Virgil's poetry?); the anecdotes are also used to characterise Virgil's nature as a poet, to express interpretations of his works, and to navigate his place in the political and social world of the late Republic and early Empire.

The second half of the thesis (Chapters 3, 4 and 5), by contrast, investigates *explicitly* fictional representations of Virgil: those in which he is represented as a character from his own works, that is, by means of biographical allegory. Biographical allegory has proved one of the most long-lasting (and most contentious) interpretative frameworks applied to Virgil's works from antiquity to the present. This section re-examines the very earliest uses of the technique; it focuses on its appearances within poetic texts, rather than scholarly prose works, the better to scrutinise its mechanisms of fiction and fantasy. Virgil and later readers of Virgil, I argue, use the figure of author-as-character – usually, but not always, Virgil-as-Tityrus – as a method for exploring concepts of authorship, Virgil's unique place in literary history and genealogy, and the hermeneutics of reading and interpretation.

Chapter 3, a short introduction to this second half of the thesis, begins by addressing the history of (Virgilian) biographical allegory, taking into account Martial, Quintilian, Servius, other ancient commentaries, and post-classical reception and scholarship. I then turn to Virgil's appearances in Propertius 2.34 (Chapter 4), before focusing on (Virgil-)Tityrus' 'absent presence' in the *Eclogues* of Calpurnius Siculus (Chapter 5) – two of the very earliest extant uses of biographical allegory as a tool for interpreting Virgil's works and for representing his role in creating them. Both Propertius and Calpurnius use it for subtle but polemical readings of Virgil, oscillating rapidly between attributing the allegorising move to Virgil's own intentions and making it clear that they are creatively appropriating it for their own, genre-specific ends. And in both poets, we see biographical allegory used, not as a blunt tool of deriving 'truth' about Virgil's life, but almost as a game of biographical methodology. Examining the use of allegory in this poetic context sheds light on the surprising degree of complexity with which it can be employed in biographies, commentaries and other apparently 'factual' texts, and the way it encourages its readers to collaborate and participate in its ways of reading Virgil's master-text.

Ultimately, I argue, the discussions of Virgil's methods of composition, revision, recitation and self-representation by his ancient readers are more than frivolous pseudo-biographical anecdotes, or tendentious fictionalisations of his work. Instead, they constitute sophisticated forms of engagement with Virgil's texts and autobiographical self-representation; they allow his readers the imaginative space to explore ideas of literature and poetic creation, and to construct for themselves an *author* worthy of reading, just as much as his texts. These discussions are particularly interesting in that they relate in intricate ways to the authorial self-construction that we can perceive in Virgil's own works: something of a system of impersonatory metapoetics. Through this investigation, I aim to demonstrate how an alertness to complex systems of poetics, even in the most neglected of ancient texts, can open up new horizons for scholarship of antiquity.

A note on the sources

Before continuing, it is worth clarifying what I mean by ‘the ancient reception of Virgil’, in the words of my title. Gian Biagio Conte notoriously commented that ‘Virgil’s *Nachleben* is Western literature’;⁷¹ my ambitions in this thesis are hardly as broad as that, but I will range widely all the same. The most important constraints here are chronological: the sources I discuss begin in Virgil’s own lifetime, while the post-Donatan generation of Macrobius, Servius and Jerome marks my temporal end-point in the early- and mid-fifth century (with the exception of a handful of pages in Chapter 2 on the irresistibly weird Fulgentius, a century later).⁷² This is not a dissertation on late antique reading culture – or it wouldn’t be, were it not for the fact that so few of my would-be sources are extant outside reports and quotations of them, at second (or third, or fourth) hand, in late antique texts. If we had more from first-century sources – Tucca and Varius, Probus, Hyginus, Carvilius Pictor, Nisus *grammaticus*, Melissus, Herennius, Asconius Pedianus and countless others besides – this would be a very different thesis. My use of sources half a millennium apart is not intended to blur their differences and imply a consistent view of Virgil’s role as author throughout that time; quite the opposite, since one of my aims in this thesis is to encourage the reading of these sources as fully functioning texts in their own right, complete with their own contexts and systems of internal logic, rather than as easily excerpted collections of Virgilian testimonia.⁷³ At the same time, though, these testimonia *are* intertwined with one another, across the centuries; the biographical anecdotes demand to be read in tandem, or against each other, or collectively, even as we respect each individual text in its own right.

In selecting my chief sources for this study, I have prioritised those which directly represent Virgil *as an author*, a historical figure who lived in the first century BCE and created, at the very least, the *Eclogues*, *Georgics* and *Aeneid*.⁷⁴ Very few of the usual poetic suspects, therefore, are invited along to this party: we will hear very little from Horace and Ovid, nothing from Lucan and Statius, and poor devoted Silius Italicus only briefly puts his head round the door.⁷⁵ In my first two chapters, this gathering brings together an unlikely collection of scholars, biographers, encyclopaedists, grammarians and rhetoricians: Quintilian, Suetonius, both Plinys,

⁷¹ Conte 1994:284.

⁷² I remain quiet, for the most part, on the influence of Christianity, though of course it is particularly relevant for Jerome and Fulgentius. To do justice to Virgil’s reception in early Roman Christian culture would require many more pages than I have available here.

⁷³ Though Ziolkowski and Putnam’s magisterial compendium (2008) is an invaluable tool for navigating this material.

⁷⁴ I will not directly treat Virgilian *pseudepigrapha* in this thesis. As a basic rule, I do not consider any of it authentic, and doubt that most of it was seriously and wholeheartedly thought Virgilian in antiquity. See further especially Peirano 2012a, 2012b and 2013, and my forthcoming article on the *Culex*.

⁷⁵ Silius is perhaps the first full-blooded Virgilian ‘fan’. Cf. Plin. *Ep.* 3.7, Mart. 11.48, Sil. *Pun.* 8.593-4. On Virgil’s tomb, cf. the essays in Goldschmidt and Graziosi (forthcoming).

both Senecas, Gellius, Donatus, Macrobius, Servius, Jerome. Two poets, Propertius and Calpurnius, show up in the final chapters, bringing with them their honeyed words and labyrinthine speech. The formal separation of prose and poetry in this thesis maps, to a certain extent, onto a conceptual rift: the first two chapters focus on biographical accounts of Virgil's authorship which apparently purport to be factual, while my poetic sources openly construct 'Virgil' as a fiction. But as the thesis goes on, this divide will be revealed to be merely illusory: besides re-evaluating what 'fact' and 'fiction' might mean in the context of ancient authorial biography, we will see how the poets put on performances of scholarly care and biographical reliability, while the non-fiction writers are surprisingly willing to play poetic games of invention.

The Ur-text for the surviving Virgilian biographical tradition, as mentioned above, is the *Vita Suetonii-Donati* (*VSD*). While some later *Vitae* do seem to preserve material from pre-Suetonian sources, or from those entirely independent of the Suetonian tradition, the *VSD* forms the basis of nearly all other Virgilian biographies in antiquity and after.⁷⁶ Aside from its dubious value as a source for Virgil's historical existence, though, the *VSD* is a difficult text to work with: while it certainly replicates a great deal of material from Suetonius' lost biography, possibly almost verbatim,⁷⁷ it survives only in the form of a prefatory *Vita* to Aelius Donatus' fourth-century commentary on Virgil. The only obvious later addition to Suetonius' original biography is the quotation from Sulpicius of Carthage (*VSD* 38),⁷⁸ though it seems likely that there are other post-Suetonian supplementations and accretions too. The *VSD* is of particular value as a fourth-century snapshot of an extensive, perhaps primarily oral, biographical tradition; while I believe the passages discussed in this thesis derive from anecdotes dating to the first century BCE or earlier, my argument does not rest on their dating. But the *VSD*'s original context will be taken into account too. As part of Suetonius' collections of biographies – in this case, of other poets such as Terence, Horace and Persius – it draws on a longstanding tradition of thinking about authors and their work in biographical terms; its similarities with and departures from conventional biographical tropes are significant.

Servius, too, is a notorious mess. His commentary was originally drawn, for the most part, from Donatus', although he makes judicious cuts and additions in adapting it for his schoolboy

⁷⁶ For the *Vitae Vergilianae*, see *VVA* and Ziolkowski and Putnam 2008.

⁷⁷ Donatus writes, in the letter that dedicates the commentary to Lucius Munatius, that he has followed his sources very closely: *eorum etiam uerba seruire* (in Ziolkowski and Putnam 2008:643). 'Sources', plural – though this letter perhaps refers more to the *uariorum* commentary than the *Vita* itself, and in his *Vita Terenti* Donatus attributes the biography section explicitly to Suetonius. As Peirano 2017:14 summarises, 'the extent of [Donatus'] dependence on the text of the *De poetis* is hard to recover'.

⁷⁸ Possibly C. Sulpicius Apollinaris, Gellius' teacher: cf. *EV* s.v. *Sulpicio Apollinare*, Holford-Strevens 2003:83-4, Jocelyn 1990:265-6, Ziolkowski and Putnam 2008:422. On the *VSD*'s own sources, see Horsfall 1995b, Powell 2017:178-80. *VVA* xv-xviii collected passages of the *VSD* suspected of being Donatan interpolations in Suetonius' *Vita*, mostly based on the inconsistencies of various details (e.g. the details of Virgil's will; Varius alone or both Varius and Tucca as executor-editors).

readers. This is to be expected from commentaries; what is more difficult in the case of Servius, though, is that his original (or ‘vulgate’) commentary – written in the first third of the fifth century CE – has since become thoroughly shuffled together with an expanded version, *Servius Auctus* or *Servius Danielis*, which seems to have been gathered together around the seventh or eighth century CE.⁷⁹ The additional material in this expansion preserves in large part material from Servius’ model, Donatus’ commentary, but also draws on other strands of the lost Virgilian commentary tradition, both pre- and post-Servian.⁸⁰ Disentangling these two strands is a formidable task for any editor of Servius. I have taken a pragmatic stance throughout this thesis: I have aimed to use only the material from the ‘vulgate’ Servius as the basis of my analyses, and so sidestep the problems of date and attribution for material from the expanded Servius. The old Thilo-Hagen edition (1878-1902) is the main source of my text, though I have consulted the Harvard editions and now Baudou and Clément-Tarantino’s 2015 version too.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Named for Pierre Daniel, who first printed an edition of the expanded version in 1600.

⁸⁰ The ‘Harvard’ position, endorsed especially by Rand 1916, Goold 1970:104-5 and Marshall 1983:386, holds that much of Serv. Dan.’s additions derive simply from Donatus. Brugnoli (*EV* s.v. ‘Servio’), Daintree 1990 and Jeunet-Mancy 2012:xxv-xlii instead emphasise the presence of other non-Donatan sources.

⁸¹ Harvard editions: Rand *et al.* 1946, Smith *et al.* 1965, Murgia and Kaster 2018. On the first of these, cf. Fraenkel’s notorious reviews (1948-9).

CHAPTER 1

‘LIKE A BEARE’: ANECDOTES OF POETIC COMPOSITION AND REVISION

‘It is said of the incomparable Vergil, that he brought forth his poems like a Beare, and after form’d them with licking.’
(Ben Jonson, in a letter to Shakespeare)¹

‘This one was one who was working. This one was one who was working. This one was one being one having something being coming out of him.’
(Gertrude Stein, on Picasso)²

Virgil’s craftsmanship

Any search for a coherent and consistent account of Virgil’s methods of literary production in the ancient sources is doomed to failure from the start, even if we accept that we cannot ever recover the historical truth of Virgil’s actual actions. The *Vita Suetonii uulgo Donatiana (VSD)*, our chief source, is riddled with inconsistencies.³ Other sources provide us with fragmentary and scattered anecdotes, again inconsistent both internally and with one another; and even where the same anecdote appears in multiple sources, there can only rarely be any certain interpretation of its significance, either in its immediate context or more broadly. ‘Virgil’s life is a problem not of facts, but of sources’, comments Nicholas Horsfall, and it is certainly wise to abandon at the outset any search for concrete biographical fact.⁴

But despite this overall tendency in the biographical tradition towards self-contradiction and incoherence, there is one trait of literary production not only repeatedly attributed to Virgil from as early as the century following his death,⁵ but consistently situated in particular frameworks of value and significance. This is the idea that Virgil took laborious care over the production of his poetry, continually redrafting and revising, slowly chiselling rough sketches

¹ Jonson *Timber* 2440, in Herford, Simpson and Simpson 1970:638.

² Stein 2004:213-5 (orig. 1909); I owe the quotation to Butler 2011:4.

³ Exhaustively documented by Horsfall 1995b.

⁴ 1995b:25.

⁵ Wilson-Okamura 2010:101-3 suggests that Horace’s description of Virgil’s poetry as *molle atque facetum* (*Sat.* 1.10.44) indicates that Virgil was already then known for his perfectionism. But the adjectives are generic signifiers of Alexandrian poetic values; they do not in themselves connote any especial authorial care, let alone specific habits of composition or revision. Horace uses them ostensibly to praise Virgil’s pastoral while simultaneously valorising satire (cf. Gowers 2012 *ad Sat.* 1.10.31-5, Zetzel 2002:40-2). On the other hand, while Horace’s contemporaries would probably not have found any special devotion to *labor* here, it is not impossible that this might have confirmed Virgil’s perfectionism for readers later in antiquity: Donatus elsewhere derives *facetus* from *facio*, implying not only a craftsman’s control over words’ meanings but the process of literary composition itself (*ad Ter. Eun.* 427: *facetus est, qui facit uerbis quod uult*). Cf. Isidorus *Orig.* 10.95: *facetus, qui iocos et lusus gestis et factis commendat, a faciendo dictus*.

into finer finished versions.⁶ The most detailed account is found in the primary biographical text, the *VSD* (22-4):

[22] cum Georgica scriberet, traditur quotidie meditato mane plurimos uersus dictare solitus ac per totum diem retractando ad paucissimos redigere, non absurde carmen se more ursae parere dicens et lambendo demum effingere. [23] Aeneida prosa prius oratione formatam digestamque in XII libros particulatim componere instituit, prout liberet quidque, et nihil in ordinem arripiens. [24] ac ne quid impetum moraretur, quaedam imperfecta transmisit, alia leuissimis uersibus ueluti fulsit, quos per iocum pro tibicinibus interponi aiebat ad sustinendum opus, donec solidae columnae aduenirent.⁷

[22] It is said that when he was writing the *Georgics*, he would dictate each day a large number of verses that he had composed in the morning, and that he would revise them throughout the day and reduce them to a very small number, saying – not unreasonably – that he birthed his poem after the fashion of a she-bear, and only later licked it into shape. [23] As for the *Aeneid*, he followed the policy of first drafting it in prose and then dividing it into twelve books, which he composed as poetry in a piecemeal way, so that he could do each piece just as he pleased, taking up nothing in order. [24] So that nothing would impede his momentum, he would let some things go unfinished; others he propped up,⁸ as it were, with inconsequential verses, which he said as a joke were put there as struts, to hold up the work until the solid columns arrived.⁹

The pertinent details are that Virgil habitually recorded his ideas at speed and in large quantities, sometimes in verse straight away, and sometimes first in prose then verse (22, 23).¹⁰ In order to get his ideas onto the page as swiftly as possible, he would first write incomplete or unsatisfactory lines, with the expectation of removing them later (24). He would then laboriously and ruthlessly edit the drafts to his satisfaction (22). This care is reflected in his slow pace of literary production: while biographies report that he composed the *Eclogues* over three years, the *Georgics* appeared seven years later, and after eleven years spent on the *Aeneid*, his plans for three additional years of revision were cut short by his untimely death (25, 35). Virgil's swift production of a large quantity of material followed by a lengthy period of painstaking revision is illustrated by a whimsical and memorable simile attributed to the man himself: the *VSD* records earlier reports that Virgil said that he composed his poem 'as a she-

⁶ The sculptural metaphor is Horace's; see below (34) on *limae labor*.

⁷ What is meant by *tibicines*? While clearly including elements such as the notorious hemistichs, the category must also cover other first-draft techniques: plot summaries, unsatisfactory stand-in lines or passages, the prose sketches, and so on: 'A word which probably... came to mean anything in the poem which was not, when it was written, intended to survive his final revision of it' (Sparrow 1931:2). Cf. Baldwin 1993, Horsfall 1995:23-4, Farrell 2010:438-9.

⁸ *fulsit* is a form of *fulcire*, 'to prop up' or 'strengthen', not *fulgere*, 'to shine' (*contra* Power 2010:152).

⁹ The text of the *VSD* used throughout is from Ziolkowski and Putnam 2008; the translation is adapted from Wilson-Okamura's version (revised by Ziolkowski) in that volume.

¹⁰ There are no ancient analogies for this use of prose sketches by anyone but Virgil (Horsfall 1995b:16). On random order of composition, cf. Pliny on his principles of collecting his letters for publication: *collegi non servato temporis ordine – neque enim historiam componebam – sed ut quaeque in manus venerat* (1.1.1).

bear gives birth to cubs, proceeding then to lick them into shape' (22).¹¹ A 'not unreasonable' comparison, the biographer comments, and according to ancient zoological thought this is an apt simile: bear cubs were believed to be born unformed and shapeless, until 'licked into shape' by their mothers.¹² Unlike the mad poet at the end of Horace's *Ars Poetica* – a frenzied bear (472), whose uncontrolled torrent of verbiage sucks the life from his audience (*tenet occiditque legendo*, 475) – Virgil's bear is the definition of care, finesse, nurture and maternal dedication.¹³

Why the 'well wrought' urn?

The English word 'work' means both labour, deed, production and a literary artefact. Even for the critic loath to commit to polysemy as an unequivocal tool of interpretation, this indicates a widespread link between the labour put into the creation of literature and the value attached to the finished text. We often read in reviews, for example, that a monograph may not be most rigorously researched or most pleasurable to read, but that the reviewer could perceive how much effort the author put into its production, as if this is an independent metric that contributes to the book's overall importance. So too in antiquity was the process of literary composition linked to the text's (and author's) value: indeed, to continue the semantic point, Greek *πόνος* and Latin *opus* and *labor* carry the same double sense as the English 'work'.¹⁴ What's more, the causative current runs both ways: while a text may gain value when known to have required arduous composition and revision, equally such toil may be presumed to have taken place to produce a text already admired for its apparent workmanship and virtuosity. The clearest ancient examples of this phenomenon, whereby careful revision adds value to a literary text and a text is valued for the traces of labour to be found in it, are expressed in the poetics of the Alexandrian and neoteric circles: the doctrine of μέγα βιβλίον μέγα κακόν,¹⁵ the ideals of *deductus*, *lepidus*, and *tenuis* poetry, and the densely allusive scholarly tone require ready use

¹¹ Though the *VSD* limits this metaphor of composition to the *Georgics* alone, most other sources extend it to the other works too, and Gellius associates it firmly with the *Aeneid*. (Other sources discussed below.)

¹² Cf. Aristotle *NH* 6.30, Pliny *NH* 8.54.126 (*hanc [caro] lambendo paulatim figurant*), Aelian *NH* 2.19; in modern scholarship, Kitchell 2014:12-14. In poetry, Ovid is eloquent: *nec catulus, partu quem reddidit ursa recenti, | sed male uiua caro est; lambendo mater in artus | fingit et in formam, quanta, capit ipse, reducit* (*Met.* 15.379-81). Later in this chapter I consider other attestations of the Virgilian anecdote in Gellius *NA* 17.10.3, Jerome *Comm. in ep. ad Galatas praef.* 3 (*PL* 26, 427C [399D]), *Comm. in Zachariam praef.* (*PL* 25, 1571A). The same zoological belief is transferred to wolves (specifically, the she-wolf who nurses Romulus and Remus) in Virgil (*A.* 8.634) and Ovid (*Fast.* 2.418).

¹³ *Ars P.* 472-5; the bear shapeshifts into a leech in the final line (*hirudo*, 476), contravening Horace's own poetic precepts against literary hybrids (1-4).

¹⁴ *πόνος*: cf. Gurd 2012:81-3 on the ubiquity of the term in Hellenistic metapoetic statements, although 'in none of these or the many other examples of Hellenistic references to poetic labor do the texts compel us to assume' that revision actually took place. *opus*: e.g. Virgil *A.* 7.45 *maius opus moueo*.

¹⁵ Callim. fr. 465 Pf., in Athenaeus *Deipn.* 72a.

of the revisionary file – the *labor limae*, as Horace puts it.¹⁶ Attic Old Comedy, too, is deeply concerned with the physical act of producing literature, with the dramatist depicted toiling over a manual task: rivets, chisels, timbers, lathes, wax, casts, and words three cubits tall...¹⁷

Yet pinning down the precise way in which the two interact – whether in terms of authors boasting of their labour to secure a positive reception for their texts, or in terms of the documented reception of texts according to the quantity of authorial labour – is, naturally, contingent on specific historical criteria of genre, literary community and cultural milieu. A straightforward relationship like that outlined above is not always guaranteed. Praise of an author’s hard work can convey hidden criticism too: traces of intellectual labour that remain visible are an inelegant departure from the idealised pose of ‘effortless genius’ that remains a mark of literary or scholarly excellence. They could be taken, paradoxically, as a sign of *insufficient* labour, as if the author in question has not devoted enough time to polishing away the marks of their hard work – or even imply that this *labor* is the book’s only virtue, its author simply too uninspired to produce genuinely innovative work.

In antiquity, we find that even though Alexandrian and neoteric poetics fetishise lengthy processes of revision and suffuse their metapoetic statements with metaphors of polish and slenderness, explicit discussion of authorial processes is somewhat suppressed. Indeed, a certain level of discomfort seems to accrue around the prospect of revision: that a text has been revised implies that it was inadequate in its previous state, or even that it has been altered away from a purer original state. Apollonius of Rhodes’ motivation for heavily revising (ἐπιξέσαι καὶ ὀρθῶσαι) the *Argonautica* is recorded in the first *Vita* as his embarrassment at its earliest reception.¹⁸ And Pliny – relatable as ever, for the academic writer! – takes up arms against excessive literary revision, suggesting the imposition of a hard limit for both aesthetic and practical reasons (*Ep.* 9.35.2):

diligentiam tuam in retractandis operibus ualde probo. est tamen aliquis modus, primum quod nimia cura deterit magis quam emendat, deinde quod nos a recentioribus reuocat simulque nec absoluit priora et incohare posteriora non patitur.

I very much approve of the trouble you take over revising your work, but there should be a limit to this; first because too much application blurs the outline instead of improving the details, and then because it distracts us from more recent subjects and prevents us from starting on new work and from finishing the old.

¹⁶ *Ars Poetica* 290. Cf., e.g., Philotas fr. 10 Powell, Theocritus *Id.* 7.51, Asclepiades 28.1 GP. Horace is fond of violent physical metaphors for literary revision: compare the ‘anvil’ at *Ars. P.* 441. Propertius too sharpens his verses on an *angusto... torno* (2.34.43).

¹⁷ E.g. Teleclides fr. 42; Ar. *Ran.* 819, *Thesm.* 52-7; Crates fr. 21 (ἐπὶ τριπήχη). On Callimachean and Aristophanic systems of poetological metaphors, cf. Asper 1997. This chapter later turns to Jerome’s characterisation of his own literary production as ‘hammering’ (*uolumen hoc cudimus*, *PL* 26.483).

¹⁸ μὴ φέροντα δὲ τὴν αἰσχύνην τῶν πολιτῶν καὶ τὸ ὄνειδος καὶ τὴν διαβολὴν τῶν ἄλλων ποιητῶν (*Vita A* Wendel). Cf. Gurd 2012:78-91, with multiple examples.

Authorial labour is approached differently in different literary spheres: for practitioners of rhetoric, philosophy and oratory, lengthy textual revision is not advised in order to produce a finely polished literary work, but rather as a pedagogical tool to prepare the student for improvised public speaking – a way of learning to think, rather than to produce a fine literary artefact.¹⁹ Quintilian’s lengthy discussion in *Inst.* 10.3-7, for example, subordinates advice regarding the production of written work to the ultimate aim of gaining *ex tempore dicendi facultas* (‘ability to extemporise’), which he calls *maximus uero studiorum fructus... et uelut prouentus amplissimus longi laboris* (‘the greatest fruit of our studies and the richest harvest of our long labours, as it were’, 10.7.1). This is to be done by cultivating good habits of structured composition and revision in written work, to train the mind for the task of *mental* composition and revision, which is undertaken simultaneously with – or in fact running slightly ahead of – speech (10.7.5-14). Quintilian values improvised oratorical speech over written preparation not only for practical reasons (e.g. readiness for any situation, 10.7.1-4), but for certain qualities – *calor, impetus* (‘heat’, ‘speed’, 10.3.6) – that he considers lacking in written texts, which remain staid, cooler, even *exsanguia* (‘bloodless’) and, paradoxically, *cura peiora* (‘the worse for the care taken over them’, 10.4.3).²⁰

Improvisation could be considered superior to lengthy written authorial processes in other literary spheres, too: most notably, Statius’ self-consciously virtuosic *Silvae*, supposedly written *ex tempore* or in a matter of hours or days,²¹ rest upon a flashy poetics of speed, genius and daring. He emphasises their *calor* (1 *praef.* 3), *celeritas* (1 *praef.* 14), *temeritas* and *audacia* (3 *praef.* 3-4), and though he at first makes a show (however disingenuous) of shame at his *libelli* (*diu multumque dubitauit... an hos libros... dimitterem*), he rapidly talks himself into pride: not only is their speed a testament to his poetic brilliance, but it has enabled him to honour esteemed dedicatees with timely occasional poetry. The conceit of poetic immediacy – that the speaker is moved by genuine and unrehearsed feeling or thought, which just happens to be expressed in crafted literary form, generated at the same time as the poems are disseminated – is strengthened by Statius’ prefatorial assertions that this was, in fact, the original way in which these poems came to be.²² From another angle, this claim of speed is also an effective defence

¹⁹ Cf. Gurd 2012:25-48, who terms this the development of a cognitive *habitus*, adducing evidence from Isocrates and Plato alongside Quintilian. Cf., too, Cic. *Brut.* 283, *Fam.* 15.21.4; Pliny *Ep.* 9.26.1.

²⁰ For *exsanguia*, compare Horace’s mad poet, who drains the life from his audience like a bloodsucking leech: *tenet occiditque legendo, | non missura cutem, nisi plena cruoris, hirudo* (*Ars P.* 476).

²¹ *nullum enim ex illis biduo longius tractum, quaedam et in singulis diebus effusa* (1 *praef.* 14). Cf. Hardie 1983:76-91 (‘it was the age of the virtuoso, and of speed’, 84); on the context of poetic competitions and occasional epideictic poetry, cf. e.g. Coleman 1986; Nauta, Van Dam and Smolenaars 2006.

²² Gurd 2012:80: ‘...audiences [were] used to the pretense that poetic speech was composed in the same way that it was performed – in one go, without interruptions, alterations, or second thoughts...’ On rapid writing, cf. Plut. *Cic* 40, Hor. *Serm.* 1.4.9, Cic. *Arch.* 8.18, *De Or.* 3.194, Quint. *Inst.* 10.7.1-28. Caesar is said to have composed his *De analogia* on the battlefield itself: *Caesarem... libros scrupulosissimos scripsisse inter tela uolantia de nominibus declinandis, de uerborum aspirationibus et rationibus inter classica et tubas* (Fronto *De bello Parthico* 9 – with more than a jot of exaggeration).

against criticism. If the work admits itself to be hastily composed, or still a ‘work in progress’, it claims a measure of leniency: we cannot judge it against some concept of perfection, but only in the context of the external constraints on its production. Statius’ title, *Silvae*, means simply ‘Raw Material’, a shrewd artistic tactic of defensive incompleteness.²³ Pliny the Elder attests the same tactic in the visual arts too (*NH praef.* 26):

... pingendi fingendique conditoribus quos in libellis his inuenies absoluta opera et illa quoque, quae mirando non satiamur, pendenti titulo inscripsisse, ut ‘Apelles faciebat’ aut ‘Polyclitus’, tamquam inchoata semper arte et imperfecta, ut contra iudiciorum uarietates superesset artifici regressus ad ueniam uelut emendaturo quicquid desideraretur, si non esset interceptus.²⁴

... those founders of painting and sculpture who, as you will find in these books, used to inscribe their finished works – even the masterpieces we never tire of admiring – with provisional titles like ‘Worked on by Apelles’ or ‘Worked on by Polyclitus’, as though art were always something in process, never completed. That way, when faced by the fluctuations of critical appraisal, the artist would always be able to resort to imploring their indulgence, by implying that he had intended to correct any defect his critics might notice, were he not interrupted.

The strategy has remained popular in the intervening years. The title of Ben Jonson’s posthumous collection *Timber*, for example, is a direct translation of Statius’ *Silvae*, and Olivia Laing’s recent novel *Crudo* (2018) makes a feature of its ‘raw’ nature, in terms of both its hasty, almost *ex tempore* composition and its apparent representation of unfiltered, untempered interior experience.²⁵

Virgil between *ingenium* and *labor*

In view of this variety, then, how are we to interpret ancient accounts of Virgil’s authorial diligence? What does it mean for Virgil’s reception in antiquity that his readers said of him, like Gertrude Stein of Picasso, ‘This one was one who was working’? The *VSD* presents its factoids on Virgil’s authorial habits somewhat neutrally, with little indication of how its readers might understand them within larger interpretative frameworks. Readers are, presumably, to slot this representation of Virgil’s working habits into their existing preconceptions about different methods of authorship. Given the laudatory tone of the *VSD* as a whole, we can assume

²³ On the title *Silvae*, cf. (e.g.) Coleman 1988:xxii-xxiv.

²⁴ Apelles appears later at *HN* 35.84, anxiously monitoring the reception of his artworks and delivering outbursts against his critics in person – a monstrous incarnation of the creator refusing to leave well alone. Gurd 2012:69-70 suggests that Cicero may have had this latter anecdote in mind when he discussed interchange between author and audience at *Off.* 1.147.

²⁵ Laing comments, ‘I wrote it in a fury: two months of exploring in real time how it felt to live in a world where love and truth were becoming increasingly endangered.’ [<https://www.panmacmillan.com/blogs/literary/olivia-laing-non-fiction-fiction-crudo-everybody>, accessed 10/09/2018.]

that the details of Virgil's authorial processes are to be understood positively:²⁶ the rapidity of his initial drafts as evidence of his (vatic) genius, and his subsequent slow carefulness as a metric of the quality of his finished poetry. This double function is characteristic of biographies of 'great men', which seek both to celebrate the unique and inimitable qualities of their subject and simultaneously to set out their exemplarity, so as to encourage readers to emulate them. We may not all have it in us to be a Caesar, a Cicero or a Virgil, but following in their footsteps may yet take us some way down the same path to greatness.

The pedagogical function of the *VSD*, which has survived not within Suetonius' other literary biographies but as a prefatory *Vita* before Donatus' commentary on Virgil's works, confirms this: the schoolchildren who are the imagined audience of the commentary are repeatedly encouraged to read Virgil's texts in order to improve their own writing styles and habits, whether through imitation or avoidance.²⁷ In this case, Virgil's *labor* is to be taken as exemplary and to be emulated. Indeed, educational texts frequently attribute something of a 'Protestant work ethic' to Virgil, appropriating his famous aphorism on hard work (*labor omnia uicit | improbus*, *G.* 1.145-6) with the negative epithet *improbus* excised and past-tense *uicit* generalised to gnomic present-tense *uincit: labor omnia uincit* (e.g. Jerome in *Danielem praef.*, Macrobius *Sat.* 5.16.7; later, Erasmus *Adagia* 1.5.22, 2.253).²⁸ The ambiguities and dourness (if not outright pessimism) of Virgil's phrase²⁹ are lost, as the altered phrase gestures to the all-conquering value of honest toil instead of its futility. In this context, the biographical reports of Virgil's own *labor* fulfil the aphorism of the *Georgics* – Virgil's hard work *did* 'conquer everything', thus assuring his poems' fame – and encourage imitation on the part of the reader: *hic labor [est], hinc laudem... sperate!* ('this is the task; from this, hope for glory!', *G.* 3.288).

Regarding Virgil's inimitable genius, the *VSD* also has its cake and eats it: it later reports a recitation during which Virgil supposedly completed two half-lines – the *quaedam imperfecta* mentioned at *VSD* 24 – *ex tempore*, instructing his amanuensis to fill in the additional phrases in his copy (*VSD* 34, referring to *A.* 6.164-5). This passage illustrates the earlier abstract

²⁶ Laudatory, disregarding the passages where criticism is clearly signalled, e.g. by reference to Asconius and his *Contra Obtrectatores Vergilii* (*VSD* 10, 16, 43-6); cf. Zetzel 1981:37-8.

²⁷ Avoidance: Servius, for example, frequently discusses Virgil's archaisms or more abstruse literary forms with an admonishing *debut dicere*, followed by a plainer or more modern expression – not in fact a criticism of Virgil's practice but a remark directed at the pupils using the commentary, more like *dicimus* (Kaster 1988:180-4; cf. Keeline 2013:77).

²⁸ Are these minor differences merely scribal error? I think that unlikely: we would expect to see scribes altering Macrobius or Jerome to bring them in line with the much more famous Virgilian 'original'.

²⁹ Cf. Jenkyns 1998:678-84 for a thorough discussion, with Thomas 1988 and Mynors 1990 *ad loc.*; Geue 2018 offers a refreshingly polemical Marxist (or, as he puts it, 'Marxish') corrective to received ideas of georgic *labor*. *uicit*, the *lectio difficilior*, is correct at *G.* 1.145, though clearly subject to alteration under the influence of Virgil's earlier motto, *omnia uincit amor* at *Ecl.* 10.69 (*uincit* at *G.* 1.145 is found in two 9th century manuscripts, Bernensis 184 and 255+239, alongside Jerome and Macrobius [above]). The *Georgics* (a poem on *hominum boumque labores*, 1.118; cf. 1.325, and *A.* 2.306) overwhelmingly demonstrate that *labor* itself can (and does) not guarantee freedom from difficulties (cf., e.g. *quid labor aut benefacta iuuant?*, 3.525); Geue 2018 notes that hard *labor* is a natural focus for the didactic poet, who would have no way to prove his expertise if he were to teach an easy task.

description of how Virgil went about filling and reshaping his texts, but places it in a live recitation context, such that Virgil's virtuosic skills remain unchallenged. (I return to this and other anecdotes of Virgil's recitations in the next chapter.)

Citing Virgil in the rhetorical schoolroom

Other attestations of Virgil's compositional methods more explicitly contextualise their discussions, situating Virgil's slow revisionary process within specific frameworks of interpretation. Some are, like the *VSD*, laudatory. Quintilian, for example, uses Virgil's methods of composition and revision as models for the readers of the *Institutio Oratoria* to emulate. He advises his readers that it is best to begin slowly and revise continually, when first writing, to ensure one's thoughts are set down carefully (10.3.5-6):

sit primo uel tardus dum diligens stilus, quaeramus optima nec protinus offerentibus se gaudeamus... quae quidem ut diligentius exequamur, repetenda saepius erunt scriptorum proxima

Let the pen be slow, as long as it is careful; let us search for the best, and not be happy with whatever presents itself first... To do this with care, we will repeatedly have to go over what we wrote last.

When inspiration strikes, he reassures us, we should indulge it quickly (*si feret flatus, danda sunt uela*, 'if the wind is behind us, we can spread our sails', 10.3.7),³⁰ yet still be sure to go back and revise our work (*sed redeamus ad iudicium et retractemus suspectam facilitatem*, 'but let us then go back to criticise them, and reconsider anything that seems suspiciously facile') – and he adduces examples of great writers who worked in this way, as justification for the method's validity: *sic scripsisse Sallustium accepimus... Vergilium quoque paucissimos die composuisse versus auctor est Varius* ('we are told that Sallust wrote like this... Virgil too, Varius tells us, wrote very few lines in a day', 10.3.8).

Virgil is an exemplary model of writerly caution elsewhere in the *Institutio Oratoria*: in the overview of Greek and Latin literature a few chapters earlier, Virgil is commended not for virtuosic talent like that of Homer (*natura caelestis atque immortalis*), but instead for his meticulous care: *curae et diligentiae vel ideo in hoc plus est, quod ei fuit magis laborandum*, ('there is more care and craftsmanship in Virgil, if only because he had to work harder',

³⁰ Does this phrase owe anything to Virgil's own images of poetic composition (and of the experience of reading poetry), again yoked to authorial *labor*? Note *inceptumque una decurre laborem... Maecenas, pelagoque uolans da uela patenti*, *G.* 2.39-41), and *extrem ni iam sub fine laborum | uela traham et terris festinem aduertere proram* (*G.* 4.116-17). Notably, Horace later connects Virgil's poetic activities with sailing in *Carm.* 1.3 (cf. Robinson 2006:189-91). But the image is hardly uncommon in Latin literature.

10.1.86).³¹ It is Virgil's *acerrimum iudicium* and *unicus usus* that bring him praise (8.3.24) – 'unique' here in the sense of 'exquisite' or 'peerless', I would argue, rather than connoting some miraculous ability unattainable by any other author, given that *iudicium* and *usus* are, in Quintilian and elsewhere, desirable traits achievable through dutiful effort.³² Where the biographers of Greek poets and tragedians attribute the magnificence of their creations to external sources of inspiration – the Muses, Apollo, Pan, even swarms of bees³³ – Virgil's poetry, according to his readers, derives from his personal qualities of perseverance, hard work and authorial care.

Interestingly, Quintilian is one of the earliest extant authors to use Virgil as an almost infallible authority on linguistic and literary matters, presaging an attitude that would become ubiquitous later in antiquity. *Vergili miramur illud...*³⁴ In discussing solecisms of gender, for example, Quintilian takes a pair of contradictory examples from the Virgilian corpus and comments *quorum neutrum quidem reprehendo, cum sit utriusque Vergilius auctor; sed fingamus utrumlibet non recte dictum* ('personally, I object to neither, since Virgil is after all our authority for both – but let us suppose that one or the other is wrong', 1.5.35).³⁵ Quintilian's examples, he says, are only an apparent error, since their use by Virgil guarantees their propriety: an argument from *auctoritas*.³⁶ Yet Virgil's *auctoritas* is not the licence afforded to genius. Even the acknowledged virtuoso Homer, 'in whom we find either the perfect achievement or at least clear traces of every art' (*in quo nullius non artis aut opera perfecta aut certe non dubia uestigia reperiuntur*, 12.11.21),³⁷ is not always recommended as offering *auctoritas* for contemporary literary customs, as at 8.6.18: *at ego in agendo nec 'pastorem populi' auctore Homero dixerim* ('in a speech, personally, I would not say "shepherd of the people" on Homer's authority').³⁸ Rather, Virgil's linguistic and poetic authority stems from

³¹ Cf. Pelttari 2014:33-4.

³² *unicus* as 'peerless': OLD 2. Attainability of *iudicium* and *usus*: in a sense, the entire *Institutio Oratoria* is a manual in the development of good judgment. In particular, 10.1 demonstrates this process: exposure to a canon of good authors, along with guidance as to what makes them good, trains the pupil's *iudicium* (cf. Taekema 2003:255-6). Similarly, *usus* denotes skill gained through experience, or habitual practice (OLD 3, 6, 7, 9): cf., e.g., the orators' need of *ars aut usus* in arousing πάθος and ἦθος, 6.2.10.

³³ Cf. Lefkowitz 2016:179-82.

³⁴ 8.3.20. Virgil does not entirely escape reprimand: cf., e.g., Quintilian's use of *A.* 1.109 and *G.* 3.79-83 as bad and good examples, respectively, of hyperbaton and parenthesis (8.2.14-15).

³⁵ Corbeill 2015:12-40 contextualises this example (discussed at 21) within Roman scholarly approaches to grammatical gender. He identifies a persistent belief among scholars and grammarians that gender was originally fluid and unfixed, becoming more stable thanks to the authority of anonymous *maiores*, and that Virgil (and select others) possess the same linguistic authority (38).

³⁶ Arguments from *auctoritas* are crucial in establishing *sermo* (linguistic usage; cf. Quint. *Inst.* 1.6.1-3) in the Latin grammarian tradition. They rely on the argument that the verbal element in question is correct due to descent from a proven authority, whether guaranteed by *uetustas*, good standing, or (circularly) its *ratio*. Gellius presents *auctoritas* as the 'highest principle': *NA* 6.11.3, 13.29.2, 15.9, etc (Holford-Strevens 2003:178).

³⁷ Cf. 10.1.46-51, 65 (*post Homerum tamen, quem ut Achillen semper excipi par est*). Quintilian's observation that not everything the best authors do is perfect does employ Homer as illustration, true, but only reluctantly: *Ciceroni dormire interim Demosthenes, Horatio uero etiam Homerus ipse uideatur* (10.1.24).

³⁸ I may be stretching this point: Quintilian rejects Homer's metaphor in prose, not in poetry, and in fact commends Virgil's own use of the phrase: *licet hoc Vergilius... speciosissime sit usus*. Nonetheless, my point stands, that Virgil is presented as exemplary in most situations, and as characterised by care and diligence, and Homer

his manifest scholarly care – his *scientia*, as the grammarian Pompeius put it when discussing another apparent solecism where Virgil’s authority trumps logical reasoning, or *intelligentia*, as the elder Pliny has it.³⁹ Since he is reliable and correct in the vast majority of cases, according to quantifiable and externally verifiable metrics (i.e. *ratio*), he is thus to be trusted in more difficult or ambiguous cases too, by virtue of his assured *auctoritas*.

Traces of this process are preserved throughout the *Institutio Oratoria*, as at 9.3.6, where Quintilian defends another apparent gender solecism of Virgil’s: *et ‘oculis capti talpae’ et ‘timidi dammae’ dicuntur a Vergilio, sed subest ratio, quia sexus uterque altero significatur* (‘Virgil says both *oculis capti talpae* and *timidi dammae*, but there is a reason for this, because both sexes are meant by the one word’).⁴⁰ Here, however, the solution is reached through *ratio*, not Virgil’s *a priori* authority. Virgil’s usage is defensible through scholarly logic, a testament to his reliability; it is his reliability that bestows *auctoritas*, such that his usage is itself a legitimate form of reasoning.⁴¹ Quintilian’s approach preserves a sort of snapshot of a transitional moment between Virgil’s earlier reception, when criticism of the poet was still viable, and later antiquity, in which many commentators succumb to blind adoration and the urge to defend him against all slurs.⁴²

Jerome’s Virgilian apologetics

Jerome, in the fourth century, also holds Virgil up as a model of careful and slow composition.⁴³ In defending his own slowness in writing, Jerome twice enlists Virgil’s own lengthy process of composition, as encapsulated in the by now proverbial metaphor of the bear and cubs, as support. Jerome was a pupil of Donatus;⁴⁴ he may have learned the anecdote directly from his

occasionally rejected, despite his merit being located in his ineffable genius. Quintilian’s keen sense of cross-cultural rivalry helps exaggerate the distinctions between the two.

³⁹ Pompeius 292.22-3, on *A.* 1.212 (*pars... secant*): *nefas est autem de isto tanto uiro credere per inperitiam hoc fecisse, non per scientiam adfectasse nouitatem*. Pompeius’ admission of Virgil’s *scientia* is remarkable: he is insistent that solecisms and barbarisms should not be admitted in verse (that is, as figures and metaplasms) unless absolutely unavoidable *metri necessitate* (283.37-284.1, *contra* Don. *gramm.* 4.394.23-4, Serv. 444.8-11), and only reluctantly endorses Virgil’s solecism (cf. Kaster 1988:151-2, Corbeill 2015:45-8). (But Corbeill 2015:21 also notes an unusual case 159.27-33, where Pompeius seems to assert that any Latin-speaker can choose a noun’s gender at will, *pro uoluntate*.)

⁴⁰ *G.* 1.183, *Ecl.* 8.28. The problem is that Virgil uses masculine adjectives (*capti, timidi*) for feminine nouns (*talpae, dammae*).

⁴¹ At times the hapless Quintilian can but confess his confusion, as at 1.6.2: poets often commit solecism in gender *metri necessitate*, except where there is no metrical constraint at all, and thus no reason. Cf. Corbeill 2015:47: ‘Quintilian cannot begin to form a basis for criticising it, let alone for understanding the poet’s intention. The practice remains ineffable.’

⁴² Cameron 2011:591-4, for example, proposes an ‘axiom of authorial infallibility’ attaching to Virgil in late antiquity; cf. Keeline 2013.

⁴³ On Jerome’s engagement with Latin literature, cf., e.g., Hagendahl 1958, Williams 2006, Vessey 2007, Pelttari 2014.

⁴⁴ *Contra Ruf.* 1.16: *puto quod puer legeris... commentarios... praeceptoris mei Donati... in Vergilium*.

teacher.⁴⁵ The brevity of his references to it, however, implies that it was widely known among those who would read his *Commentary* – a commonplace among (relatively) educated Romans, not a deeply learned reference.⁴⁶

The first of these citations comes in the preface to the third book of his commentary on the *Epistle to the Galatians*, in which he apologises for and explains his unstylish Latin prose: *uolumen hoc cudimus, non ignari imbecillitatis nostrae, et exilis ingenii riuulum, uix paruo strepentem murmure sentientes* ('I have hammered out this book, not unaware of my inadequacy, and feeling the stream of meagre talent rushing by with barely a little murmur', *PL* 26.483). Isolated from good Latin usage by geography and scholarly preoccupation, his language has been contaminated by 'the hissing sound of Hebrew' (*stridor lectionis Hebraicae sordidauit*, *PL* 26.485), and – worse – he cannot write by his own hand, owing to his bad eyesight and illness, and must instead rely on an impatient and reproachful scribe (*PL* 26.488).⁴⁷ He plaintively contrasts his own inability to edit his work to his satisfaction with Virgil's effort and diligence (*PL* 26.427):

nec labore et diligentia compensare queo eloqui tarditatem: quod de Vergilio quoque tradunt, quia libros suos in modum ursorum fetum lambendo figurauit.

I cannot make up for the slowness of my dictation by exerting more effort and diligence, as they say Virgil did when he shaped his books in the way bears do, shaping their offspring by licking them.

As usual in such self-castigating prefaces, however, Jerome's lamentations are disingenuous.⁴⁸ In the first instance, the contaminating influence of Hebrew in fact emphasises his mastery of the language and thus his authority as translator and commentator; his reliance, however reluctant, on an amanuensis forces him to dictate *ex tempore*, to be taken as evidence of his remarkable scholarly ability;⁴⁹ and his apparent condemnation of his own style is undermined by his portrayal of the deterioration of modern Christian prose in comparison with earlier

⁴⁵ Note that every one of Jerome's references to Virgilian biography is close to details given in the *VSD*, suggesting not merely familiarity but direct derivation: *Ad Olympiada* 177.3-4 < *VSD* 2; 180.2 < *VSD* 6; 181.4 < *VSD* 7; 187.1 < *VSD* 68; 189.2 < 19 (and cf. Catalepton 7, and Varius at *VSD* 37, 48); 190.3 < *VSD* 35-6; 190.4 < *VSD* 37, 40; and *Liber quaestionum Hebraicarum in Genesim praef.* (*PL* 23.983) < *VSD* 46. In the examples discussed here, note *tradunt* (*Comm. in Gal.* 3 *praef.*) and *traditum est* (*Comm. in Zach.* 3 *praef.*), with *VSD* 22 *traditur*.

⁴⁶ Cf. Wilson-Okamura 2010:101-3 on the anecdote's widespread use in the Renaissance.

⁴⁷ On the limitations of using an amanuensis, cf. Quintilian 10.3.19-21: scribes can be impatient, forcing one to dictate before properly prepared; and the act of composition is often accompanied by strange physical contortions and groans, which are embarrassing in company. Cf. Fulgentius's depiction of Virgil (85.14-16 Helm), who appears *quales uatum imagines esse solent... quiddam latranti intrinsecus tractatu submurmurant*. Relevant too are Encolpius' labour-pains as he delivers his poetry at Petronius *Sat.* 115; cf. Rimell 2002:80-1 (citing Don Fowler, sadly unpublished) and 130 n.22, Gowers 2016b:566.

⁴⁸ Cf. Williams 2006:207, Cain 2010:205 n.11. For similarly disingenuous prefaces apologising for lack of an editorial hand, see above on Statius' *Silvae*, and compare (in two very different genres) Apuleius *Met.* 1.1 (*rudis locutor*) and Tacitus *Agr.* 3.3 (*non tamen pigebit uel incondita ac rudi uoci... composuisse*).

⁴⁹ *statim dicto quodcumque in buccam uenerit*, 'I immediately dictate whatever comes into my mouth', *PL* 26.488. Williams 2006:207: 'Jerome claims that the polished Latin of this preface, with its striking images and elegant turns of phrase, is simply what rises to his lips unpremeditated'.

elegant simplicity, implicitly aligning his own writing with the unfashionable yet elegant style he endorses.⁵⁰ Indeed, Jerome complains elsewhere that the necessity of using a *notarius* prohibits him from editing his text: *quidquid hoc tumultuarii operis est... praesertim cum et notario, ut scitis, uelocissime dictauerim* ('whatever in this work is chaotic... especially since I dictated as quickly as possible to a secretary, as you know', *Chronicon praef.*). This claim of unedited and disorderly work is even more disingenuous than that in the commentary on *Galatians*: the *Chronicon* survives in two fifth-century manuscripts which are 'the very opposite of a *tumultuarium opus*', with complex patterns of layout, chronological tables, and annotations set out in geometrical forms, which seem to go back to Jerome's original.⁵¹ Jerome's knack of disingenuous apology is nothing if not audacious and well honed. In the preface to the *Galatians*, it simultaneously hails Virgil's slow revision as the best form of textual production and, more tacitly, valorises his own, supposedly scrappier work.

Twenty years later, Jerome employs the same anecdote in the preface to the third book of his commentary on *Zachariah*, again apologising for the state of his work, which he sends *incompta et impolita*. This time, it is not his health that precludes a polished piece but the tight deadline he must work towards (*PL* 25:1571). He complains that the work still needs the finishing authorial touch (*auctoris manu*), and is therefore lacking, not only in its overall disarray, but in the discordant sounds of the words themselves, with their gaping vowels and harsh consonants (*hiulca uocalibus... aspera consonantibus*). Jerome then explicitly invokes the anecdote representative of Virgil's editorial labour (*PL* 25:1571):

unde et de Virgilio traditum est, quod libros suos quasi ursorum fetus lingua composuerit, et lambendo fecerit esse meliores, qui durarent in memoriam sempiternam, et necessitatem metri libera oratione complerent.

Whence it is said of Virgil, too, that he composed his books like bears their offspring, with his tongue, and by licking improved them, so that they would last eternally in the memory of all – and so that they might fulfil the restrictions of metre, after first being composed as prose [lit. 'unconstrained speech'].

Where Jerome's first use of this anecdote implicitly valorised his own quasi-improvised work over Virgil's careful composition, this time the tacit self-praise rests on similarity to Virgil, not difference. True, Jerome explicitly points out that it is Virgil's painstaking diligence in revision that makes his poetry immortal (*qui durarent in memoriam sempiternam*; cf. Quintilian above); this is eminently not the case for his own work, which he says has received no revision at all. Rather, the likeness lies in the fact that both authors *would* have revised, if they could, but were prevented from doing so by external forces.

⁵⁰ *iam enim et in Ecclesiis ista quaeruntur: omisssaque apostolicorum simplicitate et puritate verborum* (*PL* 26.483).

⁵¹ Williams 2006:210; cf. Fotheringham 1905 for facsimiles of the manuscript.

Although Jerome refers to *libros* in the plural here (as in his earlier citation of this anecdote), this time he is quietly implying specific reference to the *Aeneid*, and thus to the legend of Virgil's premature death, which left the *Aeneid* unfinished. For one thing, his explanation of Virgil's slow poetic process ultimately refers, not without a touch of bathos, to Virgil's versifying of a previous prose sketch (*libera oratione*). His source for this is *VSD* 23, which refers to the *Aeneid*, not Virgil's other works. More persuasive is his use of the phrase *auctoris manus* – the 'final touches' that Jerome's work lacks. For a reader familiar with the *VSD* – as Jerome expected his audience to be – this phrase recalls the 'final touches' (*summa manus*, 35) that Virgil had intended to put to the *Aeneid*, before his premature death.⁵² Jerome's implication is that his authorial process has been cut short, not through his own fault (similarly to Virgil), and that, had he been able, he would have liked to revise his work – (similarly to Virgil). By claiming affinity with Virgil, he insinuates that, although his work is therefore not up to the standard he would otherwise have achieved, it is nonetheless (and despite his claims to the contrary) well written and deserves immortality. In both these instances, therefore, Jerome manipulates his relationship with Virgil in terms of their authorial methods in order to assert his own writerly merit, whether that entails distance or similarity.⁵³ Virgil provides a flexible model of literary and scholarly excellence, but the common factor remains his hard work and slow, diligent poetic revision.

Aulus Gellius, Virgil and the literary community

Jerome's self-defence – that he *would* have revised his work, had he been able to, and that it would then have reached great heights of literary and scholarly elegance – rests on the privileged position held by Virgil in late antique literary culture: he can be sure of his correspondents' high opinion of the poet. Earlier sources, though, advance more critical denunciations of Virgil's writing methods and poetry. Towards the end of Aulus Gellius' *Noctes Atticae*, Favorinus, the man of letters favoured by Gellius as a figure of importance and

⁵² Cf. Ovid *Tr.* 1.7.28 *summam... manum*, 3.14.22 *summa... manu* (and 2.555 *manus ultima*): these, again, refer to the legend of Virgil's premature death and unfinished manuscript. Cf., e.g., Krevans 2010, Laird 2016 – and note that Ovid's chief concern for the *Metamorphoses*, however unfinished the poem is, is that it ensure his immortality (*Tr.* 1.7.25-6; cf. Daedalus at *Met.* 8.200). (The phrase recurs at Petronius *Sat.* 118.6, on Eumolpus' mock-epic.) On the association of authorial activity and imminent/ recent death, cf. (e.g.) Connors 1994 (the "textualisation of death", 227), Edwards 2007:142 and *passim*, Butler 2002:1-2, 124n4; in ancient texts, cf. esp. Plato *Phaedo* (and Cicero's use of it in his dialogues), Tac. *Ann.* 15.60-4, 16.18-19, Suet. *Nero* 49.1 (*qualis artifex pereo!*). I explore the conjunction between death and authorship in Fulgentius' depiction of Virgil in the *Expositio Virgilianae Continentiae* in Kearey (forthcoming).

⁵³ Jerome elsewhere enlists Horace's poetics of *labor* (e.g. *Ep.* 53.6): cf. Vessey 2007, Pelttari 2014:16. In Jerome's theology, *labor* is unending, but virtuous.

authority,⁵⁴ holds forth on Virgil’s description of Mount Aetna (*A.* 3.570-7). He considers it not only derivative of Pindar’s superior description (*Pyth.* 1.21-6) but in itself confused, clumsy, and cacophonous.⁵⁵ Favorinus’ criticism is hyperbolic – he finds Virgil’s description ‘the most monstrous of all monstrous things’ (*omnium, quae monstra dicuntur, monstruosissimum est, NA* 17.10.19) – yet it is not undertaken for the mere iconoclastic thrill of it.⁵⁶ He offers a dodge, a forgiving explanation: the passage’s faults, as with other portions of the *Aeneid* that fall short of Virgil’s usually elevated poetic style, are due to the unfinished nature of the poem.⁵⁷ The unsatisfactory passage is not to be ascribed to any fault in Virgil’s poetic taste or talent, but to his otherwise admirable habit of lengthy and painstaking revision, in this case cut short (*NA* 17.10.2-7):

‘amici,’ inquit, ‘familiaresque P. Vergilii in iis, quae de ingenio moribusque eius memoriae tradiderunt, dicere eum solitum ferunt parere se uersus more atque rite ursino. namque ut illa bestia fetum ederet ineffigiatum informemque lambendoque id postea, quod ita edidisset, conformaret et fingeret, proinde ingenii quoque sui partus recentes rudi esse facie et imperfecta, sed deinceps tractando colendoque reddere iis se oris et uultus lineamenta. hoc uirum iudicii subtilissimi ingenue atque uere dixisse, res,’ inquit, ‘indicium facit. nam quae reliquit perfecta expolitaque quibusque imposuit census atque dilectus sui supremam manum, omni poeticae uenustatis laude florent; sed quae procrastinata sunt ab eo, ut post recenserentur, et absolui, quoniam mors praeuertaret, nequiuerunt, nequaquam poetarum elegantissimi nomine atque iudicio digna sunt. Itaque cum morbo obpressus aduentare mortem uiderat, petiuit orauitque a suis amicissimis inpense, ut Aeneida, quam nondum satis elimauisset, adolerent.

‘Virgil’s friends and intimates’, [Favorinus] said, ‘in the accounts they have passed down about his talent and his character, tell us that he used to say that he ‘bore’ verses after the manner and fashion of a bear. For he said that, just like that animal brought forth its offspring formless and misshapen, and afterwards formed it and shaped it by licking, so too the freshly-born products of his mind were clumsy in form and unfinished, but then by working them over and polishing them he gave them a definite form and expression. That this was actually and truly said by that man of the most exquisite taste,’ he said, ‘is proved by the result. For the parts that he left perfected and polished, to which his judgment and approval had given the final touches [*suprema manus*], enjoy the highest praise for poetical beauty; but the parts which he postponed, intending to come back to them later, but was unable to finish because he

⁵⁴ On Favorinus, a strikingly unusual and vividly drawn figure, cf. Holford-Strevens 2003:98-131, Gunderson 2009:167-74, Keulen 2009 *passim*.

⁵⁵ *Vergilius... confudit* (17.10.12); *crasse et inmodice* (17.10.14); *duriter et ἀκόπως* (17.10.15). Cf. 17.10.8: *Pindaro quoque ipso, qui nimis opima pinguique esse facundia existimatus est, insolentior hoc quidem in loco tumidiorque [est]*.

⁵⁶ Indeed, Gellius elsewhere depicts Favorinus as reluctant to criticise Virgil, substituting the vagaries of textual transmission as culprit instead. Thus at 1.21.4, on *G.* 2.246-7: *quod sanctissimum iusiurandum habitum est, paratus ego iurare sum Vergilium hoc numquam scripsisse*. Probus, on the other hand, criticises Virgil directly at *NA* 9.9.12-17 (though note that elsewhere in the commentary tradition Probus’ opinions are never endorsed, but merely reported: *A.* 1.441, 5.871 and 6 *praef.*, 7.773, 8.406, 10.539; *DServ.*: *G.* 1.277, *A.* 1.21, 1.44, 4.418, 10.303, 11.830, 12.605).

⁵⁷ *in his autem... quae uidentur retractari et corrigi debuisse, is maxime locus est qui de monte Aetna factus est* (17.10.8); *Vergilii uersus, quos inchoasse eum uerius dixerim quam fecisse* (17.10.10). Cf., for similar phrasing, Suetonius’ report of Pollio’s assessment of Caesar’s writings: *existimat... rescripturum et correcturum fuisse* (Suet. *Iul.* 56.4).

was overtaken by death, are in no way worthy of the fame and taste of the most elegant of poets. For that reason, when he was felled by disease and saw that death was near, he earnestly begged and implored his closest friends to burn the *Aeneid*, which he had not yet sufficiently revised.⁵⁸

This is not a new sentiment: the strategy of exculpating Virgil for any perceived faults in the *Aeneid* by pointing instead to its unfinished state – and thereby granting oneself, not incidentally, licence to ‘restore’ the text to how Virgil ‘would have’ had it – apparently dates back to the first few years after Virgil’s death. Gellius reports three instances where Hyginus, Palatine librarian under Augustus and (in Gellius’ eyes) *non hercle ignobilis grammaticus* (‘far more, by god, than a common grammarian’),⁵⁹ comments on the text of Virgil in this vein;⁶⁰ and of course the biographies record Virgil’s deathbed struggle with Augustus and with Varius over his posthumous authorial rights regarding possible changes made to the poem (e.g. *VSD* 39-42).⁶¹

Yet Gellius – or Favorinus – is unique in the extent to which he dwells on the faults of the *Aeneid* as left by Virgil, and hence on the *necessity* of Virgil’s lengthy process of self-revision – that is, as opposed to this authorial trait being morally virtuous but practically somewhat redundant, since even the first draft of such a great man would have been something approaching perfect anyway (viz. Quintilian and Jerome).⁶² The *VSD* is the only other source to adduce examples of what Virgil would have (or should have) revised, in the form of those things either left as Virgil left them or supposedly altered by Varius and Tucca: the hemistichs (41), the structure of the books (42). Yet all of these examples are merely structural, a matter

⁵⁸ It is possible that Jerome draws in part from this passage of Gellius: note the application of the bear simile to the *Aeneid* instead of to Virgil’s other works, the connection of Virgil’s slowness of composition to his premature death, and the similar phrases *auctoris manus* (Jerome *Comm. in Zach. 3 praef.*) and *supremam manum* (*NA* 17.10.5). Despite this, his chief source is undoubtedly the *VSD*. Gellius wrote roughly contemporaneously with or a little after Suetonius; his anecdote could be derived from that in the *VSD*, but it seems more likely to me that they both stemmed from a common source.

⁵⁹ *NA* 1.21.2. Keulen 2009:78 n.31 considers this ironic; I think it a genuine compliment here, given that not only *docti quidam etiam uiri* but the esteemed Favorinus too agrees with Hyginus; Gellius also quotes Hyginus at length at 10.16.1-18 with no hint of disagreement. Gellius’ other assessment of Hyginus as *nimis hercle ineptus* (*NA* 7.6.5) is qualified by the particular circumstances of Hyginus’ ineptitude in one instance, rather than a complete character assessment.

⁶⁰ *reprehendit Hyginus Vergilium correcturumque eum fuisse existimat* (*NA* 10.16.1 on *A.6.365*, Funaioli 530), *correcturum fuisse Vergilium putat, nisi mori occupasset* (*NA* 10.16.11 on *A.6.122* and 617, Funaioli 531), *quem Vergilius procul dubio exempturus... fuit* (*NA* 10.16.18 on *A.6.838-40*, Funaioli 532). On Hyginus: Zetzl 1981:31-6.

⁶¹ Interestingly, however, the commentaries and *Vitae* only *accept* changes made to the text by Virgil himself (*VSD* 34, *Serv. ad A. praef.*, 1.560, 1.565, 4.348, 5.626, 9.36, *ad G.1.6*, 2.224), or by Varius and Tucca (*VSD* 40-2; *Vit. Seru.* at *VVA* 149-57; *Serv. ad* (e.g.) *A. 4.436*, 5.871, 6 *praef.*, 7.7.464). Other supposed inadequacies of the text are marked with phrases like *non dubium est emendaturum fuisse Vergilium* (*Serv. ad A.5.626* on the *insolubilia*) or *Vergilius... in emendando carmine fuerat repleturus* (*Serv. ad A.1.560* on the *hemistichia*), but not ‘corrected’ – yet none of Varius’ and Tucca’s changes are flagged up in this way and explicitly asserted to be a fulfillment of the author’s intentions. On the anecdotes of Virgil’s early death, cf. further Farrell 2010, Krevans 2010, Ziogas 2015, Laird 2016, Powell 2017; I discuss Virgil’s relationship with Augustus towards the end of this chapter.

⁶² Jerome ostensibly plays into this in *Comm. ad Zach. 3 praef.*, but his overarching rhetorical purpose is to emphasise the greatness of both the *Aeneid* and his own work, despite their ostensibly unfinished states; his position on the *Aeneid*’s quality is more positive than Gellius’ here.

of rearranging passages and books, or removing self-contained passages (the *ille ego* proem, *VSD* 42), or filling in hemistichs, mostly superfluously.⁶³ Favorinus puts forward a more biting account: that the stage of revision Virgil had reached at the time of his death, three years before he had intended to complete the *Aeneid* (*VSD* 35), still included passages ‘in no way worthy of the fame and taste of that most refined of poets’ (*nequaquam poetarum elegantissimi nomine atque iudicio digna sunt*, 17.10.6).

This is unusual. Even Quintilian’s emphasis on Virgil’s human nature, as opposed to divinely inspired vatic talent, does not reach this far. The popular anecdote of Virgil’s desire to have the unfinished *Aeneid* destroyed tells us less about ancient ideas of just how complete or incomplete the poem was than about ideas of Virgil’s own perfectionism; indeed, that anecdote appears most often in contexts praising the manuscripts’ saviour(s) for its preservation, not decrying the imperfections still found in the text.⁶⁴ And Servius’ commentaries on Virgil repeatedly defend the text from accusations of poetic or linguistic flaws, refuting others’ criticisms and frequently excoriating them for lack of critical nous: *nescientes, culpare, frustra, non respicientes*.⁶⁵

Gellius’ focus on the necessity of revision and the deeply inferior quality of Virgil’s first draft emphasises the textuality of the poet’s methods of composition – a feature present in the other testimonies, if to a lesser extent. Gellius’ Virgil not only writes his own manuscripts, but corrects them.⁶⁶ He engages closely and imitatively with source texts, rather than mimetically, observing reality: where Virgil relies on the text of Pindar, ‘Pindar has more closely followed the truth and given a realistic description of what actually happened there, and what he saw with his own eyes’ (17.10.11).⁶⁷ It is hard to imagine Gellius’ Virgil giving recitations, let alone improvising his poetry *ex tempore*:⁶⁸ indeed, Gellius’ focus on Virgil’s own hand in his manuscripts erases the very possibility of a scribe or amanuensis. Virgil’s own poetry maintains the conceit that it is a sung performance; it erases most traces of literary labour, and subsumes

⁶³ As the *VSD* comments (41), only one hemistich leaves the text incomplete in syntax and sense, and even that has been argued to be intended for dramatic effect, as Andromache breaks off in emotion over the death of her son: *quid puer Ascanius? superatne et uescitur aura? quem tibi iam Troia...* (*Aen.* 3.339-40). I discuss Virgil’s half-lines at greater length in the next chapter (68-72).

⁶⁴ *VSD* 35-42, Pliny *HN* 7.114, Macrobius *Sat.* 1.24.6, *Anth. Lat.* 242 and 672 Riese, elsewhere throughout the biographical tradition, and implicitly as early as Ovid (*Tr.* 1.1.117-22, 1.7.15-26, 3.14.19-24). Cf. Jocelyn 1990, Horsfall 1995b:22n139, Lowrie 2004, Krevans 2010, Farrell 2010, Laird 2016.

⁶⁵ Keeline 2013:69. Cf. Goold 1970:134-40, Kaster 1988:190-2. This strategy of using criticism as a foil for praise is dramatised in Macrobius, with the critical Evangelus a straw man to prompt other characters’ virtuous arguments (*Sat.* 1.24 and *passim*).

⁶⁶ *NA* 1.21.2, 2.3.5, 9.14.7, 13.21.4 (*librum manu ipsius correctum legi*). Cf. Pliny *HN* 13.83, Quint. *Inst.* 1.7.20.

⁶⁷ *Pindarus, ueritati magis obsecutus, id dixit quod res erat quodque istic usu ueniebat quodque oculis uidebatur.*

⁶⁸ Gellius’ Virgil possibly recites at 6.20.1: *uersus istos [G. 2.244-5] a Vergilio ita primum esse recitados atque editos*). Gellius is dubious: *ea res uerane an falsa sit, non laboro*; and in any case this recitation is premature, since Virgil is apparently then compelled to revise his text (*poetam... nomen urbis eorum, quasi ex hominum memoria, sic ex carmine suo derasisse*, 1).

the authorial voice into a pose of spontaneous vatic inspiration: *cano, canam, cecini...*⁶⁹ Gellius, by contrast, reveals the *writer* behind the vatic persona.⁷⁰

In fact, Gellius creates Virgil in his own image: a bookish antiquarian. Although he toys with the conceit of orality – emphasising the conversational setting throughout this anecdote, as Favorinus introduces the passages he discusses with *quantulum est mihi memoriae* and *audite nunc* (‘as far as I can remember’, ‘now, listen’, 17.10.9-10) – there is little doubt that his work is textual through and through. Erik Gunderson explores the entanglements of Gellius’ antiquarian textuality: ‘Gellius writes Gellius reading. The face of Gellius peeks out at us as he turns his gaze away from the book he has been reading in order to contemplate the scene before his eyes. The problem here, though, is that the book he is reading is also the book he is writing; it is as well the book we are reading. And when he stares out to contemplate the scene before him, it is not so much “us” that he is looking at as a textual community he espies, a community that he will shortly pen into the further pages of his book-of-life, the *Noctes*.’⁷¹ Gellius’ Virgil, his books open before him and his hand to the page, is welcomed into Gellius’ literary community as one of their own.⁷²

Metaphors of authorship

It is intriguing that two sources, the *VSD* and Gellius, explicitly attribute the simile of the bear to Virgil’s own speech. This move shifts the vivid image of poetic production from the narrator of the anecdote – the biographer, or Gellius and Favorinus – to Virgil himself. The *VSD* reports that Virgil commented on his authorial methods with this simile (*dicens*, 22); Gellius, too, tells us that the *amici familiaresque Vergilii* whom he has read (or, rather, whom Favorinus has read) report it as something of a habitual remark on Virgil’s part: *dicere... solitum* (17.10.2). Indeed, it is tempting to link Gellius’ *amici familiaresque* to Quintilian’s citation of Varius (10.3.8), and speculate that a common source of these two accounts expressly situated this ‘quotation’

⁶⁹ I discuss this matter at further length in the next chapter. For *canere* in authorial voice, in prefaces, epilogues, and apostrophes, see *Ecl.* 4.1, 4.3, 6.3, 6.9, 10.8, 10.70; *G.* 1.5, 1.12, 2.2, 2.176, 3.1, 4.119, 4.559, 4.566; *A.* 1.1, 9.525. Cf. Butler 2011:21 (cf. p.5). Volk 1997 makes a case for ‘poetic simultaneity’ in the *Georgics*: the pretence that ‘the poem comes into being only as it evolves before the reader’s eyes, that the poet/persona, as he is speaking, is actually just in the process of composing the work, so that the poem’s gradual unfolding really equals its own genesis’ (289).

⁷⁰ Late antique depictions of Virgil emphasise the physical accoutrements of writing. Fulgentius, for example, describes Virgil’s ghost as appearing *quales uatum imagines esse solent, dum adsumptis ad opus conficiendum tabulis* (85.14-15 Helm); the *Vergilius Romanus* (Cod. Vat. Lat. 3867), an illustrated fifth- or sixth-century manuscript of Virgil’s works, depicts the author equipped with both lectern and tablets (fol. 3v, 9r, 14r; note that these half-page illustrations are found in *Ecl.* 2, 4 and 6, all associated strongly with Virgil’s autobiographical voice in antiquity). Cf. Wright 1992 and 2001 for reproductions and discussion; the manuscript is now available to view online, too, at https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.lat.3867 [accessed 28/09/17].

⁷¹ Gunderson 2009:197-8.

⁷² I explore these dynamics of oral performance versus material textuality at greater length in the following chapter.

of Virgil in the context of the teasing, allusive repartee of his circle of literary, scholarly and personal acquaintances⁷³ – or even that it did in fact derive from an account written by Varius – but I will not push such speculation too far.

What we *can* say with certainty, however, is that the *VSD* records only three instances of casual speech attributed to Virgil – as opposed to quotations from his poetry, whether genuine or spurious⁷⁴ – and that all three of these take the form of similes or comparisons, employed as comments on his methods of composition. Besides the mother bear at *VSD* 22, we find an architectural image at *VSD* 24:

ac ne quid impetum moraretur, quaedam imperfecta transmisit, alia leuissimis
uersibus ueluti fulsit, quos per iocum pro tibicinibus interpoli aiebat ad sustinendum
opus, donec solidae columnae aduenirent.

So that nothing would impede his momentum, he would let some things go unfinished; others he propped up, as it were, with inconsequential verses, which he said as a joke were put there as struts, to hold up the work until the solid columns arrived.

And at *VSD* 46, a reference to mythology:⁷⁵

Asconius Pedianus libro, quem contra obtrectatores Vergilii scripsit, pauca admodum obiecta ei proponit, eaque circa historiam fere et quod peraque ab Homero sumpsisset; sed hoc ipsum crimen sic defendere assuetum ait: ‘cur non illi quoque eadem furta temptarent? uerum intellecturos facilius esse Herculi clauam quam Homero uersum surripere.’ et tamen destinasse secedere, ut omnia ad satietatem maleuolorum decideret.

Asconius Pedianus, in the book which he wrote to rebut Virgil’s detractors, set forth a few of their objections, especially concerning his plot and the fact that he took much of it from Homer; but he says that Virgil used to defend this very crime as follows: ‘Why is it that they, too, do not try out the same thefts? Indeed, they will find that it is easier to steal the club of Hercules than a line from Homer.’ Still, says Asconius, he decided to retire, in order to trim everything to the satisfaction of his ill-wishers.

There is something interesting going on here. In the *VSD*, when Virgil speaks, he speaks either in verse or *about* poetry (22, 24, 46) – and the latter in figured speech. This oddity has thus far escaped scholarly attention; while each passage has been amply discussed on an individual

⁷³ On Virgil’s literary circles, cf. Horace *Sat.* 1.6.40, 54-5, 1.10.44-5, 81, *Ep.* 2.1.247, *AP* 55, *Carm.* 1.3, 4.12; Virgil *Ecl.* 9.35; Philodemus *On Flattery* (*Pap. Herc. Paris* 2.22-3; fragmentarily at 1082, 253). Notably, the pseudepigraphic *Catalepton* dramatises Virgil’s friendships by impersonating poetry in Virgil’s voice: *Cat.* 1.1, 6.6, 7.1, 9, 11.1 (with Peirano 2012a:79-116). Cf. the humanistic *Donatus Auctus* on Virgil’s friendliness (Ziolkowski and Putnam 2008:351).

⁷⁴ Pseudepigraphic: epigram on Ballista (*VSD* 17), final distich of the *Culex* (*VSD* 18), *Aen.* 6.883 (*VSD* 32), *Aen.* 6.164-5 (*VSD* 34), epitaph (*VSD* 36), proem to the *Aeneid* (*VSD* 42). On the poetic quotations, cf. Laird 2017:34-6.

⁷⁵ Cf. Macrobius *Sat.* 5.3.16: Avienus comments *tria haec ex aequo impossibilia putentur, uel Ioui fulmen uel Herculi clauam uel uersum Homero subtrahere*; McGill 2012:204-7. The anecdote appears in Jerome (*Quaest. Heb. in Gen. praef.*, PL 23.935) and Isidore (*Etym.* 10.44), too, both of whom expressly attribute it to Virgil (Jerome: *quibus ille respondit*; Isidore: *ille respondit*).

basis, all three have not yet been considered together as a distinct group of ‘quotations’ within the *VSD*.

The insistence on the figured nature of Virgil’s speech, and the restriction of his non-poetic utterances to comments on poetry, is intriguing. It is evocative of the *topos* in ancient literature of poets as riddle-tellers, their native idiom a form of speech which obscures plainer meaning:⁷⁶ of course Virgil expresses himself in similes and metaphors, since that is how a poet must speak! In this context, too, the repeated, habitual, almost scripted nature of Virgil’s speech (*dicens*, *VSD* 22; *aiebat*, *VSD* 24; *dicere eum solitum*, *NA* 17.10.2) serves to differentiate it from the speech of a lesser mortal. Just as Virgil’s poetry will be performed and re-performed, mined for aphorisms and generalised for universal moral purposes, so too his conversational speech resounds, already poeticised and memorable, ready to be disseminated as pearls of wisdom. Virgil’s vatic quality, in the eyes of his biographers, encompasses not only his canonical poetic works but all his casual utterances too.

What’s more, this particular trio of ancient biographical reports of Virgil’s authorial self-characterisation provides evidence for surprisingly wide-ranging and sophisticated metapoetic modes of reading in antiquity. There can be no doubt that ancient authors used an enormous range of metapoetic figures in their work to indicate individual poetic manifestos, generic affiliation, self-representation, and so forth. A greater stumbling block for many scholars, however, is the question of how receptive ancient audiences were to metapoetic structures; in this, as in much else, ancient literary criticism seems to lag far behind the complexity we perceive in ancient literature ourselves. Proponents of systems of self-conscious intertextuality and allusion in ancient literature, for example, are troubled by the apparently reductive accusations of plagiarism that we find in ancient scholarly sources like the Gellius passage discussed above.⁷⁷ Champions of sophisticated and multivalent allegorical signifying in ancient epic come up hard against such apparently simplistic ancient readings as Servius’ insistence that *Ecl.* 9 is solely, and wholly, about Virgil’s own experiences in the land confiscations.⁷⁸

Increasingly, however, modern assessments of ancient literary criticism are beginning to take into account the different norms of scholarly expression in antiquity as compared to today. In particular, a high degree of creative engagement between forms of ancient reception and

⁷⁶ I am thinking especially of the biographical anecdote of Homer and the boys’ riddle about the lice, in which the poet’s waning faculties as he approaches death seem to reach their nadir in his incomprehension of this form of figured speech (Heraclitus fr. 56 DK). Conversely, while a bard is alive, he creates and comprehends riddles. Poets as riddlers, of course, pervade ancient literature; in Virgil’s own works, the Sibylline *Ecl.* 4, the journey into the underworld in *Aen.* 6, and (not least) his own fondness for wordplay and riddles (cf., e.g., Kronenberg forthcoming), guarantee his own reception as a prophet or magician (cf. Comparetti 1895). See, too, the next chapter, on the significance of speech in Virgil’s ancient reception.

⁷⁷ Though cf. McGill 2012 for more extensive discussion of ancient plagiarism accusations.

⁷⁸ Later chapters in this dissertation address the problem of biographical allegory in more detail. Servius’ stance is rather more complex than I imply here.

their poetic source texts has come to light.⁷⁹ Thus, for example, the idea that the *VSD*'s report of Virgil's ineptitude at oratory takes its inspiration from the dumbstruck would-be orator at *G.* 2.508, or that the *Culex* supplements Virgil's warning at *G.* 3.425-39 against lying in the grass when snakes are about, rests on precisely that level of creative allusion.⁸⁰ I propose to extend this approach to the three similes attributed to Virgil, considering them as serious metapoetic statements about Virgil's work. They each reflect a complex dance of what we might call 'impersonated self-reflexivity', whereby strategies of reading are attributed to the author's own stated intentions.⁸¹ Their attribution to Virgil encourages the reader to correlate each of these reported similes with other metapoetic comments familiar from Virgil's poetry.

Temples of poetry

The most straightforward example of this, among the three anecdotes, lies in *VSD* 24, in which Virgil supposedly compares his use of unfinished and temporary passages to that of a builder who uses temporary struts (*tibicines*) in place of permanent stonework (*solidae columnae*), putting them in place to shore up his construction before filling in the gaps and replacing them. In the context of the *VSD*, which precedes a commentary frequently concerned with the textual problems of Virgil's works, this slow and piecemeal compositional technique helps explain to dubious readers why the *Aeneid* was left apparently unfinished at the time of Virgil's premature death (*VSD* 35-41); it indicates why certain features, such as the half-lines in the poem or the abrupt and unsettling end of Book 12, still remained in an otherwise polished epic. But the image itself speaks to more than this alone. In this anecdote, Virgil figures the act of writing poetry as architecture. This is a direct inversion of a more common metapoetic image, where a poetic description of architecture (or nearly any manual or artistic craft) seems to comment on or encode an act of poetic composition. Indeed, one of Virgil's most explicit metapoetic statements in his oeuvre comes in the form of a sprawling architectural metaphor: *templum de marmore ponam* ('I will place there a marble temple'), he tells us at the opening of Book 3 of

⁷⁹ Cf., e.g., Graziosi 2002, Powell 2011, Peirano 2012a and 2012b.

⁸⁰ Peirano 2012a:10: 'Creative supplements... treat authors and their lives as textual entities whose gaps can be productively filled with new texts. There are in fact good reasons to regard poets' biographies as such texts.' I would add that the *Georgics* appears so often as a prompt for this sort of biographical construction for two specific reasons: firstly, this poem identifies its narrator as the author of the *Eclogues* (4.559-66) and *Aeneid* (3.1-48); secondly, it has a consistent and coherent narrative voice that often drifts tantalisingly close to the individual or personal, while remaining within the bounds of the conventional didactic persona. Cf. Volk 2002:139-48.

⁸¹ Cf. Greenblatt 1980:3 on the dynamics of literary (self-)fashioning: 'Self-fashioning derives its interest precisely from the fact that it functions without regard for a sharp distinction between literature and social life. It invariably crosses the boundaries between the creation of literary characters, the shaping of one's own identity, the experience of being molded by forces outside one's control, the attempt to fashion other selves.'

the *Georgics*, himself the architect (13) and sculptor (26-39), substituting the temple for a poem in praise of Augustus (*dicere pugnas | Caesaris*, ‘telling of Caesar’s battles’, 46-7).

I am not suggesting that *VSD* 24 originates *directly* with *G.* 3.1-48. Architecture or construction as a metaphor for poetic composition is too common a figure in antiquity;⁸² there is no obvious verbal link between the passages. But for readers of the *Georgics* already familiar with the *VSD*’s biography of Virgil, a paratextual supplement to the poems,⁸³ the consonance between the two passages informs and enriches the interpretation of both. For one thing, knowledge of *VSD* 24 ‘verifies’ the metapoetic interpretation of *G.* 3.1-48: if Virgil is known to characterise his composition as architecture, then his temple is more readily understood as standing allegorically for a poetic work, not (just) a literal building.⁸⁴ For another, the detailed description of building work found in *VSD* 24, carried over to the *Georgics*, satisfyingly fleshes out the actual writing process: where the narrator skims over the process of construction (*templum... ponam*, *G.* 3.13; *Caesar erit*, 16; *dona feram*, 22; etc), the reader of the *VSD* can adduce the struts and scaffolding of the simile, and so imagine the narrator of the *Georgics* as a careful and hardworking craftsman as well as an inspired vatic panegyricist to the emperor. And finally, the temple of the *Georgics* lends a borrowed glamour to the unidentified building of *VSD* 24 that is the unfinished *Aeneid* (*VSD* 23-4). Had Virgil lived long enough to replace all the poem’s *tibicines* with *solidae columnae*, the reader might imagine, the *Aeneid* would truly fit the *Georgics*’ lush description of Virgil’s extravagant epic temple, all gold and purple, marble and ivory, with no traces of earlier poetic scaffolding left behind.⁸⁵

In fact, *VSD* 24 develops a wider motif of architectural metapoetry in Virgil. The idea of a half-constructed building left in disarray – well suited to ancient evaluations of the *Aeneid* as a whole⁸⁶ – perhaps owes something to Virgil’s next temple, too, the temple to Juno in *Aeneid* 1

⁸² Cf. Ps-Longinus 2.2 and Arist. *Rhet.* 1415a13 for this same figure in a non-Virgilian context, and Aristophanes and Callimachus above (27). An argument could be made for architectural metapoetry at *A.* 9.446-9, too: Rome, the *domus Aeneae* established on the *Capitoli immobile saxum* (448), serves as the equivalent of Horace’s *monumentum aere perennius* (*Carm.* 3.30.1), a guarantee for the length of the *Aeneid*’s survival (or, more pessimistically, bound to come to ruin itself).

⁸³ The *VSD* was placed prior to Donatus’ commentary discussion of the poems. Biographies of the author still precede the text in most editions and translations of classical authors’ works today.

⁸⁴ In Tacitus’ *Dialogus* the character Aper repeatedly characterises rhetoric, in strongly Virgilian terms, as a beautifully constructed temple (20.6-7, 22.4) – evidence for this metapoetic reading already in the late 1st century CE?

⁸⁵ Does *G.* 3.1-48 actually refer to the *Aeneid*? Virgil constructs the image of a career spanning the *Eclogues* and *Georgics* at *G.* 4.559-66, as well as suggesting future epic endeavours at *G.* 3.1-48, and so the tripartite Virgilian career perhaps existed in embryonic form by 29-7 BCE – but cf. Volk 2002:148-56, who argues that a view of *G.* 3.1-48 as signalling a deferred epic project *identical* to the *Aeneid* is solely a function of reception, resting on a post-Virgilian (i.e. post-*Aeneid*) perspective (150 n.41). My reading of *VSD* 24 may illustrate when and how this identification of *G.* 3.1-48 with the *Aeneid* came about.

⁸⁶ As expressed in Gellius *NA* 17.10.2-7, for example (pp. 38-43 above). Gowers 2014 puts it well: ‘Rumours that [Virgil’s] masterpiece the *Aeneid* was unpolished at his death are hardly surprising: the poem draws unnatural attention to unbuilt cities and artworks, continuity errors, plot derailments, geographical shifts, unfinished erotic business, notorious dangling half-lines which reduce a temple of song to already ruined choirs, and above all the unfulfilled promise, made in the *Georgics*, that he would one day write an epic with the Emperor Augustus at its centre.’ Cf., too, O’Hara 2010.

that is Aeneas' introduction to Carthage and Dido (1.446-93). Like the temple, Carthage is half-built; immediately before this passage, Virgil lavishly describes the city's construction (418-40), including the *immanis... columnas* hewn out of the cliffs (cf. the *VSD*'s *solidae columnae*), and when Dido plunges fatally into love for Aeneas, work ceases entirely on both the city and the temple (*non coeptae adsurgunt turre... pendent opera interrupta*, 4.86-9).⁸⁷ Once inside the temple, Aeneas views the pictures on the temple walls 'in order', *ex ordine* (456) – a notoriously misleading phrase, since these *Iliacas... pugnas* hardly follow the Iliadic order.⁸⁸ Immediately before the architectural simile, the *VSD* has Virgil 'taking up nothing in order', *nihil in ordinem arripiens* (*VSD* 23); the simile illustrates this haphazard approach. In modern scholarship, the ecphrasis of Juno's temple is often read productively as an image for the *Aeneid* as a whole, reflecting several of its poetic characteristics: Homeric reception, self-conscious secondariness, violence, elegiac undertones, and so on.⁸⁹ If Virgil's ancient readers, too, saw his craftsmanship of the *Aeneid* reflected not only in the promised 'epic' temple of *G.* 3.1-48 but the Carthaginians' temple to Juno, as yet unfinished but still capable of producing devastating emotional and aesthetic responses in its viewers (*Aen.* 1.459-65, 485, 494-5), the attribution of the anecdote in *VSD* 24 to Virgil himself would shore up their metapoetic readings of the *Georgics* and *Aeneid*.

Monstrous thievery and the poetics of cattle-rustling

Turning to *VSD* 46, the report of Virgil's comments on Homeric borrowing, we again find promising links to Virgil's own works. The simile compares literary plagiarism of Homer to the theft of Hercules' club, on the premise that neither can possibly succeed.⁹⁰ Homer's lines, like Hercules' familiar prop, are so closely associated with their author-owner that they cannot

⁸⁷ Even Dido's sentences are half-finished (*incipit effari, mediaque in uoce restitit*, 76), reinforcing the perpetual parallels between the person of Dido and her city (e.g., *animum labantem*, 22; cf. 47-8, 667-71). Aeneas, eager for city-foundation, later seems to take over from Dido as director of urban development at 260: *Aenean fundantem arces ac tecta nouantem*.

⁸⁸ Cf., e.g., Lowenstam 1993, Kirichenko 2013.

⁸⁹ Cf. especially Bartsch 1998, exploring the *Aeneid*'s relationship to the artworks depicted within the poem. Barchiesi 1997 sees Virgilian ecphrases as *praeteritio* rather than *mise en abyme*, gesturing towards the business the *Aeneid* doesn't overtly include.

⁹⁰ If Hercules' club is ever removed from him in ancient literature, it is always either temporary and played for laughs (e.g. by the Cercopes), temporary and voluntary (e.g. in the Omphale episode) or under extreme circumstances, with Hercules weakened and distraught (e.g. after killing his family). Each of these myths of (attempted) club-stealing holds metapoetic value. Propertius emphasises language of thievery (note *fur, furtum*: 4.9.8, 13-14), but Seneca gets the most metapoetic mileage out of his 'thievery' of *Hercules Furens* from Euripides' *Heracles* (cf. especially *Her. F.* 1153-5, 1229-36). The Cercopes – monstrous, uncannily quasi-human, given to acts of thievery – are comic counterparts to Virgil's tragic Cacus: where Cacus steals Hercules' cattle and dies horribly as punishment, the Cercopes' theft of Hercules' accoutrements is interrupted, and they joke their way out of a worse fate. Connors 2004:184-9 connects their monkey-like nature to ancient discourses of imitation and plagiarism (cf. English 'to ape'). On the Cercopes generally, cf. Kirkpatrick and Dunn 2002, Connors 2004:184-9, Rosen 2007:57-66.

flourish when rehomed in an alien context.⁹¹ Since Virgil's lines *do* flourish, according to the logic of the anecdote, there can have been no theft at all. Virgil's techniques of allusion and imitation do not qualify as stale second-hand *furta*, but rather an entirely new creative endeavour.

Other versions of the anecdote take a slightly different slant on the problem of Virgil's closeness to Homer. Macrobius (or the speaking character Avienus) devotes a lengthy passage to the problem (*Sat.* 5.3.16):

quia cum tria haec ex aequo impossibilia putentur uel Iovi fulmen uel Herculi clauam uel uersum Homero subtrahere, quod etsi fieri possent, alium tamen nullum deceret uel fulmen praeter Iovem iacere, uel certare praeter Herculem robore, uel canere quod cecinit Homerus: hic opportune in opus suum quae prior uates dixerat transferendo fecit ut sua esse credantur.

'Since these three things are all reckoned to be equally impossible: taking a thunderbolt from Jupiter, or his club from Hercules, or a line from Homer. And even if it could be managed, still no one could fittingly hurl a thunderbolt except Jupiter, or wield a club in combat except Hercules, or sing what Homer sang; yet by choosing just the right place in his own work to take over the earlier bard's words, [Virgil] caused them to be thought his own.'⁹²

Here, the act of plagiarism is not necessarily impossible (*quod etsi fieri possent*), but it is certainly inhumanly difficult. Virgil's successful reuse of Homer's lines, then, reflects his supreme, inimitable vatic abilities. The same implications can be seen in Jerome's and Isidore's phrasing of the anecdote; both have Virgil comment on the 'great strength' (*magnarum... uirium*)⁹³ required to wrest Hercules' club from his hand, a rather self-aggrandising profession of his own poetic abilities.

In all four versions of the anecdote, plagiarism is implied to be a risky business, best not undertaken. There is more than a slight hint of danger and retribution: woe betide the one who steals from *Hercules*! And it is this that perhaps activates a latent allusion to Virgil. There is a parallel theft from Hercules in Book 8 of the *Aeneid* when Cacus steals eight of his cattle; cunningly erases the traces of his thievery; and yet is betrayed by the very thing he steals, which knows to whom it belongs: *reddidit una boum uocem uastoque sub antro | mugit et Caci spem custodita fefellit* ('one heifer returned the cry and lowed from the desolate cavern's depths, and from her prison ruined Cacus' hopes', *Aen.* 8.217-8). Modern readers tend not to read this episode metapoetically, unlike the temples in *Georgics* 3 or *Aeneid* 1.⁹⁴ But could it be possible

⁹¹ Cf. Bretzigheimer 2005:152, McGill 2012:204-7.

⁹² In *Amores* 2.1, Ovid characterises his own (hypothetical) audacious poetic endeavours (*ausus eram, meminī, caelestia dicere bella*, 11) as 'hurling thunderbolts alongside Jupiter' (*cum Ioue fulmen habebam*, 15).

⁹³ Jerome *Quaest. Heb. in Gen. praef.* (PL 23.935); Isidore *Etym.* 10.44

⁹⁴ An exception is O'Rourke 2017, who reads the 'hospitality narrative' in the Cacus episode, alongside Callimachus' *Aetia* and *Hecale*, as metapoetic narratives of 'reception' in a double sense.

that ancient readers did? The theft of Hercules' cattle here in the *Aeneid* follows the same contours as the theft of Homer's lines or of Hercules' club in the biographical anecdote. As with the architectural simile, triangulation of the two elements of the biographical simile with a metapoetic moment in Virgil's own poetry would serve to validate the utterance as 'really' Virgil's. The comparison between theft from Hercules and literary borrowing would become something Virgil uses both in his poetry and in his reported comments *about* his poetry.

If Cacus's theft is to be read as a metapoetic comment on authorship, moreover, Cacus is to be considered not only derivative and plagiarising, but degenerate and impotent in the first place. He is the half-human son of Vulcan (*huic monstro Volcanus erat pater*, 8.198; *semihomo* 194; *semifer* 267), the god who in *Aeneid* Book 8 is the master-craftsman who fashions Roman history itself (626-728), yet his own efforts at construction and interior décor are tainted by death and decay: *foribusque adfixa superbis | ora uirum tristi pendebant pallida tabo* ('nailed to [his cave's] proud doors, faces of men were hanging, pallid in ghastly decay', 196-7).⁹⁵ And even his theft of Hercules' cattle is an unoriginal deed (*contra* 8.205-6: *quid inausum | aut intractatum*): Hermes has beaten him to it already in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*.⁹⁶

Now, I am not advocating a strictly metapoetic reading of the Cacus episode itself. Instead, I suggest, ancient readers may have connected the *VSD*'s comparison of plagiarism from Homer and theft from Hercules with a third element found in Virgil's poetry, prompted by the attribution of the original comparison to Virgil. An allusive flourish is thus added to 'Virgil's' point that it is impossible to steal a line from Homer, by comparing the hypothetical plagiarist to the monstrous Cacus, incapable of creative endeavour and ultimately defeated and punished.⁹⁷

There is, moreover, precedent within Virgil's previous works for a herd as metapoetic signifier of appropriated poetic property.⁹⁸ *Eclogue* 3 famously begins (1-3, 5-6):

MENALCAS:	dic mihi, Damoeta, cuium pecus? an Meliboei?
DAMOETAS:	non, uerum Aegonis; nuper mihi tradidit Aegon.
MENALCAS:	infelix, o semper, oues, pecus! ...
	hic alienus ouis custos bis mulget in hora,
	et sucus pecori et lac subducitur agnis.

⁹⁵ *foribus... superbis*: cf. *G.* 3.26-7 *in foribus... faciam...* Putnam 1998:160 connects Cacus' style of decoration with the *superbis postibus* (8.721-2, in the ephrasis of the shield) on which Caesar's gifts are hung – an unsettling overspilling of Cacus' failed artistry into the craftsmanship of the shield, as well as of his monstrous violence into Augustus' new Rome.

⁹⁶ Cacus' flight from vengeful Hercules transforms him for a moment into a replica of Hermes, with his winged sandals: *pedibus timor addidit alas* (8.224).

⁹⁷ That Hercules' cattle in *A.* 8 are in fact themselves stolen goods (*Geryonae spolia*, 202) is an intriguing detail, but to extrapolate a more polemical metapoetic stance from this allusion – perhaps the idea that all literature is derivative or borrowed, rendering accusations of plagiarism more complex or even meaningless – would perhaps be a leap beyond what the evidence can strictly justify.

⁹⁸ Farrell 1997:231 sees in these lines 'a sardonic commentary on the suspect position of the imitative poet who, as if by definition, stands accused of living off another's property'.

MENALCAS: Tell me, Damoetas, whose is the flock? Is it Meliboeus’?
 DAMOETAS: No, it’s actually Aegon’s; Aegon recently entrusted it to me.
 MENALCAS: Poor sheep, always ill-fated! ... This hired guardian milks his ewes twice an hour, and steals away strength from the flock and milk from the lambs.

Confusion reigns supreme over the ownership of the *pecus*, not only among the rustic characters themselves but in these lines’ literary legacy. Virgil is here translating the opening of Theocritus’ Fourth *Idyll* (1-3):

BATTOΣ: εἰπέ μοι ὦ Κορύδων, τίνοσ αἱ βόες; ἦ ῥα Φιλώνδα;
 ΚΟΡΥΔΩΝ: οὐκ, ἀλλ’ Αἴγωνος: βόσκειν δέ μοι αὐτάσ ἔδωκεν.
 BATTOΣ: ἦ πᾶ ψε κρύβδαν τὰ ποθέσπερα πάσασ ἀμέλγεισ;
 BATTUS: Tell me, Corydon, whose are the cattle? Are they Philondas’?
 CORYDON: No, they’re actually Aegon’s; he gave them to me, to put them to pasture.
 BATTUS: And you’ll secretly milk them in the evening, I bet?

Battus’ reply to Corydon (*Id.* 4.3) directly, if playfully, accuses him of theft, even though he admits Aegon’s ownership. In his version, Virgil amplifies this hint of plagiarism from one line to two (*Ecl.* 3.5-6)⁹⁹ – and in a later poem, the character Menalcas admits that the lines are not his own invention, but instead attributes them to earlier poetic tradition (or, literally, to the pipe he plays).¹⁰⁰ It is notable, too, that one of the parodies of Virgil preserved in the *VSD*, a fragment of Numitorius’ *Antibucolica*, borrows and distorts these same lines, engaging in the same form of poetic interaction with Virgil as Virgil did with Theocritus (*VSD* 43):¹⁰¹

dic mihi, Damoeta: cuium pecus, anne Latinum?
 non, uerum Aegonis nostri sic rure loquuntur.

‘Tell me, Damoetas: “whose the flock” – is that Latin?’
 ‘No; that’s just the way they speak in our Aegon’s lands.’

In the *Eclogues* at least, then, the *pecus* seems to flag up poetic *furta*, even as it naturalises Theocritus’ lines within their new Virgilian context.¹⁰² If the anecdote of Hercules’ club

⁹⁹ He amplifies the rate of theft too: nightly milking in Theocritus, but every half hour in Virgil.

¹⁰⁰ *Ecl.* 5.85-7: *hac te nos fragili donabimus ante cicuta | haec nos ‘formosum Corydon ardebat Alexin’ | haec eadem docuit ‘cuium pecus? an Meliboei?’*. The question of whether the Menalcas of *Ecl.* 3 should be identified with the Menalcas of *Ecl.* 5 is a controversial one: for a recent summary of the problem (with extensive bibliography) see Kania 2016:24-33 and my Chapter 5, where I explore Calpurnius Siculus’ version of this inherited pipe motif.

¹⁰¹ Numitorius’ mode of mimicry, where the first hemistichs of each line repeat Virgil’s but the second hemistichs develop into parody, greatly resembles the *VSD*’s reports of how Virgil himself composed, completing half-lines with their second hemistichs (*VSD* 34, discussed above). I explore this at greater length in the next chapter.

¹⁰² Hörschele 2013: 55-6 suggests, intriguingly, that Cicero’s reported comment on hearing Virgil’s *Eclogues* in performance, *cuius esset* (*Serv. ad Ecl.* 6.11) might in an earlier report (or in reality) have taken the form *cuium carmen* – a pointed evocation of the ownership question (*cuium pecus?*) that Virgil raises at *Ecl.* 3.1 (‘intertextually more savvy’, 2013:56).

gestures towards Cacus' theft of Hercules' herd, Virgil's previous metapoetics of cattle-rustling¹⁰³ again serves to naturalise the simile in Virgil's own voice.

Bears and wolves and poets, oh my!

From one poetic animal to another: let us return to the last simile of authorial method attributed to Virgil, that of the mother bear licking her cubs into shape. This anecdote was by far the most popular of the three, in antiquity and after, and, as I have shown, it was manipulated for a range of purposes by different authors. But the simile itself rewards closer examination, too. For one thing, it is a vivid and memorable activation of a metaphor for literary production so pervasive in literary discourse as to remain non-signifying in the majority of cases: motherhood.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, this same figure suffuses the terminology of modern literary scholarship: filiation, Oedipal anxiety, generic inheritance, and so forth.¹⁰⁵ Metaphors of gestation, incubation, birth, nurturing and childrearing are so common in antiquity (and today) that it is easy to lose sight of their cultural or poetic value, or the varying nuances they can encompass. But despite their omnipresence in critical discourse, when activated within a text, these metaphors can still prove a potent and flexible form of metapoetic discourse. And classical scholars should be especially wary of allowing them to pass without comment: after all, when it comes to the subject of parenthood in classical literature, fewer examples of nurturing care spring to mind than of parricidal envy or infanticidal rage. Simple or uncontroversial births are vastly overshadowed by disrupted, distorted, inverted or entirely bizarre ones: Dionysus born from Zeus' thigh, Athena from his head, Aphrodite from sea-foam, Helen and her siblings from swan's eggs. Within Virgil's own works, perhaps the most famous 'birth' is entirely fantastical: the *bugonia* of *Georgics* 4, the miraculous generation of bees from the carcass of an ox. The simile of the mother bear may be true to Roman zoology, but its application to a human author is worth further investigation.

The author under question is not only human but male, too.¹⁰⁶ Feminist scholarship has drawn attention to the gendered implications of childbirth and parenthood as a metaphor for literary creativity (*mater* = *materia*): the metaphor is always entangled in fraught cultural

¹⁰³ The *pecus* of *Ecl.* 3 is revealed to be a herd of sheep only in the third line (*infelix o semper, oues, pecus!*), whereas the Theocritean model is specifically cattle (βόες, *Id.* 4.1). It is intriguing that two of Virgil's four uses of the term *fur*, 'thief' (not generally an epic word; cf. Fratantuono and Smith 2018 *ad Aen.* 8.205), are in contexts of cattle-rustling: *G.* 3.405-6 and *Aen.* 8.205.

¹⁰⁴ Cf., e.g., τίκτειν at Callimachus *Aet.* fr. 1.20 Pf., *Ia.* 13.14, Aristophanes *Batrachoi* 1059; *nasci* at Horace *Ep.* 2.1.233, Quintilian 10.3.2, 4, 7, Martial *Epig.* 3.1.5, Gellius *NA* 1.15.1. The old pun of *liber* (book) and *liberi* (children) should not be forgotten either (cf. Ahl 1985:56-7).

¹⁰⁵ Note too the cladistics of the study of manuscript traditions; cf. Reeve 1998 on the analogy between biological phylogenetics and 'Lachmann's method'.

¹⁰⁶ Thus Pandey's passing comment (2017:8): 'The *Aeneid*... was still just a twinkle in its daddy's eye'.

resonances and anxieties, and even more so when appropriated by a male author for his own work.¹⁰⁷ While David Leitao is quick to dismiss gender as a primary implication of the metaphor's use by classical Greek philosophers and technical writers,¹⁰⁸ other ancient authors' employment of the trope clearly highlights gender inversion as a key feature. Horace, for example, repeatedly figures male characters as gestating poetry or ideas, as Emily Gowers has argued: Maecenas takes a significant nine months to decide to adopt Horace as client in *Satires* 1 (*abeo, et reuocas nono post mense*, 'I go away; nine months pass; you summon me back again', 1.6.61), Horace himself struggles to 'bring his iambics to term' in the *Epodes* (14.7-8, *iambos | ad umbilicum adducere*),¹⁰⁹ and he prescribes an exaggerated nine *years* of poetic gestation in his *Ars Poetica*.¹¹⁰ Horace extends the metaphor: as well as painting himself as a gravid poet, he casts Maecenas or his friends as his midwife (or, sometimes, as his own mother, or father, or child); his usurpation of (or self-subjection to) traditionally female roles forms part of a broader tendency towards poetic gender confusion throughout his works.¹¹¹ Ovid, too, casts himself as the Althaea to his poem's Meleager (*Tr.* 1.7.15-25; cf. *Met.* 8.451-546, *VSD* 39), in a complex blend of authorial nurture and destruction. His femininity in this anecdote both recalls his earlier authorial pose as elegiac lover – a male role frequently (self-)feminised in Latin poetry – and emphasises his political passivity and helplessness in his current exile poetry.

In this context, the simile of the mother bear can be seen to tie into the strangely feminine vein of characterisation running through Virgilian biography. Despite the traditionally masculine air of didactic and epic,¹¹² the biographers' Virgil is far from macho: in the *VSD*, not only does his modesty and upright morality lead him to confine himself indoors and flee the public eye, but he is even reported to have been nicknamed 'the virgin', *Parthenias* (*VSD* 11);¹¹³ the location of his birth, and the tree that grew there, was the site of worship by pregnant women

¹⁰⁷ Friedman 1987 is a foundational discussion. On the bodily text in antiquity, cf. (e.g.) Rimell 2002, Butler 2011. I leave aside discussion of Lucretius' *Venus genetrix*, and the multitudinous symbolisms and literary roles of mothers in Latin epic (for which see especially McAuley 2016).

¹⁰⁸ E.g. Leitao 2012:7-14. It would be interesting to see a feminist or queer reading of his examples; I remain unconvinced that gender can be so swiftly ruled out as a primary connotation. See, for example, McAuley 2016:75-6 and 306-16, reinvesting the childbirth metaphor with gendered meaning.

¹⁰⁹ Gowers 2016a:110-11.

¹¹⁰ *Ars P.* 388-9: *nonumque prematur in annum | membranis intus positus*. The book is described in remarkably bodily terms: *membrana* is not just 'parchment' but 'skin' (cf. Gowers 1994:142-3 on Persius 3.10); and this external skin is to be kept safely *intus*, as if in a womb.

¹¹¹ Gowers 2012 *ad Sat.* 1.6.61, 2016a:109-11; cf. Henderson 1999:184. *VSD* 44 hints at a further parental role for Maecenas as Virgil's foster-parent: *M. Vipsanius a Maecenate eum suppositum appellabat*, 'Marcus Vipsanius used to call him Maecenas' foster-child'.

¹¹² A broad but still valid generalisation; cf. Keith 2000 for more complex discussion. I return to the topic of Virgil's gender and sexuality in the ancient biographical tradition in the next chapter.

¹¹³ On Virgil's *uerecundia*, especially in Macrobius and Servius (cf. e.g. *Sat.* 1.16.44, *doctrina ac uerecundia nobilis*), cf. Kaster 1980 and 1988, McGill 2005:109-10, Sharrock 2008:10, Cameron 2011:550. Virgil's avatar in this is perhaps the Sibyl, 'emphatically *uirgo*' in the *Aeneid* (Gowers 2005:567).

and new mothers.¹¹⁴ (Is it coincidence alone that Dante calls Virgil his ‘mamma’, at *Purg.* 30.44, and his ‘dolcissimo patre’, ‘sweetest of fathers’, six lines later?)¹¹⁵

Metaphors of birth are attached to the *Aeneid* even within Virgil’s lifetime.¹¹⁶ Virgil announces *maius rerum mihi nascitur ordo* (‘a greater order of affairs is coming to birth for me’) at *A.* 7.44, playing on his previous depiction of messianic birth in *Ecl.* 4 (*paulo maiora canamus*, ‘I sing a somewhat loftier theme’, 4.1; *magnus... nascitur ordo*, ‘a great order is coming to birth’, 4.5; *nascenti puero*, ‘a boy just born’, 4.8), and the image is echoed by Propertius: the *Aeneid*, which Virgil is writing ‘right now’ (*qui nunc... 2.34.63*) is identified with the line *nescio quid maius nascitur Iliade* (‘something greater than the *Iliad* is coming to birth’, 66). There is nothing in the Propertian context to suggest that *nascitur* is more than a dead metaphor, but for the reader familiar with the bear simile, Propertius’ line would fall neatly into place to confirm the veracity of the simile’s attribution to Virgil; it becomes a sly jab, from a friend and rival, at Virgil’s self-admittedly slow rate of production.¹¹⁷ In a similar way, Quintilian too might be seen to invoke the same figure implicitly in his mention of Virgil’s slow composition discussed above (10.3.8). A few sentences before, he compares the production of large literary works to the long gestational period of large animals (10.3.4):

nihil enim rerum ipsa natura uoluit magnum effici cito, praeposuitque pulcherrimo cuique operi difficultatem: quae nascendi quoque hanc fecerit legem, ut maiora animalia diutius uisceribus parentis continerentur.

Nature herself has decreed that no great thing can be brought about quickly; she has set difficulties in the way of every noble work. She has even made it a natural law of birth, that bigger animals should stay longer within the parent’s womb.

What’s more – and here we near the metapoetic crux of this discussion – it has long been noted that the bear simile, in the form found in the *VSD*, Gellius, Jerome, and later authors, has a marked resemblance to a passage from the *Aeneid*, with not only the thematic continuity seen

¹¹⁴ *VSD* 3-5 – probably relating to Virgil’s mother’s solo childbirth in an isolated place, but with interesting implications for the ‘cult’ of Virgil nonetheless. McAuley 2016:113 notes the ‘strange and wonderful proliferation of mothers in this passage – real and metaphorical, male and female’; she emphasises ‘the poet’s own quasi-feminine generativity and fecundity’.

¹¹⁵ Seneca the Elder attributes the phrase *plena deo* to Virgil (*Suas.* 3.6-7) – a phrase not in fact extant in Virgil’s texts, but found in Ovid (*Fasti* 1.474, 6.538). Gowers 2016b:567 suggests seeing pregnancy as well as vatic inspiration in the phrase (‘pregnant by the god’); would this connect to the characterisation of Virgil as ‘mother’ of his poems, as well as bard-speaker of them? Compare Carmenta, Evander’s mother and a Virgil-like bard of no little ability (*Aen.* 8.340); Varro, according to Gellius (*NA* 16.16.4), identifies her as a goddess of childbirth, and it is she who in Ovid is *plena dei* (*Fast.* 1.474, 6.538). Virgil is fond of authoritative female speakers: cf. Cyrene in *G.* 4, the Sibyl in *Aen.* 6, not to mention Dido, whose speech (and silence) overwhelms the epic.

¹¹⁶ At the end of the *Georgics*, and in the epitaph on Virgil’s tomb reported in the *VSD*, it is Virgil, not his own works, who is the recipient of parental care: *alebat Parthenope* (*G.* 4.563-4), *Mantua me genuit* (*VSD* 36). Virgil’s mother is a topic of great interest in the *VSD*: note *VSD* 3 and 5.

¹¹⁷ It is possible, of course, that Propertius’ *nascitur* is connected only to *Ecl.* 4, and Virgil’s use of it in *Aen.* 7 is a direct response to Propertius. Compare Virgil’s reappropriation (from low to high genre, satire to epic) of Horace’s description of a hostel kitchen fire (*Sat.* 1.5.73-4) in his description of Troy aflame (*Aen.* 2.310-12); cf. Austin 1964 *ad Aen.* 2.312, 360.

above regarding theft from Hercules, but close verbal correspondence as well.¹¹⁸ The ecphrasis of Aeneas' Vulcan-forged shield in *Aeneid* 8, depicting the vast sweep of Rome's history from the time of the poem's narrative right down to Virgil's present-day Rome, begins with a scene at the Lupercal (8.626-34):

illic res Italas Romanorumque triumphos
 haud uatum ignarus uenturique inscius aeu
 fecerat ignipotens, illic genus omne futurae
 stirpis ab Ascanio pugnataque in ordine bella.
 fecerat et uiridi fetam Mauortis in antro
 procubuisse lupam, geminos huic ubera circum
 ludere pendentis pueros et lambere matrem
 impaudos, illam tereti ceruice reflexa
 mulcere alternos et corpora fingere lingua.

There, the Lord of Fire – not ignorant of prophecy, nor unknowing of the age to come – had fashioned the story of Italy and the triumphs of the Romans; there, he fashioned every generation of the stock that would arise from Ascanius, and the wars they fought, set out in order. He had fashioned, too, the she-wolf stretching out in Mars' leafy cave; the twin boys hung playing around her teats, and suckled their mother unafraid. She, with her smooth neck twisted back, caresses [lit. 'softens'] them each in turn, and shapes their bodies with her tongue.

VSD: *lambendo effingere*. Gellius: *fetum... lambendo... conformaret et fingeret*. Jerome: *fetum lambendo figurauit*, and *fetus lingua... lambendo fecit*. But for the changes of species – the wolf for the bear, and the human children for the cubs – this is precisely the same image, in precisely the same words: the maternal animal does not merely nurture but actively shapes or fashions the children.¹¹⁹ This passage has undeniable overtones of authorship, too: both *fecerat* (of Vulcan, 'divine artificer with vatic insight')¹²⁰ and *fingere* (of the *lupa*) are blatant metapoetic buzzwords – the two are linked by the action of *mulcere*, too (634; cf. *Mulciber*, 724)¹²¹ – and *haud uatum ignarus* parallels Vulcan with the narrator of the *Aeneid*, who self-identifies as *uates* in the previous book (7.41).¹²² Michael Putnam writes effusively:

¹¹⁸ Fratantuono and Smith ask, in their 2018 commentary, 'Did the [biographical] story arise from a metaliterary reading of this passage?' (*ad Aen.* 8.635). I hope to provide here a firmer answer to their question.

¹¹⁹ See above for the zoological belief regarding bears. While wolves were not believed to literally lick their cubs into shape, Virgil's language here clearly extends the concept to the she-wolf of the Romulus and Remus story; Ovid closely follows Virgil in his description of the Lupercalian scene at *Fast.* 2.413-18: *et fingit lingua corpora bina sua*. The change to a bear in the biographical anecdote may in fact be traceable to Ovid: *Met.* 15.279-81 depicts a bear shaping her cubs: *lambendo mater in artus | fingit et in formam...* (Interestingly, much Virgilian biography and *pseudepigrapha* seems to be 'Virgilian' by way of Ovid: cf. Güntzschel 1972, Ax 1984, Most 1987, Zwierlein 1999, Janka 2005, Peirano 2012a, Seelentag 2012 on the *Culex*, Austin 1968, Conte 1986:84-7, Laird 2001, Farrell 2004 on the *ille ego* poem.)

¹²⁰ Gransden 1976 *ad* 626-728. Cf. *finxerat* (8.726) of Vulcan's creation of the shield. Peirano 2017:11-12 notes that Servius takes a strongly literalist reading of *fingere*, perhaps resisting the *VSD*'s biographical reading: where the expanded note in *Serv. Dan.* (*ad loc.*) paraphrases as *arte producere*, comparing those who work in bronze or wax, Servius bluntly comments *id est tergere*.

¹²¹ *mulcere* as a description of authorial activity is picked up by Statius (*Silv.* 5.3.215: *quotiens ego carmine patres mulcerem*) and Apuleius (*Met.* 1.1: *auresque tuas beniuolas lepido susurro permulceam*).

¹²² Casali 2006 eloquently untangles the complexities of this parallel.

‘Virgil himself, in the process of creation, is like Vulcan-Mulciber, who fashions the features of Roman history [and] composes them into shape. He is the godlike controller of time through art... He is also, with a change of animal, the wolf of the shield’s initial episode, artist-nurse, softening his newborn creations and licking them into shape with his imagination’s tongue. One implication remains: that only through art, and in the mind’s eye alone, can the wild actions that make up the story of Rome be tamed into submission.... The wolf quiets the twins’ spirits just as Neptune pacifies the winds and Vulcan-Mulciber brings moderation to all the creatures of Roman history through the medium of art. And then there is Virgil, a higher Vulcan, who controls the whole through the medium of words, subordinating art’s ekphrasis to his grander design and yet giving it special scope.’¹²³

Putnam’s account eloquently outlines the metapoetic implications of the biographical anecdote here, when read alongside Virgil’s poetry: by aligning Vulcan, the wolf and Virgil, the anecdote frames the latter’s authorship as *both* divine artistry *and* dedicated hard work.¹²⁴ It is curious, though, that his writing emphasises certain key issues without interrogating them further. Putnam describes Virgil as an ‘artist-nurse’, who ‘soften[s]’, ‘tame[s]’, ‘quiets’, ‘pacifies’ his artistic product. His interest here is in the connotations of Vulcan’s name *Mulciber*, ‘the softener’, an epithet derived from his metal-working activities (cf. Servius *ad* 8.724: *ab eo quod totum ignis permulcet*): the wolf’s nurturing is directly paralleled to Vulcan’s artistry with *mulcere* in line 634.¹²⁵ But Virgil’s Vulcan is like the wolf – and like Virgil himself – in other ways too. Earlier in Book 8, the post-coital Vulcan is the subject of Virgil’s remarkable gender-bending comparison to a housewife, a chaste *uniuira* who rises industriously before dawn and tends the hearth (8.408-15):

... cum femina primum,
 cui tolerare colo uitam tenuique Minerua
 impositum, cinerem et sopitos suscitatur ignis,
 noctem addens operi, famulasque ad lumina longo
 exercet pense, castum ut seruare cubile
 coniugis et possit paruos educere natos:
 haud secus Ignipotens nec tempore signior illo
 mollibus e stratis opera ad fabrilia surgit.

... at the time when a woman, whose task it is to support life by the humble work of spinning thread on her distaff, first awakens the embers and the slumbering fire, taking time from the night for her work, and keeps her assistants toiling by lamplight at the long task, so that she can keep her husband’s bedroom chaste and raise her little sons; just so, and no more sluggish at that hour, the Lord of Fire rises from his soft couch to the work of his smithy.

¹²³ Putnam 1998:163-5.

¹²⁴ *labor* is unique to Vulcan among deities: the rest of the pantheon are able to create and act almost effortlessly. Cf. Bremmer 2010:199-200, 207-8.

¹²⁵ Putnam 1998:155-6 discusses the epithet. Putnam is right to read the connotations of *mulcere* as signalling male Roman temperance and moderation – but in the context of the wolf’s nurture, feminine qualities are implied too.

The comparison is absurd, a moment of humorous levity in a book otherwise weighed down with historical gravitas.¹²⁶ And one detail stands out as particularly unsuitable for this grandiose ‘Lord of Fire’ (*ignipotens*, 414 and 423; cf. at 628). The housewife’s concern with fire, her early-morning labour, and her taskforce of assistants all help to facilitate the unlikely comparison to Vulcan – but her reproductive preoccupations (*castum ut seruare cubile | coniugis et possit paruos educere natos*, 412-13) are harder to assimilate to the god. After all, Virgil has made it abundantly clear that Vulcan’s *cubile* is far from *castum*.¹²⁷ And Vulcan’s ‘sons’ are a strange bunch, too (*natos*, 413):¹²⁸ Aeneas, the ‘son’ (*nato*, 383) whom Vulcan is concerned with here, is not his, but Venus’ by another man.¹²⁹ In the *Aeneid*, Vulcan’s few biological children are mentioned infrequently, and barely linked with him in the narrative. Caeculus, the king of Praeneste mentioned in Book 7 (678-90), is the product of a spark of fire from the hearth, though the narrator’s assertion of truthfulness raises more questions than it answers (*omnis quem credidit aetas*, 7.680).¹³⁰ And the monstrous Cacus, who has been efficiently despatched by Hercules already in the narrative of Book 8, hardly resembles his father in power and artistry, let alone physical appearance.¹³¹

Resolution lies in the wolf’s alternative model of motherhood: though the twins are not her children, it is her nurturing that literally moulds and shapes them.¹³² The housewife’s mothering, too, lies not in the simple fact of childbearing, but in her subsequent care for her children, bringing them to adulthood (*educere*, 413). This focus on nurture over nature, of course, fits well with the presentation of Vulcan’s craftsmanship in Book 8 of the *Aeneid*: unlike

¹²⁶ The same quasi-comic levity characterises Venus’ seduction of Vulcan here (8.370-406), a narratively inconsequential episode of romantic intrigue characterised by gender role-reversal (cf. Lyne 1987:42). Cf. Hera’s seduction of Zeus at *Il.* 14.153-353, famously troubling to ancient commentators’ sensibilities (Plato *Rep.* 3.390c, Heraclitus *Homeric Problems* 39). Casali 2006:193 suggests that Venus’ seduction of Vulcan is a self-referential representation of Virgil’s imperial commissioning: ‘Virgil vividly depicts the way in which he has “got into bed” with the Augustan regime’.

¹²⁷ Lyne 1987:40-1 details the allusions to Mars’ escapades with Venus in this passage, with especial attention to the marked verbal reminiscences of Lucretius’ account of the story. Casali 2006:194-5 notes the unsettling nature of Virgil’s Apollonian models for this simile.

¹²⁸ Vulcan’s offspring are rarely the result of straightforward reproduction. Compare, e.g., Servius Tullius, born after a fiery phallus rose up from the hearth to impregnate his mother (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 4.2.1); or Erichthonius, born from Hephaestus’ semen dripping on the earth (Aesch. *Eum.* 13: παῖδες Ἡφαίστου).

¹²⁹ Macrobius’ character Evangelus is troubled by Venus’ tactless request to her husband, when ‘she knew very well she had no children with him’ (*Sat.* 1.24.6; cf. Lyne 1987:39-40). Scully 2000:107 notes the unusual use of *pater* for Vulcan at 8.394 (the narrator) and 454 (Venus); Venus herself is *mater* at 370 and 534. Note Venus’ tactless self-identification as *genetrix nato* (383; cf. Smolenaars 2004:101-2).

¹³⁰ Caeculus – ‘little blind one’, so-named since his eyes were small and squinty from the smoke of Vulcan’s fire – was a Praenestine founder-figure (cf. Horsfall 1999 *ad Aen.* 7.678-90).

¹³¹ Although modern scholarship often describes Hephaestus as ‘grotesque’ or ‘ugly’, ancient sources confine his deformity to his feet alone (e.g. Homer *Il.* 1.590-607, 18.393), and minimise the visual appearance even there (cf. Pestilli 2005; Trentin 2017:233; Rinon 2006; Pavlovskis 1989; visual material is collated in *LIMC* IV:628-54 and VIII:283-97). Cacus, by contrast, is hideous (*semihominis Caci facies... dira*, *Aen.* 8.194; *terribilis oculos, uultum uillosaque saetis | pectora semiferi*, 266-7); his bodily appearance, as much as his artistry, fails to replicate his paternal inheritance.

¹³² The name of the twins’ *human* mother, Ilia, marks her role as their biological parent, in contrast with the wolf’s fostering role (*ilia* synecdochic for ‘womb’, not just ‘guts’); cf. Gowers 2007:33. Virgil always refers to her as ‘Ilia’, not ‘Rhea Silvia’; compare Livy 1.3-4.

the phantoms that other gods conjure up in the twinkling of an eye,¹³³ the shield – a clear parallel for Virgil’s *Aeneid*, filling in the gaps in his foundational history of Rome – is the product of long strenuous work on the part of Vulcan and the Cyclopes (8.424-53).¹³⁴ The biographical anecdote of Virgil as the mother bear thus taps into a complex network of corresponding comparisons and similes within the *Aeneid* itself – Vulcan, the housewife, the wolf – which subordinates female motherhood to male artistry as a figurative illustration of the creative process, and which emphasises the lengthy work of finessing and fine-tuning over the moment of ‘birth’ or inspiration itself. For Virgil, Vulcan and the wolf, art is a matter of nurture, not nature.¹³⁵

The scene of the Lupercal is the foundational image on Aeneas’ shield, standing at the very beginning of what can be called ‘Roman’ history; as Philip Hardie notes, the wolf’s ‘licking into shape of the twins is followed immediately by the first mention of Rome in the *ecphrasis*’: *nec procul hinc Romam* (8.635).¹³⁶ It seems, moreover, to have been a key plank of Augustus’ political platform: not only did he restore the Palatine shrine to the Lupercal (*RG* 19.1; cf. *Aen.* 8.343), but he apparently even considered taking the name Romulus instead of Augustus (Cass. Dio 53.16.7).¹³⁷ In this context, the triangulation of Virgil’s production of the *Aeneid*, the bear’s fashioning of her cubs and the wolf’s nurture of Romulus and Remus veers into unavoidably politicised territory. In particular, it hijacks the more usual parallel between the ancient founding(s) of Rome and Augustus’ refounding of the city, found throughout the *Aeneid*, to introduce a third element: Virgil’s composition of the poem itself. The biographical tradition inscribes Virgil as the metaphorically implied subject where we would expect to find Augustus – an expectation the *Vitae* themselves help to create, with their description of the *Aeneid* as a poem which ‘contains at the same time the origin of the city of Rome and of Augustus himself’, *Romanae simul urbis et Augusti origo contineretur* (*VSD* 21).¹³⁸

Should we see here a usurpation of the *princeps* by the poet, or an assimilation of the one to the other? Is Virgil’s creative endeavour not only aligned with the ancient foundation of

¹³³ E.g. Juno’s phantom Aeneas at *Aen.* 10.636-65.

¹³⁴ While ecphrases of artworks in the *Aeneid* are associated with descriptions of their creation (e.g. Juno’s temple in Book 1, or the temple doors in Book 6), their creators are generally mortal (the Carthaginians, Daedalus). Vulcan, the divine craftsman, stands out in this grouping.

¹³⁵ Shakespeare’s reference to this zoological commonplace in *3 Henry VI* emphasises how this sort of nurture does not bring about any parental resemblance: Gloucester (later Richard III) refers to his disabled body as ‘like to a chaos, or an or an unlick’d bear-whelp | That carries no impression like the dam’ (3.2.161-2).

¹³⁶ Hardie 1986:350.

¹³⁷ In later decades he was associated with the revival of the lupercal rites (Suet. *Aug.* 31.4). Cf. Bremmer 1987, Cornell 1975, Cooley 2009 *ad RG* 19.1.

¹³⁸ On this doublet, Powell 2017:184-5 adds that the *VSD* avoids simple statements relating Virgil’s poetic purposes to Augustus alone, though it does for the *Georgics* (Maecenas, *VSD* 20) and, to an extent, the *Eclogues* (Pollio, Varus and Gallus, 19).

Rome, but *rival* to Augustus' own efforts in bringing about peace?¹³⁹ The question is not easy to solve. The biographical and exegetical reception of Virgil displays a notable fascination with the ways in which his literary output and its survival are related to Augustus, returning again and again to the interrelated dynamics of artistic creation, literary aesthetics and political activity. Augustus' role in the *Vitae* is considerable, and not necessarily easy to parse. There are considerably troubling facets of his role in preserving the *Aeneid* against the wishes of its author (*VSD* 39-41), for example, or of his requests, apparently midway between threat and joke, to read the written drafts of the poem (*supplicibus atque etiam minacibus per iocum litteris efflagitaret*, 'he demanded with begging and even jokingly threatening letters', *VSD* 31 – but can an emperor's 'joke' ever *not* be a serious 'threat'?). Servius' report of the *laudes Galli* – which he claims stood in Virgil's original version of *Georgics* 4 and were replaced with the story of Aristaeus when Gallus' fall from favour exposed them as politically inconvenient – gives us a Virgil willing to revise his poems not on literary grounds but to appease a tyrant (*iubente Augusto*, 'on Augustus' orders', *ad Buc.* 10.1; *irato Augusto*, 'in response to Augustus' fury', *ad G.* 4.1.).¹⁴⁰ And ancient discussions of the text of Virgil will allow no emending or revisionary hands to meddle in the poems except the author's or, notably, those given authority to do so by Augustus himself (*edidit autem auctore Augusto Varius*, 'Varius published it according to Augustus' authorisation', *VSD* 41),¹⁴¹ even when against Virgil's express wishes.¹⁴²

A full account of the relationship between Virgil and Augustus, and of how it was understood in antiquity, is a story for another time (and one to which I will return in the following chapters).¹⁴³ For our purposes here, it is enough to note that it is not only the mother bear simile, but all three reports, which tap into particularly Augustan moments in Virgil's corpus. Hercules in Book 8, after all, is far more often seen as an allegorical double for the

¹³⁹ Bartsch 1998:330 notes: 'What Virgil himself is doing is licking into shape not only a story but Roman history itself, making it into an artifact via which he can aestheticize, again, the violence of the struggle to found an empire'.

¹⁴⁰ Thomas 1988:13-16 discusses the *laudes Galli*, concluding – convincingly – that the story is not historically plausible, but instead reflects ancient interpretations of the poems. Cf. Wilkinson 1969:325-6 for a bibliographical survey.

¹⁴¹ Varius acting alone: *VSD* 41-2. Varius and Tuca: *VSD* 37, Servius *ad Aen.* 5.871 and 6 *praef.*, 4.436, 7.464. On the Helen episode cf. Goold 1970, Horsfall 2006, Peirano 2012a:242-63. Varius' and Tuca's reported revisions stand in contrast with other citations of textual editing in Servius: Probus, for example, is often cited as proposing emendations (Servius *ad Aen.* 1.441, 5.871 and 6 *praef.*, 7.773, 8.406, 10.539; *DServ.*: *G.* 1.277, *Aen.* 1.21, 1.44, 4.418, 10.303, 11.830, 12.605), but each of these is either rejected or ignored in Servius' lemmata and commentary (cf. further Zetzel 1981:53-4; n.70 above). Emily Gowers suggests to me that Varius and Tuca can be seen as the *Aeneid*'s foster-parents, who rescue the text, like an orphaned child, from exposure – parallels, perhaps, to Maecenas' role as foster-parent to his clients' poetry.

¹⁴² Ziogas 2015 offers a superb discussion of the 'dynamic tension between imperial and artistic authority' in Ovid, Virgil and Horace, including some of the material I discuss here; cf. too Powell 2017.

¹⁴³ Until then, Krevans 2010, Martelli 2013, Keeline 2013, Ziogas 2015, Laird 2016 and Powell 2017 offer fascinating accounts of Augustus' interactions with the editing of Virgil's (and others') texts.

emperor, given Augustus' Herculean self-fashioning throughout the previous decade;¹⁴⁴ for Virgil to declare himself up to the task of stealing the hero's club might be seen as a poetic challenge to Augustus himself. And while the temple that Virgil builds in *Georgics* 3 is outwardly in praise of the emperor and his conquests, the passage focuses on the poet-builder's activity almost to the exclusion of the *laudandus*: it is Virgil's artwork, Virgil's charioteering, that is described – and full praise of Augustus is perpetually deferred until the next poetic project.

Coda: difference and repetition

Did Virgil actually speak these similes? On one level, I do not believe it matters that much: what is important here is that later generations apparently thought that he did, and that their reading of both Virgil's texts and his life was influenced by the connections these anecdotes forge between the two.¹⁴⁵ The choice to repeat the anecdotes – to retell them, put them into new contexts, employ them for new purposes – lies with Virgil's readers; even if Virgil *did* once speak these similes, his readers' transmission of them is the crucial mediation between Virgil's original utterances and later receptions of his works and life.

Seen from this angle, a certain level of authorial responsibility does inevitably accrue to Virgil's readers, who transmit the anecdotes and refashion or reframe them. For one thing, these anecdotes represent an act of readerly dissent from the author. The discourse of revision lays bare precisely the things the perfectionist poet would rather hide, in his pursuit of polish and panache: joins, seams, cracks, and the shadowy traces of paths not taken. The biographies and commentaries are compendia of Virgil's errors: half-lines, embarrassing juvenilia, clumsy proems, faulty structural decisions. These are the very features that Virgil's readers treasure for the way in which they bring us closer to Virgil in his active state of authoring. The interests of Virgil and his readers are directly opposed – and, in this matter at least, the readers win. Indeed, if *VSD* 39-41 is to be believed, the very existence of the *Aeneid* is caused by readerly dissent from the author's intentions. The story of Augustus' rescue of the poem from Virgil's destructive dying wishes is an enduring element of Virgilian reception, and one that divorces the *Aeneid* from authorial intentionality from the very start.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ E.g. his triple triumph in 29 BCE, when he entered as victor into Rome on August 12th, the date of Hercules' festival at the Ara Maxima. This is the event memorialised at the end of Book 8, in the ecphrasis of the Shield (*Caesar, triplici inuectus Romana triumpho | moenia*, 8.714-15).

¹⁴⁵ Peirano 2012a discusses how complex matters of ancient 'beliefs' about literature may in fact be, in the context of authenticity and forgery. Her argument is an invaluable remedy to binary thinking in matters of biographical truth and fiction as well as in authorship studies.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Laird 2016:82-3.

This particular style of reception – the fetishistic use of mottos or tags, partial quotations, lines in Virgilian style though not wholly Virgilian – bears a striking resemblance to other transformative genres: centos,¹⁴⁷ for example, or imitative works, which must balance replication of the source author with the need to differentiate themselves from the original by means of new material and diction.¹⁴⁸ An interesting tension arises: while the purpose of these biographical anecdotes is the veneration and canonisation of Virgil, their central object, the manner in which the anecdotes are related seems to appropriate Virgil’s authorship, or expand the sense in which we understand Virgil’s authorial role. In this, note not only the similarity of the anecdotes to Virgil’s own metapoetic language but the differences too, the partiality of their quotations of Virgil to describe his compositional process.¹⁴⁹ Hercules’ club, not Hercules’ cattle. The struts of a building – themselves described metaphorically as musical instruments (*tibicines*, *VSD* 24)¹⁵⁰ – not temple statues (as in *G.* 3.34-9) or paintings and friezes (*G.* 3.26-33, *Aen.* 1.450-93, 6.14-34). A she-bear, not a she-wolf, licking the work into shape.¹⁵¹ These differences from the Virgilian original are, in a sense, redundant; they seem designed simply to distinguish their quotations of Virgil’s supposed speech from actual repetition of his poetry, and so to assert the ways in which these readers are *extending* Virgil’s author function rather than simply repeating his words.

My conclusions here must remain tentative, as for the most part there is simply not enough evidence to claim either that these anecdotes are true representations of Virgil’s habitual speech, or that they are entirely fabricated by later readers. What is clear, however, is that reports of Virgil’s compositional methods are part of a strikingly sophisticated subsection of ancient literary criticism, which is particularly attentive to systems of metapoetry and self-representation. As Virgil becomes a cultural touchstone for Roman readers and writers, through the first centuries of his reception, so the model of his authorship becomes ever more important both for interpretations of Virgil’s work and for later authors’ own self-fashioning. The interrelation of the anecdotes with Virgil’s own poetic works ‘verifies’ them as Virgil’s own, expands their meaning and significance by correlating them with complex intra-poetic dynamics, and at the same time functions as commentary on both Virgil’s works and his authorial presence.

¹⁴⁷ For which cf. primarily McGill 2005, especially his grounding of cento composition in partial and tendentious quotation (xxi-xxv; cf. my discussion of Numitorius’ semi-cento parody above). Milnor 2014:233-72 explores transformative Virgilian quotation in Pompeian graffiti.

¹⁴⁸ Forgeries can fail not only by being too different to the forged author but too similar, since no author would create new works simply by repeating their older pieces word-for-word (*pace* Pierre Menard; cf. Borges 1962:45-55). On forgeries, cf. esp. Grafton 1990, Peirano 2012a.

¹⁴⁹ I am grateful to Francesca Martelli for drawing my attention to this aspect.

¹⁵⁰ *tibicen* is strictly a pipe player (*OLD* 1, from *tibia*, ‘pipe’); the sense ‘strut’ is rare and apparently primarily poetic (Ovid *Fast.* 4.695, Juvenal 3.193).

¹⁵¹ Bears are infrequent elements of Virgil’s poetry: they appear only at *G.* 3.247-8 and *Aen.* 7.17-18, and their pelts at *Aen.* 5.37 and 8.368 (cf. Fratantuono and Smith 2018 on the latter line). Lycophron’s *Alexandra* varies the animals associated with Rome’s founders too: Romulus and Remus are διπλοῦς | σκύμνους λέοντας (1232-3).

CHAPTER 2

VIRGIL'S VOICE: SONG, PERFORMANCE AND RECITATION

'If I'd succeeded in demystifying voice, I would have no god left.'
(Wayne Koestenbaum)¹

Singing the written page: voice and text in Virgil's poetry

Does Virgil's writing demand to be heard in its author's voice? Despite the slipperiness of the Virgilian persona – so difficult to pin down to a secure biographical presence, and so much less chatty and forthcoming than his contemporaries, Horace and the elegists Propertius and Tibullus – all three of his poems certainly insist *prima facie* upon their status as *sung*, as live productions. One of the most recognisable stamps of Virgilian authorship is his use of *canere* ('I sing') at key programmatic points in his poems: first-person forms of the verb appear at the opening of the first three books of the *Georgics* (1.5, 2.2, 3.1) and the end of the fourth (4.559, 566) and famously announce the *Aeneid*'s themes in its monumental opening line (*arma uirumque cano*, 1.1). It is trickier to find a single authorial voice in the poems of the *Eclogues*, given their proliferation of shepherd-singers, contemporary poets and dialogic forms,² but they too obsessively play and replay singing performances; the final lines round off the collection with a final mention of singers (*solet esse grauis cantantibus umbra...*, 'the shadows are dangerous for singers...', 10.75).³

The claim is a powerful one, an assertion of active performance and authorial presence that casts a shadow over the poems in their entirety. Even without the spurious autobiographical proem *ille ego qui...*, the present-tense *cano*, 'I sing', in the opening line of the *Aeneid* invites the poet's audience to hear the poem in a specifically *Virgilian* voice; compare Homer's equivalent opening imperatives, ἄειδε θεὰ ('sing, goddess', *Il.* 1.1) and μοι ἔννεπε μούσα ('tell me, Muse', *Od.* 1.1), which attribute the initial poetic act not to the narrator but to omniscient divine beings. Virgil, by contrast, delays the address to his own Muse until the eighth line of

¹ Koestenbaum 1993:155.

² Most prominently Gallus (6.66-73, 10.1-74), but note too Varius and Cinna (9.35), and (according to Servius *ad loc.*) 'Anser' too (9.36).

³ *Umbrae* are the other most recognisable token of Virgilian self-fashioning; the end of *Ecl.* 10 binds *canere* and *umbra* together. Cf., handily, Theodorakopoulos 1997. The opening of *Ecl.* 1 avoids the term *canere*, reserving it for Virgil's narrative persona, not his characters: roughly a quarter of its occurrences in the *Eclogues* refer to the unmarked narratorial voice (4.1, 4.3, 6.3, 6.9, 9.61, 10.8), whereas *cantare* is used only for his characters (and never in the *Georgics* or *Aeneid*). On *cantare*, cf. Lowrie 2009:16-17, highlighting its lack of claim to original authorship and its frequentative aspect ('to recite'). Pastoral tradition always presents itself as a repeat performance – of Theocritean pastoral, of nebulous Arcadian song tradition, of other *Eclogues* – but the author's own performance retains an air of originality, marked through its association with *canere*. (It is not only Aeneas who is *primus* in the first line of the *Aeneid*, but Virgil too.)

the poem (*Musa, mihi causas memora*, ‘Muse, tell me the causes’); his Muse does not herself sing, leaving that role to the narrator.⁴ The *Aeneid* emerges from its opening lines less as a written text than as an oral performance, coming into being in the very moment of its narration. The strong use of *cano* throughout the *Georgics*,⁵ too, lends the didactic scenario a similar quality of what Katharina Volk terms ‘poetic simultaneity’ – an aspect neatly depicted in the illustration from the ‘Vatican Virgil’ with which this thesis began.⁶

But this is, of course, an oversimplification. Virgil’s three works all engage in a highly complex dialectic of song and writing; they blur and transgress the boundaries between the oral and the textual, and destabilise the strict association of each with particular qualities – song with immediacy, life, divinity, ephemerality; writing with mediation, secondariness, lifelessness, permanence. This spills over from the first-person narration to other characters and scenarios within each poem. Virgil’s Sibyl presents the clearest reversal of the usual connotations of song and writing.⁷ Where Jupiter ‘unrolls’ the course of history like a papyrus roll (*uoluens fatorum arcana*, *Aen.* 1.263; cf. Virgil’s *euoluite*, 9.528),⁸ Aeneas is warned by Helenus that the Sibyl’s written prophecies are ultimately unstable, fleeting and irretrievable – qualities far more often associated with the spoken voice – since they are written on leaves that flutter out of order as soon as they are caught up by the swirling breezes in the cave (3.443-52).⁹ Instead, Helenus advises, Aeneas must demand that the prophetess deliver her oracles by singing (*oracula poscas | ipsa canat*, *Aen.* 3.456-7). Aeneas takes his brother-in-law’s advice and his words as well when he encounters the Sibyl, saying *ipsa canas oro* (‘I ask that you sing yourself’, *Aen.* 6.76). The oral delivery of the Sibyl’s prophecy does not render it more easily interpretable: her prophecies still ‘mix truth with obscurity’ (*obscuris uera involvens*, *Aen.* 6.100), and she remains a frustratingly uncooperative speaker, laconic and prone to deflections. But, as Michèle Lowrie comments, ‘at least the message is actually transmitted’.¹⁰ And as part of Virgil’s epic poem, the Sibyl’s spoken prophecies attain an immortality expressed by

⁴ Similarly, the Muse Erato is asked in the proem of Book 7 to ‘hasten’ and ‘advise’ (*age*, 37; *mone*, 41), where Virgil ‘explains’ and ‘tells’ (*expediam*, 40; *dicam*, 42).

⁵ Lucretius rarely uses *canere* for his own poetry (though *carmen* and *cantus* are common): a strong first-person use at 5.509, and two comparisons of the *DRN* to swans’ songs at 4.181 and 910, but nothing like Virgil’s programmatic use.

⁶ Lowrie 2009:1-23 and 142-74 thoroughly discusses Virgil’s *cano* at *Aen.* 1.1, in the context of performance and singing in Virgil’s works. Volk 1997, on ‘poetic simultaneity’, is discussed in my previous chapter (39 n.69).

⁷ Cf. especially Oliensis 2004, Gowers 2005.

⁸ A passing image within Jupiter’s prophetic speech (*fabor*, 1.262) and Virgil’s song (*canenti*, 9.525)

⁹ Oliensis 2004:39-45 analyses the Sibyl’s disordered leaves in connection with *ordo* throughout the poem; she compares them to the *Aeneid*’s practices of literary reading, re-use and re-ordering (45). Breed 2006a:149-51 adds that the Sibyl’s shuffled pages open up interpretative space: Virgil ‘emphasizes the reader’s freedom to put things back in order’. Perhaps compare B. S. Johnson’s aleatory novel *The Unfortunates* (1969) or Anne Carson’s poem *Float* (2016), or divinatory methods like tarot cards.

¹⁰ 2009:4. Lowrie’s discussion (2009:2-7) notes the painful cost of the Sibyl’s songs, deriving from both past trauma and violent possession by the god in the present. Like a Roman slave, whose legal testimony is valid only if it is the product of torture, the Sibyl transforms pain into prophecy. ‘The Sibyl’s... resistance is understandable. She ... would much rather do her job in writing’ (5).

comparison to the enduring material of Rome itself: ‘If my songs have any power’, Virgil writes in *Aeneid* 9, his commemoration of the events of the poem will last ‘for as long as Aeneas’ line dwells on the immovable rock of the Capitol’ (*si quid mea carmina possunt... dum domus Aeneae Capitoli immobile saxum accolet*, *Aen.* 9.448-9).¹¹

The Sibyl’s words communicate with the ‘unmediated clarity of full presence’, as Ellen Oliensis puts it, and attain the weight and longevity usually attributed to the material text;¹² her written material, in a reversal of the usual trope, is disordered, unreadable, impermanent. Elsewhere in Virgil’s poetry, even this binary opposition between voice and text is not so easily maintained. The two central poems of the *Eclogues*, in particular, throw serious obstacles in the path of a smooth association of pastoral poetry with song, exposing an undercurrent of textuality beneath the illusion of extemporised performance. In *Eclogue* 5, Menalcas invites Mopsus to compose off-the-cuff song. He specifies traditional genres and suggests contemporary pastoral characters as targets of each: love-poetry to Phyllis, encomium of Alcon, invective against Codrus (*aut Phyllida ignes | aut Alconis... laudes aut iurgia Codri*, *Ecl.* 5.10-11). But Mopsus shrugs off the invitation, instead performing poetry he recently composed and inscribed on beech-bark (*immo haec, in uiridi nuper quae cortice fagi | carmina descripsi... experiar*, 5.16-18). Within Mopsus’ poem appears yet another inscription, too: the epitaph on Daphnis’ tomb, which (following the conventions of sepulchral epigram) purports to be in Daphnis’ own voice, the dead man speaking to the reader (*Ecl.* 5.43-4; note *carmen* at 42). Mopsus’ performance of his pre-composed poem directly challenges the conceit of pastoral song; the fact that it is not only prepared in advance¹³ but a *written* text, which exists independently of Mopsus’ current performance of it, forces us to reconfigure our understanding of poetry and textuality in Virgil’s pastoral world.¹⁴

If written literature exists within the pastoral world of the *Eclogues*, it also opens up room for the audience to recognise the larger intertextual sphere within which Virgil’s poetry operates: the characters voice direct translations from Theocritus’ and Callimachus’ Greek and quote material from Virgil’s peers – or even from Virgil himself.¹⁵ Self-conscious about its

¹¹ The comparison is in itself ironic: in an epic filled with ruined, unfinished, forgotten or future cities, the materiality of Rome is hardly reassuring. (This irony is missed by New York’s National September 11 Memorial & Museum: the Memorial Hall bears an infelicitous quotation of *Aen.* 9.447. Criticism of the inscription has focused less on this point – the tactless reference to cities’ enduring physical existence, in the context of the destruction of the Twin Towers – than on the ethics behind terming victims of terrorism *fortunati*, or in paralleling them with Nisus and Euryalus: cf., e.g., Alexander 2011, Dunlap 2014.)

¹² Oliensis 2004:39.

¹³ Virgil’s (and Theocritus’) shepherds practise in advance: cf., e.g., Tityrus at 1.2, or Menalcas’ poem in *Ecl.* 5, of which Mopsus has heard reports before (54-5). Cf. Theoc. *Id.* 1.23-5, 7.49-51.

¹⁴ Breed 2006a:15 notes intrusions of the text: Gallus writing on trees (10.53), Lycoris reading *Ecl.* 10 (10.2-3), Pollio reading *Ecl.* 3 (3.84-5), and the miraculous child reading of his ancestors’ heroic deeds (4.26-7). See too Kania 2016: 94-7, 149-52.

¹⁵ Theocritus: most egregiously, *Ecl.* 9.39-43 (Moeris searches his memory for Menalcas’ poetry and finds instead a translation of Theoc. *Id.* 11.42-7). Callimachus: e.g. *Ecl.* 6.3-5, quoting Callim. *Aetia* 1 fr. 1.21-4 Pfeiffer. Virgil’s peers: Gallus, perhaps, in *amor uincit omnia* at 10.69 (speculation, but pleasing; cf. Martindale

status as text, the collection betrays its own conceit of orality not just by including depictions of written poetry but by referring to itself in similar terms. The narrator of *Eclogue* 6, who wavers between claiming the identity of ‘Tityrus’ and seeming to encode the author’s own persona, states (*Ecl.* 6.9-12):

non iniussa cano. si quis tamen haec quoque, si quis
captus amore leget, te nostrae, Vare, myricae,
te nemus omne canet; nec Phoebo gratior ulla est
quam sibi quae Vari praescipsit pagina nomen.

I do not sing unbidden. Still, if there is anyone to read even these lines, anyone captivated by them, the tamarisks will sing of you, Varus, all the grove will sing of you. No page is more pleasing to Apollo than the one that has the name of Varus written at its head.

The rapid oscillation between the oral and the written here is remarkable. The narrator begins by identifying the poetry as a present performance of song: *cano*. These very lines (*haec*), however, are then discussed as a written artefact: someone will read them (*quis... leget*). Virgil emphasises their materiality, their physical appearance: a *pagina* bears the name ‘Varus’ at the top.¹⁶ But – in yet another turn to the oral – this physical incarnation of the *Eclogues* only exists to facilitate song: the unnamed ‘someone’ will read the poems aloud to *reperform* them as song, ventriloquizing the singing of the tamarisks and groves from within the pastoral fiction. The material text *is*, on the one hand, the *Eclogues*; on the other, it is a mere mechanism for transferring the song, via performance, from the pastoral world to Varus’ reality. John van Sickle notes that *pagina*, ‘page’ or ‘column of text’, derives from *pagus*, a demarcated plot of countryside land.¹⁷ If the etymology resonates as more than a dead metaphor in Virgil’s use of it here,¹⁸ a nice paradox emerges: the *pagina*, the physical papyrus ‘page’ that contains the words of the *Eclogues*, not only enables the reader to replicate the singing of the tamarisks and groves, but is also, in some way, identical with this pastoral landscape so alive with song.¹⁹ Tityrus’ *pagina* is the equivalent of Mopsus or Gallus inscribing their poetry on trees: both a (half-convincing) countryside detail²⁰ and, simultaneously, a metaphorical encoding of the text *as* landscape. As Raymond Kania puts it, ‘there are certain parallels between being in the

1997b:114); others *passim* (e.g. Lucretius, Catullus, Calvus, *et al.*). Virgil: the end of *Ecl.* 5 marks the unnamed narrator (= Virgil?) of *Ecl.* 2.1 as liable to be quoted within the pastoral world (5.85-6). As Höschel 2013:52 notes, ‘an essential feature of bucolic poetry, after all, is that its characters do not sing of their own passion... but adopt someone else’s voice, which makes the genre itself an intrinsically mimetic one.’

¹⁶ Schafer 2017 argues that Virgil designed the *Eclogues* and the *Georgics* for a ‘presentation copy’ with 36- and 40-line columns; thus Varus’ name would fall at the top of the page, and Maecenas’ (*G.* 1.2, 2.41, 3.41 and 4.2) would be similarly prominent. I remain sceptical, but Schafer makes his case well.

¹⁷ Van Sickle 2007:132.

¹⁸ *pagina* is rare in Latin literature before Virgil; it apparently only appears in Cicero. The pseudo-Virgilian *Culex* intensifies the paradox: the narrator declares that the page itself sings (*canit... pagina*, 26).

¹⁹ Baraz 2015 explores the soundscape of Calpurnius Siculus’ post-Virgilian pastoral landscape.

²⁰ See Kruschwitz 2010 on tree-writing as epigraphy.

Eclogues and reading them'.²¹ In the *Eclogues* Virgil deploys text and song to bring about a dazzling display of fiction and metafiction; his entanglement of the two in his other works is no less exhilarating.

Methodological throat-clearing

Recent years have seen a flourishing of investigations into the Virgilian preoccupation with the interrelations between song and writing; I single out Brian Breed on singing and textuality in the *Eclogues* and Michèle Lowrie on performance and writing in all three of Virgil's works (and other Augustan writings besides). Beyond Virgilian studies, Shane Butler provocatively asserts a primary sense of voice in the ancient written word: a complete absorption of voice into text, or a symbiotic coexistence of the two. Sean Gurd, among other scholars of the synaesthetic, looks beyond the voice to sound itself, drawing our attention to the entire soundscape of ancient literature and society.²² The particular value of all these pieces of scholarship is that they go beyond a simplistic binary of the oral and the textual, delving further into the ways in which Virgil and other ancient authors present them as inextricably, and productively, bound up with one another.

Far less attention, however, has been paid to the ways in which ancient readers *responded* to these elements of Virgil's poetic self-fashioning: in particular, how they portrayed Virgil reciting, singing and performing his works, or the extent to which they assimilated him to his pastoral or vatic characters to consider him primarily as a singer of his own works.²³ I do not intend to reassess here the *realia* of literary recitation and performance culture in Virgil's Rome and in the following centuries. It is beyond doubt that Virgil, like other Augustan poets, regularly read his poetry to small groups of close acquaintances, both to elicit feedback on 'works in progress' and to disseminate the finished works;²⁴ it is also likely that his poems were adapted for performance on stage as drama or dance (or pantomime, which combined the two forms), perhaps even within his own lifetime.²⁵ Again like other Augustan poets, he seems to

²¹ Kania 2016:157.

²² Breed 2006a, Lowrie 2009, Butler 2015, Gurd 2016. I will not rehearse their arguments here in full, but these monographs, especially the first two, are influential on this chapter.

²³ Important exceptions: Graziosi 2002 investigates the literary value of ancient evaluations of Homer as both performer and performed text. Nooter 2017:53-122 analyses Aristophanes' representation of Aeschylus' voice in *Frogs*.

²⁴ Recitation culture in Virgil's Rome: cf. Quinn 1982, Starr 1987 and 1991, Dupont 1997, Markus 2000, Johnson and Parker 2009, Lowrie 2009:13-20, Gurd 2007 and 2012. Much of their evidence, however, comes from [i] non-poetic contemporary authors (Cicero), [ii] writers from later periods (e.g. Seneca, Pliny, Macrobius, Gellius), or [iii] poets who position recitation as a foil for their own practices (e.g. Horace, Persius, Juvenal).

²⁵ *VSD* 26, Tac. *Dial.* 13.2, Servius *ad Buc.* 6.11, Suetonius *Ner.* 54, Luc. *Salt.* 46, Macrobius 5.17.5, August. *PL* 38.1135-6 (cf. Panayotakis 2008, Hörschele 2013). The *Eclogues* are most likely to have been performed as pantomime, but it seems even the *Aeneid* could be adapted: Suetonius reports Nero wanting to dance the part of Turnus (*palam uouerat... saltaturumque Vergili Turnum*, 54; cf. Macr. *Sat.* 5.17.5, Lucian *Salt.* 46, August. *PL*

have anticipated his works being both read and read aloud; clearly his works make as much use of visual wordplay as of audible soundplay.²⁶ But it is difficult to claim much more than this with certainty: there is simply not enough reliable evidence either way.

After all, as I will demonstrate throughout this chapter, most later biographical reports of Virgil's recitation and performance of his own poetry hold little objective truth value. Instead, they reflect their authors' interpretative stances towards Virgil's poems. They also betray their authors' own assumptions regarding the literary and performance cultures of their own times and of Virgil's – a foible no less prominent in modern scholars' work. Thus, for example, those who consider the Roman literary culture of the first century BCE to have been primarily textual – Florence Dupont, for example²⁷ – will understand Virgil's self-presentation as a divinely inspired, extemporising *uates* to be no more than a fiction generated within his poetry, a reaction against the urbane, self-consciously textual poetry of the Hellenistic and neoteric schools. Conversely, those who see Roman culture as primarily and fundamentally an oral society, one that has singing and performance as its basic mode of literary production – most notoriously, in recent years, Thomas Habinek and Peter Wiseman²⁸ – will see the elements of self-conscious material textuality within Virgil's works as secondary elements, subsequent to and less important than the 'original' performance context of his poems.

In this chapter, as in the first, I am far more interested in the discursive functions that anecdotes about Virgil's voice and performance serve in the texts in which they are found, and the representations of Virgil or interpretations of his poetry that they entail. One thread running through ancient biographical treatments of Virgil, and through ancient scholarship on his poetry, is an obsession with scenes of Virgil's performances: the original genesis of his poetry, or of parts of it; specific significant performances; Virgil in full flow, or interrupted, or silenced; the nature of his audiences, and their reactions to his poems. But, as ever when dealing with ancient poet biographies, there is rarely one consistent characterisation of Virgil's voice, or even one single thematic thread to untangle and trace; the nature of his relationship with oral culture and performance is very much in flux. The biographies and testimonies directly contradict one another, gesture towards wholly different ways of reading Virgil, or depart entirely from any characterisation of Virgil recognisable to modern eyes.

38.1135-6). 'Adapted' is perhaps the wrong word: as Lada-Richards points out in her discussion of Ovid's portrayal of bodily transformation in the *Metamorphoses* and its relationship with Augustan pantomime (2018), 'subliterary' performance genres can exert an influence on a poet's work.

²⁶ Acrostics, for example, are only perceivable in visual form (e.g., *FONS Ecl.* 1.5-8, *VNDIS Ecl.* 9.34-8, *MARS Aen.* 7.601-4; cf. Clauss 1997, Grishin 2008, Fowler 1983). One example of soundplay (Levitan 1993:14): the elision of Juno's first words, *mene incepto...* (1.37), replays Iliadic 'anger' (*men(e)-in-* = μήνιν, *Il.* 1.1).

²⁷ Dupont 1994 claims Rome's culture of writing contrasts with Greek performativity ('cold' versus 'hot' literature). Dupont's approach is extreme, 'a reductio ad absurdum of the conventional polarities between speech and writing' (Feeney 2000; cf. Gowers 1995).

²⁸ Blandford 1958; Habinek 2005 (though cf. Feeney and Katz 2006); Wiseman 2016 (though cf. Gowers 2016c, Vasaly 2017). Habinek 2005:248 summarises: in Rome '[w]riting remains dependent on and secondary to speech'.

What is at stake, then, when ancient readers discuss an author's voice? 'Voice' is in itself a potent and much-theorised phenomenon.²⁹ It is rooted in the body: it is the product of the vibrating vocal folds, the expansion and contraction of the lungs, the manipulation of the throat, tongue and lips. But it is also immaterial, a sound that exists only in the instant of its production and that cannot be touched, seen or preserved.³⁰ Voice represents both bodily presence and absence;³¹ it is a token of the living person, but in its transience it registers, as Sarah Nooter puts it, 'a sense of loss [...]: something heard is gone already, and perhaps lost long ago'.³² There is frequently thought to be something sacrosanct or divine about the voice, and not only in Greek or Roman culture: think of the word that 'is' god, the 'word of god' that brings matter into being, the 'still small voice' in the wilderness, the 'inspiration' (literally 'breathing-into') that drives the voice and speech of prophets.³³ But voice is also quintessentially human: outside the realms of myth, story and metaphor, gods and animals do not speak,³⁴ and while the natural world certainly *signifies*, it too lacks a voice. And, finally, the human voice is unique. Though imitable to some degree, each person's speech is (or, at least, is considered to be) distinct and characteristic of that single person alone. In a typical metonymic transfer of meaning, someone's 'voice' can be their self, their individual personal identity, something inextricable from the very essence of their being. But then, the voice is also something to be constructed and regulated; like the rest of the 'natural' body, it must be groomed, clipped, contorted and polished to maintain an acceptable existence within societal constraints.³⁵ *talis oratio qualis uita*, as the philosopher puts it.³⁶

When it comes to an 'authorial voice', all these paradoxes and metaphorical resonances come into play. Authors are most liable to be reduced to their voice alone in critical discourse; a common cliché of book reviews is to refer to the author as 'a distinctive voice', 'a fresh new voice' in a particular genre. Virgil in particular falls prey to this metonym in modern scholarship, thanks to Adam Parry's 'Two Voices' and Oliver Lyne's 'Further Voices'.³⁷ The author's voice, in these idioms, is not the literal, auditory voice, but what Foucault calls the

²⁹ The most influential theorist of the voice is Barthes, particularly 1977, 1985 and 1986. My formulations in this paragraph are indebted to Breed 2006a:8-11, Butler 2015 and Nooter 2017. I do not pretend to be comprehensive in discussing the metaphorical resonances of 'voice', 'sound' or 'speech'.

³⁰ Or rather, *could not* be preserved, until the 1877 invention of recording technology (Edison's phonograph).

³¹ Habinek 2005:158-219 analyses this tension: while Roman song aspires to be 'the disembodied voice of the elite male' (221), the bodily nature of its production generates anxieties of gender and sexuality. Cf. Young 2016:188-9.

³² Nooter 2017:3.

³³ I am thinking particularly of Jewish and Christian figurations of divinity (e.g. 1 Kings 19:12; John 1:1; cf. Nooter 2017:15-17), but the link is common in other cultures too.

³⁴ Mimicry (e.g. birds) is an exception. I leave aside ancient reports of talking birds, but note that Pliny gets all in a fluster about the cannibalistic perversion of eating birds that speak *humano sermone* (HN 10.141-2). Virgil uses the term *cano* only of gods, narrators, trumpets, birds and – bathetically – frogs.

³⁵ On the regulation of the voice and body, cf. Quint. *Inst.* 11.3.19 (with Gunderson 2000:82).

³⁶ *talis hominibus fuit oratio qualis uita*, 'men's speech gives insight into their biography' (Seneca *Ep.* 114.1). Cf. Quint. *Inst.* 11.3.31.

³⁷ Parry 1967, Lyne 1987; cf. Breed 2006a:8-11.

‘author function’: the collection of textual traits that give rise, in the reader’s mind, to a hypothetical figure that controls and produces meaning, which is in turn assimilated to the biographical author.³⁸ But it is notable that the metaphor chosen by Parry and Lyne to express Virgil’s own suppressed or subconscious opinions, latent in the text of the *Aeneid*, is not Virgil’s pen (for example) but his voice. For Parry in particular, the ‘second voice’ of the poem expresses Virgil’s own personal views, a private undercurrent of anti-epic regret and ambivalence that he attributes not to the narrator alone but to Virgil himself. The metaphor of ‘voice’ goes beyond the words of the poem to the human presence of the author himself; while admittedly present in and generated by the text alone, it points irresistibly to the living author’s character and personality beyond his works.³⁹

As with the reports of Virgil’s composition and revision of his poetry discussed earlier, I argue in this chapter that the portrayals of Virgil’s voice and the anecdotes about Virgil’s recitations found throughout the biographies are of use to us for examining changing ideas of authorship and of readerly practice, and for observing textual, literary and cultural reception in action. These anecdotes are used to navigate problems of textual authority: who is able to control the circulation, the meaning, or even the actual words of Virgil’s poetry, especially in the absence of the author himself? They also characterise Virgil’s nature as a poet through the metonym of his voice: reports of his stuttering delivery, his melodious sweetness or his vocal fragility are used both to characterise him within the context of other ancient poetic biographies and to express interpretations of his individual works. And stories of Virgil’s recitations – both semi-public and semi-private, both to anonymous audiences of admirers and detractors and to the most select of audiences, Augustus and the imperial family – transfer the drama found within Virgil’s poems to the scenarios of their dissemination; they stage the recitations as highly significant theatrical performances in their own right, and provide fantasies of Virgil’s original intentions to help fix and shape subsequent approaches to his works. My interest in this chapter lies not in resolving the paradoxes inherent to cultural and literary conceptions of ‘authorial voice’, but in investigating places where the tensions, the play of polarities, are most prominent and most revealing. By reading these testimonies and anecdotes alongside one another, with full attention to their internal logic and to the contextual systems of the sources within which they are found, we can begin to grapple with how Virgil’s ancient readers responded to his momentous pose of vatic song, the resounding claim of *arma uirumque cano*.

³⁸ Foucault 1977.

³⁹ Seneca’s highest compliment to Lucilius’ literary efforts is that reading him is like hearing his work read aloud: *tamquam audierim illa, non legerim* (*Ep.* 46.3). Cf. Laird 2016 on Virgil’s posthumous presence.

Improvisation, interruption and interpolation

One Virgilian tidbit, rather unusually found in both Servius and the *VSD*, neatly illustrates how issues of recitation, performance and Virgil's poetic voice run through his ancient reception, frame his role as author and even represent the dynamics of poetic reception itself. In his discussion of the times and seasons for farm work in *Georgics* Book 1, Virgil offers a neatly chiasmic half-line by way of *sententia*: *nudus ara, sere nudus*, 'plough naked, sow naked' – that is, in summer (*G.* 1.299). The source is Hesiod: γυμνὸν σπεῖρειν, γυμνὸν δὲ βοωτεῖν, | γυμνὸν δ' ἄμάειν ('sow naked, plough naked, reap naked', *Op.* 391-2). Virgil translates and shortens Hesiod's tripartite maxim, making room in the line for a succinct inversion to complete the point: *hiems ignava colono* ('winter is a lazy time for the farmer'). But this strong division between the line's two halves, as well as the conceptual distance between the literal meaning of *nudus* ('naked') and its sense here ('in the heat', thus 'in summer'), leaves the line vulnerable to parody. Servius' note on the line preserves a passing witticism, a curiosity of the poem's transmission:

NUDUS ARA SERE NUDUS adeo sereno caelo, ut amictum possis contemnere. sane quidam post hoc hemistichium dicitur subsecutus 'habebis frigore febres'.

PLOUGH NAKED, SOW NAKED: That is, while the sky is clear, so you can cast aside your clothing. Someone once supposedly followed it with this half-line: 'You'll catch a fever from the chill'.

The joke takes Virgil's *nudus* literally – a *reductio ad absurdum*. The sudden turn from Virgil's elevated dictum to common-sense practicality is bathetic; it exposes Virgil's poetry as overwrought, archaic and ultimately impractical for the farmers he claims to educate.⁴⁰

Servius' phrasing here is neutral: we are not told *how* this anonymous interpolator 'followed' Virgil's half-line. But at least one reader has taken it as a purely textual interaction. In his commentary on the *Georgics*, Richard Thomas reports this piece of trivia, citing Servius: he notes that 'the oddity of [Virgil's] expression reflects the archaism of [his] source [...] but that did not save him from the waggish pen of an anonymous parodist'.⁴¹ Thomas adds flourishes: in place of Servius' vague *subsecutus*, now we find a parodist's 'waggish pen', a marginal comment or interlinear variant interpolated into Virgil's text of the *Georgics*. He omits mention, though, of the *VSD*'s version of the story, which memorably takes place at a live recitation (*VSD* 43):

⁴⁰ Numitorius' parody of *Ecl.* 1.1 takes the same common-sense approach: *Tityre, si toga calda tibi est, quo tegmine fagi?* (*VSD* 43). Roman satire's deflation of high-minded poetry often hinges on temperature: compare Lucilius' reported 'correction' of Ennius' line *sparsis hastis longis campus splendet et horret* (*Scipio* fr. 14 Vahlen), tacking on the bathetic *et alget* (*Serv. ad Aen.* 11.601). Cf. Freudenburg 2001:88-91.

⁴¹ Thomas 1988 *ad G.* 1.299.

alius recitante eo ex Georgica ‘nudus ara, sere nudus’, subiecit: ‘habebis frigore febrem’

When he was reciting this line from the Georgics, ‘Plough naked, sow naked’, someone else⁴² interrupted him: ‘You’ll catch a fever from the chill’.

In place of Thomas’ shadowy interpolator, pen in hand, here we have dramatic staging and unanticipated audience interaction: Virgil *heckled* at his own reading!⁴³

The *VSD*’s context of live recitation lends the anecdote a different flavour. In place of the dry collation of textual testimonia, the biographer gives us a drama-in-miniature. This rendition of the anecdote invites the readers to fill in the other necessary elements: author, audience and public response. Indeed, it reads very much like the dramas-in-miniature that populate Seneca the Elder’s accounts of declamations. Not the bizarre and baroque narratives found within the declamations themselves, that is, but the equally tangled dynamics surrounding their performance: the onlookers watching the show and Seneca’s descriptions of their responses that quickly overtake the declamations in importance.⁴⁴

Most importantly, though, the heckler’s tactics mimic Virgil’s own. Earlier in the *VSD*, the biographer notes that, despite Virgil’s usual laborious methods of composition, he occasionally improvised his poetry *ex tempore*, in the middle of (semi-)public recitations (*VSD* 33-4):⁴⁵

recitavit et pluribus, sed neque frequenter et ea fere de quibus ambigebat, quo magis iudicium hominum experiretur. Erotem librarium et libertum eius exactae iam senectutis tradunt referre solitum, quondam eum in recitando duos dimidiatos uersus complekse ex tempore. nam cum hactenus haberet: ‘Misenum Aeoliden’ [*Aen.* 6.164], adiecisse: ‘quo non praestantior alter’, item huic: ‘aere ciere uiros’ [*Aen.* 6.165], simili calore iactatum subiunxisse: ‘Martemque accendere cantu’, statimque sibi imperasse, ut utrumque uolumini adscriberet.

He also gave recitations to larger audiences, though not often, and mostly of those lines about which he was unsure, the better to try out people’s judgment. They say that Eros, his secretary and freedman, would report in his old age that on one occasion Virgil completed two half-finished lines *ex tempore* during a recitation. For when he reached ‘Misenus, son of Aeolus’, he added ‘whom no one surpassed’; and likewise, to ‘in stirring up men with brazen trumpet’ he added ‘and kindling Mars’ spirits with the

⁴² In the *VSD* this anecdote follows the account of Numitorius’ *Antibucolica*; *alius* distinguishes the two parodists.

⁴³ *Contra* Wilson-Okamura’s translation (Ziolkowski and Putnam 2008:194), I take *recitante eo* to imply strongly that Virgil was the one to recite the line (cf. Horsfall 1995a:19). The recitation in question also seems to take place within Virgil’s lifetime. The *VSD* reports a selection of criticism for each of Virgil’s works in order: Numitorius’ *Antibucolica*, this parody of the *Georgics* and then several attacks on the *Aeneid*. Numitorius’ parody, reported just before this anecdote, appears after the publication of the *Eclogues* (*prolatis Bucolicis*, *VSD* 43) but, it seems, before the *Georgics* or *Aeneid* appeared; the mention of Agrippa’s criticism of the *Aeneid* just afterwards (*VSD* 44) must have taken place between the mid-20s and 12 BCE (when Agrippa died). After the reports of criticisms of Virgil’s works (*VSD* 43-6), the biographer notes that Virgil departed to Greece to ‘trim everything to the satisfaction of his critics’ (*VSD* 46).

⁴⁴ On these, see (e.g.) Gunderson 2003, Gowers forthcoming, Bartsch 1994:82-4..

⁴⁵ *recitavit et pluribus*, i.e., not just to his closest acquaintances (but probably not as a full-scale public performance).

noise’, casting it off with a similar fervour. And he immediately ordered Eros to write both down on the scroll.

The Virgil of this anecdote completes existing, previously-composed half-lines with their second hemistichs – just like the anonymous heckler of *VSD* 43. And like the heckler’s, the scene for Virgil’s feat of poetic creation is the recital.⁴⁶ It is significant that the particular lines Virgil supposedly extemporised here have to do with sound and song, Misenus’ talent as a trumpeter – though unlike Misenus, whose fatal downfall is his musical ambition, Virgil’s virtuosity stands undefeated.⁴⁷ The biographer’s language links Virgil’s recitation and his character Misenus’ music together, too. Not only are Misenus’ trumpet-blasts described as ‘song’ (*cantus*; cf. 6.172), like Virgil’s own sung performance, but just as Misenus’ trumpet-blasts ‘kindle’ (*accendere*) martial ardour, so Virgil sings with ‘heat’ (*calore*).⁴⁸

In my previous chapter, I argued that the *VSD* here tries to have it both ways in the description of Virgil’s working habits: Virgil’s skill as a poet is evident both in his slow, careful composition and revision, focused on the written text, (22-5) *and* in his occasional vatic outbursts of inspired, virtuosic extemporisation (33-4).⁴⁹ The *calor* that carries Virgil along here – the white-hot spark of genius that Statius too, that self-proclaimed master of extemporisation, claims as his own⁵⁰ – distinguishes his composition in this anecdote from his habitual dictation to his amanuensis, as detailed earlier in the *VSD* (22). Though Virgil dictates his initial drafts aloud there, it is not strictly improvisation since the lines are pre-prepared (*meditados*);⁵¹ what’s more, this first-draft material is sub-par and unsatisfactory, as demonstrated by the poet’s subsequent laborious revision of it. Here, by contrast, Virgil’s half-lines are truly improvised, invented on the spur of the moment.⁵² And despite Virgil’s exacting and stringently self-critical standards for his poetry (*VSD* 22-3, 35, 39), they meet with his

⁴⁶ Servius gives a similar account for *Aen.* 6.164 (but not 6.165). Horsfall 1995a:19-20 finds the account of the *VSD* ‘but a step from unabashed fantasy’, since two successive hemistichs would be incomprehensible (cf. Austin 1977 *s.v. A.* 6.164). But the story is hardly *a priori* impossible: since oral composition of hexameter epic rests on flexible *formulae* like *quo non alter* (e.g. *Aen.* 1.544, 7.649, 9.179, 9.772, 12.632), *Aen.* 6.164 could have been completed *ex tempore*; similarly, given that the second half of 6.165 is roughly synonymous to the first (*aere ciere uiros ~ Martemque accendere cantu*), and thus syntactically superfluous and detachable, it could feasibly have been improvised during a recitation.

⁴⁷ Misenus had challenged the gods to a musical contest (*Aen.* 6.172), and was punished by *aemulus Triton* (173). Horsfall 2013 *ad loc.* argues that Misenus is Virgil’s invention.

⁴⁸ On trumpet-blasts and war-music, and the extent to which they were conceived of as meaningful ‘song’ in antiquity, see Klavan (forthcoming).

⁴⁹ Quinn 1982:85 comments, tellingly, that Virgil’s ‘standing as a *true poet* was authenticated... by the ability to reach out and grasp the *sudden inspiration* which transcended his labours at the written text’ (my emphasis).

⁵⁰ Statius *Silv.* 1 *praef.* 3. On ancient literary and oratorical improvisation, cf. Hardie 1983:76-91, Newlands 2011:3-4, Gurd 2012:41-7.

⁵¹ *VSD* 22: *cotidie meditados mane plurimos uersus dictare solitus*. Butler 2011:21 writes: ‘There is no point [at] which [Virgil’s] text is as yet unborn; its creation has been entirely eclipsed by its *being worked on*.’ Cf. Gurd 2012:44, paraphrasing Quint. *Inst.* 10.6-7: ‘What one says is a kind of second draft of what one has thought.’

⁵² In Suetonius, the other poet capable of *ex tempore* composition is Augustus (*Aug.* 98.4; cf. Macrob. *Sat.* 2.4.31). Suetonius is fascinated by Augustus’ bilingualism and linguistic invention (84-9; cf. Wardle 2014:481).

approval:⁵³ he has his secretary Eros enter them into the papyrus scroll of the draft he is reciting, and they stand in the final copy of *Aeneid* Book 6 that we, and the audience of the *VSD*, read.

This anecdote seems devised expressly in response to an enduring problem for Virgil's ancient readers (and not a few of his modern readers too): the fifty-nine half-lines that remain in the text of the *Aeneid*.⁵⁴ The use of half-lines is unprecedented in Roman and Greek poetry, and in Virgil's own works. Their presence has most often been attributed to the 'incomplete' state of the *Aeneid* at Virgil's death, with the assumption that he would have supplemented or altered them at a later date – an assumption supported by *VSD* 33-4, this anecdote of Virgil's extemporised completion of half-lines, which illustrates one method by which Virgil went about filling in the gaps. The problem is that, of the *Aeneid*'s metrically-incomplete half-lines, only one is actually incomplete in grammar and sense, as the *VSD* points out (*omnia fere apud eum hemistichia absoluto perfectoque sunt sensu, praeter illud 'quem tibi iam Troia'*, *VSD* 41): all the others bring their preceding sentences to a decisive close, and it is difficult to see how they *could* be completed (at least from our non-Virgilian perspective). What's more, if we allow the *Aeneid* a more experimental or avant-garde relationship with poetic form, even this 'incomplete' hemistich *quem tibi iam Troia...* ('whom for you now Troy...', *Aen.* 3.340) is remarkably effective in context: Andromache's grief for her dead son Astyanax overcomes her and she breaks off in aposiopesis, before abruptly resuming her questions to Aeneas (*ecquid tamen...?*, *Aen.* 3.341).⁵⁵ Others, too, seem to carry poetic weight in their current form as half-lines: the repetition of the names Nisus and Euryalus at 5.294 and 9.467, for example, which connects the pair as a distinct unit (*fortunati ambo!*), evokes the narration of the semi-comic footrace of Book 5 in the aftermath of Book 9's fatal skirmish, and cuts the line short as if in mimetic response to their premature deaths.⁵⁶ The *VSD* refers to Virgil's half-lines, in the space of a sentence, as both *imperfecti* and *perfecti* (*VSD* 41); the paradox neatly expresses the

⁵³ And (presumably) the approval of his audience too, given that the recitation was primarily for the purpose of eliciting feedback, like an academic conference paper (*VSD* 33: *recitat... ea fere de quibus ambigebat, quo magis iudicium hominum experiretur*). Compare Pliny's report of Silius (*non numquam iudicia hominum recitationibus experiebatur*, *Ep.* 3.7.5) – in direct imitation of his hero Virgil?

⁵⁴ On Virgil's half-lines, see Sparrow 1931:1-52, Baldwin 1993, Horsfall 1995:23-4 and 2006:xxxviii, Farrell 2010:438-9 O'Hara 2010:99-100, and page 42 above. Sparrow should be treated with caution: his analyses are predicated on *a priori* assumptions about Virgil's working methods. Brown 2017 finds reception of Virgilian half-lines in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*; McGill 2005:36 and 69 notes that some Virgilian *centones* seem to imitate Virgilian half-lines too. On the question of whether the *Aeneid* as we have it is in fact unfinished, see Horsfall 2006:xx-xi, O'Hara 2010. Other Latin texts suspected of being deliberately 'unfinished' (cf. Hardie 1997): Ovid's *Fasti* (with Martelli 2013:105-7), Lucan's *Bellum Civile* (with Masters 1992:216-59), Statius' *Achilleid*.

⁵⁵ Compare Sinon's aposiopesis (*Aen.* 2.100-1): *nec requieuit enim, donec Calchante ministro – | sed quid ego haec autem nequiquam ingrata reuolvo?* Servius *ad Aen.* 2.101, 105, finds the technique effective; Statius imitates it at *Thebaid* 9.799. Some modern critics argue *Aen.* 3.340 was left intentionally unfinished (Sparrow 1931:43, Grimm 1967:157-8, Feldman 1958:362, Witton 1960); Horsfall 2006 *ad loc.* argues that it is an interpolation.

⁵⁶ Sparrow 1931:42-5 lists others, which tend to occur in contexts of rhetoric, high emotion, and direct speech; O'Hara 2010:100 adds 3.400 (*infabricata fugae studio*). Nonetheless, I believe the half-lines were probably not supposed to remain in the poem. As O'Hara 2010:100 puts it: 'If Vergil actually did plan to introduce half-lines as a new poetic technique, his premature death ruined the plan by making the incomplete verses look like an accident of history rather than a deliberate device.'

status of the *Aeneid* in antiquity, as a famously unfinished work but one nonetheless marvellous and inimitable.

Virgil's dying wish, according to the *VSD*, was that no major changes be made to his epic before its publication (40). Accordingly, his editors Varius and Tucca did not try to complete the half-lines; 'many others' did, once the *Aeneid* was in circulation, but none with any degree of success, due to the difficulty of the task (*qui uersus etiam imperfectos, si qui erant, reliquerit; quos multi mox supplere conati non perinde ualuerunt ob difficultatem, VSD 41*).⁵⁷ The biography anxiously fences off Virgil's authorised version of the *Aeneid*, in defence against those who would emend it retrospectively; it firmly rejects their efforts to rival Virgil in finishing off his half-lines. It is similarly disparaging of Numitorius' pastiche of the *Eclogues*, the so-called *Antibucolica*, which – like the heckler at Virgil's recital, detailed immediately afterwards – parodies Virgil by matching the first sections of his lines with mocking supplements (*VSD 43*):⁵⁸

*dic mihi, Damoeta: cuium pecus, anne Latinum?
non, uerum Aegonis nostri sic rure loquuntur.*

'Tell me, Damoetas: "Whose the flock" – is that Latin?
'No; that's just the way they speak in our Aegon's lands.'

The biography introduces this quotation by belittling Numitorius' *Antibucolica*: the parody is 'only' two books long (*duas modo eclogas*), barely anything next to Virgil's ten, and 'extremely insipid' (*insulsissime*). The heckler, on the other hand, escapes direct condemnation from the biographer, despite engaging in exactly the sort of pseudo-Virgilian parody that is roundly dismissed when engaged in by Numitorius and the would-be hemistich-writers.⁵⁹ In one sense this is surprising, as he presents much more of a threat to Virgil's authorial control and status: he is capable of the same extraordinary feats of *ex tempore* poetic composition that Virgil is, and he derails Virgil's performance in the recitation of the *Georgics*. But I think this live performance context, and the presence of Virgil himself, also neutralises the danger presented by the interpolator. There is no risk of the quip making its way into the final text of

⁵⁷ Sparrow 1931:46-52 gives the interpolated half-lines found in Virgilian manuscripts and testimonia. Of the ancient ones, most are explicitly not attributed to Virgil: Servius and Servius Auctus flag two as non-Virgilian (*ad Aen.* 2.787, 8.41), and in the capital mss they are all added or deleted by correcting hands, or only found in one of the three (3.661 in P and added by F², 5.595 in R and added by M², 10.490 only in R, 11.391 in M but deleted by M²). Only one is cited as apparently genuine: Seneca gives the quotation *audentis fortuna iuvat, piger ipse sibi opstat* (*Ep.* 94.28.5; cf. Virgil *Aen.* 10.284: *audentis fortuna iuuat*). Given [i] the proverbial nature of Virgil's half-line (cf. Enn. *Ann.* fr. 233 Skutsch: *fortibus est fortuna uiris data*; Ter. *Phorm.* 203: *fortis fortuna adiuuat*), [ii] the fact that Seneca doesn't cite Virgil as its author and [iii] the preceding quotation from, apparently, Publilius Syrus (fr. 250 Ribbeck), the complete line Seneca cites could conceivably have derived from another author.

⁵⁸ See my discussion of Numitorius in the previous chapter (61).

⁵⁹ The condemnation of Numitorius carries over to the heckler – just as the accounts of Virgil's *obtretractores* are undermined by the *VSD*'s bookending its account of them with, first, the remark that the divine Homer too had his share of detractors (*nec mirum, man nec Homero quidam, VSD 43*; cf. Farrell 2010:444-6), and second, Virgil's self-defence against plagiarism (46). But the lack of explicit condemnation here is still noteworthy.

the *Georgics*, just as there is no risk of the interpolator's voice being mistaken for Virgil's own. Virgil, present in the recitation hall, still possesses ultimate authority over his poetry.

The scene even recalls the amoebian song contests of the *Eclogues*, where shepherds compete by swapping imitative verses back and forth, rivalling and one-upping each other.⁶⁰ Within the *Eclogues*, these scenes are ultimately benign, despite their competition contexts.⁶¹ They enact easy friendship, reciprocity and equality; they are almost collaborative, in that the two shepherds' songs combine to produce the dialogue ultimately 'recorded' in the *Eclogues*. The key to this dynamic is the supposedly oral, improvised context: as Brian Breed writes, 'the amoebian context is the ultimate pastoral venue for orality,' and the fiction is that the song exchanges are not only oral, but (crucially) extemporised.⁶² Something of the same dynamic, I propose, carries over to the heckling incident of *VSD* 43. And so the biographer only springs into defensive action when the *written* text left after Virgil's death comes under threat, when the poet is no longer around to guarantee his words, and when there is a real chance that others' words will make their way into the supposedly authorised copy. (Note the term for Numitorius' writing: not just *scripsit* but *rescripsit*, perhaps with a sense of 'rewrite' instead of purely 'write in response'.)⁶³ In the absence of Virgil's voice, his words and meaning can come into far more danger.

Ghostly voices, or, as silent as the grave

Other ancient discussions of Virgil and his poetry repeatedly dwell on the problem of the posthumous absence of Virgil's spoken voice. Imagining his recitations of his poetry, they reconfigure the relationship between Virgil's voice, his written poetry, and his later readers and *their* own literary works. These fictions of authorial voice lend themselves particularly to issues of imitation, re-use, influence and rejection of influence. Consider, for example, Ovid's poetical retrospective towards the end of his autobiography in *Tristia* 4 (10.41-6, 49-51):⁶⁴

temporis illius colui fouique poetas,
quotque aderant uates, rebar adesse deos.
saepe suas uolucres legit mihi grandior aeuo,
quaeque necet serpens, quae iuuat herba, Macer.

⁶⁰ Cf., e.g., *Ecl.* 3.43~47, 76~78, 84~86 and 104~106 for anaphoric repetition between the two singers (the last pair repeat a whole hemistich). 3.80-1 and 82-3 show one singer twisting the other's sentiment while preserving his poetic structure, as in *VSD* 43.

⁶¹ E.g. Rosenmeyer 1969:157, Breed 2006a.

⁶² Breed 2006a:48.

⁶³ 'Rewrite': *OLD* s.v. 4.

⁶⁴ This poem too explores the paradoxical permanence of the voice and impermanence of the material text. Ovid contrasts the lasting fame acquired by reading in public (57-60) with the ease with which his papyri can be burnt (61-66).

saepe suos solitus recitare Propertius ignes
iure sodalicii, quo mihi iunctus erat. [...]
et tenuit nostras numerosus Horatius aures,
dum ferit Ausonia carmina culta lyra.
Vergilium uidi tantum...

I worshipped and revered the poets of that time; all the bards that there were, I considered gods on this earth. Macer, already advanced in age, often read to me of his birds, of poisonous snakes and healing plants. Often Propertius would recite his fervent verses, by right of the [poetic] affinity that bound him to me. [...] And Horace, master of many rhythms, captivated our ears, while he struck up his embellished songs on the Ausonian lyre. Virgil I only saw...

Virgil's marked silence here disrupts the polyphony of poetic voices: Macer who 'read to' the young Ovid, Propertius who declaimed his elegies, Horace who held all ears in thrall to his poetry. Virgil's untimely death in 19 BCE, when Ovid was a tender twenty-four,⁶⁵ prohibited the younger man from attaining intimacy, not just with the poet, but with his poetry: the implication is that there was something to be gained from hearing Virgil that could not be replicated by simply reading his works. Ovid's catalogue of poets here is an assertion of genealogy, a literary family tree that traces his own affiliations to genres like didactic (represented by Macer), elegy (Propertius), and even – somewhat more audaciously – Horatian lyric. When it comes to epic, though, Ovid's claim of *distance* from Virgil and Virgilian influence makes more room for his own innovation in the genre.⁶⁶ His lack of direct contact with Virgil's own recitations separates him, in a rather disingenuous manoeuvre, from both the Virgilian career model⁶⁷ and the epic tradition represented by the *Aeneid*, and allows him to stamp his own personality and 'voice' on Roman epic.⁶⁸

For Ovid, the silence of Virgil's voice after his death offered the opportunity to free himself from the anxiety of influence and assert his own identity as a poet. Other authors responded differently. One of Ovid's contemporaries, a shadowy figure called Julius Montanus,⁶⁹ takes the same premise as Ovid – that to hear Virgil read his poetry is to access a personal and poetic intimacy with it that is unattainable through merely reading it – but pursues it to very different ends. Unlike Ovid, Montanus was lucky enough to have heard Virgil recite before his death, and he seems to have dined out on that fact for the rest of his career (*VSD* 28-9):

⁶⁵ The chronology of Ovid's career is unclear, but 19 BCE is the earliest date suggested for (some of) the *Heroides*, Ovid's earliest public poetry.

⁶⁶ Ovid laments that Tibullus' death prevented him from befriending him (*Tr.* 4.10.51-2); the lack of a similar comment for Virgil casts *uidi tantum* in a more rivalrous poetic light.

⁶⁷ Cf. Barchiesi and Hardie 2010.

⁶⁸ Virgil here seems confined to epic: didactic is already represented by Macer, and pastoral is less important for Ovid's poetry. *Tr.* 4.10.1 (*ille ego qui...*) might imitate the false opening of the *Aeneid* (*VSD* 42); alternatively, the Virgilian imitator who penned that proem had *Tr.* 4.10 in mind (cf. Volk 2005:86, Farrell 2004, Peirano 2013).

⁶⁹ We know almost nothing of Montanus, save a few mentions scattered across literature of the first century BCE (see next note). It is possible that some of these Montani are descendants of the one mentioned in the *VSD*: the Julius Montanus of Tac. *Ann.* 13.25 is certainly post-Virgilian.

Seneca tradidit, Iulium Montanum poetam solitum dicere, inuolaturum se Vergilio quaedam, si et uocem posset et os et hypocrisin; eosdem enim uersus ipso pronuntiante bene sonare, sine illo inanes esse mutosque.

Seneca tells us that the poet Julius Montanus used to say that there were certain things he would steal from Virgil, if he could also have his voice and his appearance and his delivery: for indeed the same lines that sounded good when Virgil himself read them were empty and silent without him.⁷⁰

This is, of course, a double-edged compliment. On the one hand, Montanus praises Virgil's voice and delivery: these are the elements that animate his poetry, give it life and voice. Any deficiencies perceived now in his poems are not faults at all; instead, they attest to the poems' former splendour. Montanus puts a new spin on the old cliché that the *Aeneid* would have been unimaginably improved if its author had lived to give it the final touches. For him, the reverse is true: Virgil's works are but a trace of what they were when Virgil read them, as well as of what they could have been had Virgil finished them. They lack the *ultima uox*, as well as the *ultima manus*. *inanes mutosque*: Montanus' choice of adjectives characterises Virgil's poetry as not just inferior but hollow and dead, unable either to speak or even to mean without the living author.

But Montanus' sentiment is, of course, a little more sly. Taken at face value, it is a pious performance of Maronolatry – but there is a sting in the tail. It sounds like nothing so much as a crafty pre-emptive defence against charges of plagiarism⁷¹ – like the statement attributed to Virgil himself later in the *VSD* (46), in fact, which we unravelled in the previous chapter. Just as lesser mortals cannot wield Hercules' club, so lesser poets are not up to the task of rehoming lines so intimately associated with their author in a new context. The point there is that Homer's pre-eminent skill eclipses all other poets', even if they were to use exactly the same words and phrases. Montanus goes further: in the case of Virgil, he declares, his poetry is rendered mute and meaningless even when so much as read aloud by someone else, let alone when subjected to textual fragmentation, alteration or rearrangement. That is to say, Montanus claims that Virgil's poetry fails to work as poetry: all his works are so weak that, without the particular magic of his own performance of them, they fall entirely flat. Virgil's oeuvre becomes a context-specific, unrepeatable piece of performance art – and the words of his poetry become copyright-free, up for grabs by whichever imitator wants to borrow them.

In fact, Montanus is consistently associated with problems of textual re-use across his appearances in Latin literature. Seneca the Elder quotes him demonstrating how another poet

⁷⁰ Which Seneca? We cannot be sure (cf. Grisart 1961: 202–8, Kaster 1995: 355–6). Both mention this Montanus, as does Ovid (*Pont.* 4.16.11–12). The Elder dubs him *egregius poeta* (*Contr.* 7.1.27); the Younger downgrades him to *tolerabilis* (*Ep.* 122.11–13).

⁷¹ McGill 2012:146 n.2 too quickly dismisses the idea that Montanus speaks of plagiarism, asserting that *inuolaturum* implies enthusiastic re-use instead. The issue at stake in Montanus' comment is precisely the *difference* between re-use and plagiarism.

falls short of Virgil's talent, not only in trying to imitate Virgilian verses and doing it badly, but because he chooses to imitate verses not even original to Virgil himself (*Contr.* 7.1.27).⁷² Seneca the Younger, less fond of Montanus (*tolerabilis poeta*, *Epist.* 122.11-13), casts him as the butt of a recurring joke: as a particularly cliché-prone and unoriginal poet, prone to cramming his works with sunrises and sunsets, his recitations are constantly liable to be heckled and interrupted with parodies of Montanus-style poetry.⁷³ The picture that emerges from these three sources, the *VSD* and the two Senecas,⁷⁴ is one of a poet conspicuously engaged with problems of quotation, allusion, re-use and plagiarism: sometimes falling prey to malicious textual imitation himself; sometimes demarcating and patrolling the boundaries of acceptable poetic behaviour, keen to fend off trespassers; and sometimes, as in the *VSD*, manipulating those boundaries for his own benefit. Modern scholars have occasionally suspected Montanus of such close imitation of Virgil and Ovid that his forgeries might have made their way into (what we think of as) the Virgilian and Ovidian canons.⁷⁵ The evidence – both for large-scale forgery and for Montanus as the culprit – is far too scarce for such adventurous claims: we have only six lines attributed directly to Montanus, preserved in the younger Seneca, and there is no reason to believe that the interpolations in our texts of Virgil and Ovid, no doubt multitudinous, owe their existence to just one identifiable Tiberian author.⁷⁶ But whether or not Montanus was engaged in a massive project of pseudo-Virgilian forgery, the *VSD*'s report gives us a behind-the-scenes glimpse of an imitator's self-justifying reasoning. Montanus brandishes his familiarity with Virgil's voice as a defensive weapon, turning on its head the cliché of a poet's voice as the quintessence of his poetry to make an unexpected case for creative re-use, imitation and quotation of the classical canon.

Several centuries after Ovid and Montanus, the issue of Virgil's posthumous silence – and its implications for later imitators and readers – was revived in spectacular fashion by a late antique Christian commentator on the *Aeneid*, the late fifth- or early sixth-century North African Fulgentius. Fulgentius tackled the problem of authorial absence by re-voicing Virgil in an elaborate necromantic conceit. The fiction of his *Expositio Virgilianae Continentiae* is that a ghostly Virgil is summoned up at the opening of the commentary, to serve as interpreter of his own poem in collaboration with the first-person narrator 'Fulgentius'.⁷⁷ The emphasis lies on

⁷² Seneca the Elder demonstrates the social currency to be gained from successfully imitating Virgil: e.g. Arellius Fuscus borrowing from Virgil to get in with Maecenas; cf. McGill 2012:146-77, Gowers forthcoming.

⁷³ Seneca's own *Apocolocyntosis* parodies exaggerated post-neoteric poetic timekeeping (2.1-4). Is this pointed at *omnes poetae* (2.3), or at Montanus specifically? Note *Apoc.* 2.3 *omnes poetae... ortus et occasus describere*; *Ep.* 122.11 *ortus et occasus libentissime inserebat*.

⁷⁴ Ovid in *Pont.* 4.16.11-12 tells us merely that Montanus was known for both hexameter and pentameter poetry.

⁷⁵ Zwierlein 1999 attributes about a third of Virgil and Ovid to Montanus, despite the stunning absence of sure premises; Most (forthcoming) revives the theory that Montanus penned the *Culex*.

⁷⁶ The case against Zwierlein is made at greater length by Zetzel 2000 and Galinsky 2002.

⁷⁷ On Fulgentius, see Hays 2003. I have written on the *Expositio* in Kearey (forthcoming), and these paragraphs align with my argument there; see too Laird 2001, Bartsch 2018.

Virgil's spoken utterances. The commentary is in dialogue form, with Virgil taking the lion's share of the speeches, and Fulgentius introduces the ghostly apparition with two references to Virgil's voice and spoken performance (Helm 85.12-16, 86.19-21):

nam ecce ad me etiam ipse Ascrei fontis bractamento saturior aduenit, quales uatum imagines esse solent, dum adsumptis ad opus conficiendum tabulis stupida fronte arcanum quiddam latranti intrinsecus tractatu submurmurant. [...] itaque compositus in dicendi modum erectis in iotam duobus digitis tertium pollicem comprimens ita uerbis exorsus est.

And behold: he comes toward me, all drenched with a draught of the spring of Mt. Helicon. He looks exactly like the pictures of bards, with their tablets raised in order to compose their work, wearing a dazed expression, while they murmur something mysterious, dragged out from within them and resounding like a dog's bark. [...] And so he drew himself up into an orator's posture, holding up two fingers in an 'I'-shape and pressing against them a third, his thumb;⁷⁸ in such a way he began to speak these words.

For Fulgentius, Virgil's voice is an authorising mechanism: by allowing the poet to continue to 'speak' after death, he guarantees the truth of his own interpretations of the poem. Summoning up Virgil's ghost is a hyper-logical extension of the scholarly habit of (metaphorically) ventriloquizing an author to express interpretation of a text: Servius' habitual *poeta loquitur* or *Vergilius dicit* writ large.⁷⁹ Any scholarly tentativeness in asserting interpretative control over the text can now be swept aside; instead, in the ultimate form of recourse to the author's intentions, Fulgentius takes on even the voice of Virgil himself. Virgil's ghost is authoritative, taking up an orator's stance before commencing his lecture; indeed, he holds his hand in the same conventional gesture that the 'Vatican Virgil' illustrator – roughly contemporaneous with Fulgentius, give or take a century⁸⁰ – uses to depict each scene's speakers.⁸¹ He sounds recognisably like Virgil, too, maintaining the philosophical preoccupations, etymological wordplays and systems of imagery evident in his poetry; his speech occasionally veers into quotation from his own works, as if to validate that this is the very Virgil who wrote them.⁸² For Fulgentius, claiming that Virgil's voice continues to resonate even after his death – and that Fulgentius himself is the privileged audience of this voice – is the ultimate form of recourse to the author's intentions: who better to explain the meaning of his poetry than the poet himself?

⁷⁸ I follow Corbeill's interpretation of the Latin (2004:50 n.37). Compare Fulgentius' Virgil, *compositus in dicendi modo*, with Apuleius' Thelyphron, *ad instar oratorum*, making roughly the same hand gesture (*Met.* 2.21).

⁷⁹ The metaphor is generally 'dead' in modern scholarship too: 'Virgil says Aeneas left Dido' (*vel sim.*).

⁸⁰ The gesture is common in literature and art of the time; I am not suggesting that Fulgentius saw that very codex.

⁸¹ Fulgentius' visual description here, mentioning *imagines* – not just 'ghosts' but 'pictures, illustrations' – perhaps prompts the reader to envisage an illustration come to life. Certainly the *tabulae* Virgil carries are standard in author-portraits: compare the scroll he holds in the Bardo mosaic of Virgil and the Muses, or the lecterns in the author-portraits of the 'Roman Virgil' (see pages 1-4).

⁸² Direct quotations: *Aen.* 6.552-4 (100.1-3); *Aen.* 6.724-5 (102.14-15); lemmata *passim* (incl. *Aen.* 1.1, at Helm 87.4). Virgil's paraphrases of the *Aeneid* sometimes drift into quotation: e.g. *animum pictura inani quod pascit* (Helm 93.6) from *Aen.* 1.464.

But there are hints that this is not the full story. Fulgentius' tall tale of Virgilian apparitions is just that, a story which displays its own fictional nature at the same time as it insistently presents a veneer of truthfulness. I argue elsewhere⁸³ that the *Expositio* is full of knowing nods to the alert reader who is in on the game; the fun is in maintaining the suspension of disbelief, even as the narration repeatedly places stumbling-blocks in one's way. As the dialogue continues, it becomes increasingly apparent that the *persona Mantuani uatis* that Fulgentius demands from the Muses (Helm 85.11) is, at one and the same time, both the living 'person' of Virgil, miraculously transplanted into the present day to reveal his poetic secrets to Fulgentius, and a bare-faced fiction, simply a 'mask' (*persona*) through which Fulgentius can speak (*personare*)⁸⁴ his own words. And Virgil's voice is presented from the start as an integral element of this oscillation between realism and self-conscious fictionality.

For one thing, Virgil does not produce the smooth hexametrical intonation we might expect. Like Dante's Virgil, whose first words in the *Inferno* are a babble of baby-syllables – 'nonomomo' ('non omo, omo già fui', 'not a man, [though] a man I once was', *Inf.* 1.67)⁸⁵ – before he regains the fluency of speech that carries him through the rest of the poem,⁸⁶ Fulgentius' Virgil too seems to emerge hoarse and inarticulate from a long period of silence ('chi per lungo silenzio pareo fioco', *Inf.* 63).⁸⁷ There is something otherworldly about this Virgil: his speech is not human speech, not necessarily intelligible, more like an animalistic howling wrenched from his innermost guts (Helm 85.15-16):

stupida fronte arcanum quiddam latranti intrinsecus tractatu submurmurant.

... wearing a dazed expression, while they murmur something mysterious, dragged out from within them and resounding like a dog's bark.

'Exactly like the usual pictures of *uates*' (Helm 85.14), to be sure, but this ghost's wailing is far more uncanny than the usual orderly Augustan reclamation of the *uates*-figure.⁸⁸ Despite his later authoritative, schoolmasterly demeanour, Virgil's initial words do not inspire confidence in the rationality – or the authenticity – of his interpretations.

⁸³ Kearey (forthcoming).

⁸⁴ The etymology is probably spurious, though popular in antiquity: note the vowel difference: *persōna*, but *personāre*. Gellius proclaims it *lepide, mi hercules, et scite* (*NA* 5.7.1), but dodges the problem of vowel length (5.7.2). Cf. Ahl 1985:54-7 on Latin puns which ignore vowel length; e.g. Plaut. *Amph.* 723, *et malum et mālum dari*.

⁸⁵ Virgil's first mumbblings mimic, child-like, the narrator's first words to him, with their 'm's and 'o's: 'od ombra od omo certo' ('whether [you are] a ghost or a living man', 1.66); they are also very nearly Latin, only one letter off (= *non (h)omo, (h)omo iam fui*), as if Virgil has not yet acclimatised to the Italian vernacular. Dante elsewhere forbids childish vocabulary (*De uulgari eloquentia* 2.7.4), but throughout the *Commedia* depicts multiple instances of babytalk (e.g. *Inf.* 32.9, *Purg.* 21.97, 30.44) and language failure (e.g. *Inf.* 7.1, 31.67, *Purg.* 19.8, *Par.* 15.37); cf. Hollander 1975; Gragnolati 2005:141.

⁸⁶ Ironically, the narrator of the *Commedia* identifies him as the Virgil famed for fluency (*Inf.* 1.79-80).

⁸⁷ Cf. Williams 1993:50. I explore (Fulgentius') Virgil's five centuries in the underworld and his awareness of external time passing in Kearey (forthcoming).

⁸⁸ Though Hardie 2016b explores lingering elements of the irrational within Augustan orderliness.

From a different angle, too, Virgil's voice undermines the central fiction of the *Expositio*. Fulgentius, we have seen, is careful to make Virgil sound like Virgil, despite his unearthly vocal qualities at the start of the dialogue. Virgil repeats words and phrases from his works, and his critical paraphrase of his own epic is, in a way, a replay of the *Aeneid*: not just a clarification or translation of the poem, but identical to it, the same work told again by the same author.⁸⁹ But while this apparent adherence to Virgilian identity purports to extend the poet's voice and allow him to speak again, opening up his oeuvre of works beyond its premature closure at the time of his death, it also means that this 'new' voice is really nothing of the sort. Rather than offer a privileged glimpse of the authorial intent behind the words of the *Aeneid*, by resurrecting the only figure capable of producing new yet authentic material, the *Expositio* in fact presents us with little more than a remix of his *textual* remains:⁹⁰ no living voice here but only *disiecti membra poetae*, plundered from his written poems and re-animated by Fulgentius', not Virgil's, voice. As recent scholarship on forgery, fakes and *pseudepigrapha* has amply demonstrated,⁹¹ the central paradox of authorial impersonation is that it is always retrospective, rooting its production of 'new' literature in careful imitation of existing material. Fulgentius' Virgil, with his fragmented Virgilian voice and unnervingly un-Virgilian manner, exposes this paradox: his posthumous voice is less an authentic, still-generative remnant of the author than a cento-like composite that can be made to say whatever its creator wants it to say, whether that is Fulgentius' (or Dante's) Christian reinterpretation of the *Aeneid* or Ausonius' obscene Virgilianesque pornography in the *Cento Nuptialis*.⁹²

Sore throats and fragile voices

As Ovid, Montanus and Fulgentius, in their varying ways, make clear, later generations had their ears pricked for lingering echoes of Virgil's voice, whether to shun, court or fabricate them. But what did Virgil *actually* sound like? The *VSD* preserves several comments, characteristically self-contradictory and difficult to read as a single cohesive narrative. In

⁸⁹ Dante again follows Fulgentius: Virgil's first speeches in the *Inferno* compulsively re-narrate his own poetry, telling his autobiography (1.67-73) and the story of the *Aeneid* (twice over: 1.73-5, 106-8). But the narrative is now Christianised, so Italy's saviour ('di quella umile Italia... salute', 106) is not Aeneas, nor yet Augustus, but Jesus (101-11).

⁹⁰ I mean the metaphor in 'remix' literally: less the 'ancient phonograph' (Butler 2015) than the ancient turntable...

⁹¹ Cf. especially Grafton 1990, Ruthven 2001, Peirano 2012, 2012a and 2013.

⁹² The same dynamics are at play in the corpus of ancient Virgilian *pseudepigrapha*, which similarly generates a 'new' Virgilian voice from fragments of his existing works. Modern scholarship on the *Appendix Vergiliana* has argued that at least some of these poems self-consciously play with ideas of authenticity and authorial voice: cf. Peirano 2012, Laird 2017, Kearey forthcoming.

speaking of Virgil's failed career in oratory the biography reports a comment by the scholar-comedian Melissus (*VSD* 15-16):⁹³

egit et causam apud iudices unam omnino nec amplius quam semel: nam in sermone tardissimum ac paene indocto similem fuisse Melissus tradidit

He argued a case before the jury, once but once only; for he was exceedingly slow in his speech, and almost like someone entirely uneducated, says Melissus.

'Almost', *paene*, is key here: the biography has just vaunted Virgil's medical and mathematical education (*VSD* 15), and goes on to speak of his precocious abilities in literary studies (*poeticam puer adhuc auspicatus*, 17). But Virgil's apparent failure in the art of speaking is unexpected, especially since this is only the biography's second mention at all of Virgil as someone whose claim to fame lies in words, poetry, speech or literature – that is, of Virgil as an *author*.⁹⁴ Nicholas Horsfall suggests, persuasively, that this story has its point of origin in an (auto)biographical reading of Virgil's depiction of a lawyer gaping wordlessly at the *rostrum*, in his digression on the perils of hectic city life in *Georgics* 2 (*hic stupet attonitus rostris*, 2.508) – perhaps originally in a self-evidently humorous context, part of Melissus' books of joke-collections (*Ioci* and *Ineptiae*). Irene Peirano adds that Anchises' disavowal of oratory in *Aeneid* 6 – 'others will plead causes better' (*alii... orabunt causas melius*, 6.847-53) – could easily be taken as an autobiographical statement on Virgil's part, removed from the context of Anchises' prescriptions for Rome's national pastimes.⁹⁵ The biography begins with the words 'Virgil was a Mantuan of humble parentage' (*Publius Vergilius Maro Mantuanus parentibus modicis fuit*, *VSD* 1);⁹⁶ it has already established Virgil's pathological shyness (*VSD* 11), his humble rustic background and his non-Roman origins⁹⁷ to set the stage for this scene of a country bumpkin's humiliation.⁹⁸ From wordlessness to eloquence, from gauche rusticity to cosmopolitan sophistication: everyone loves a rags-to-riches story. The joke is in the sheer distance from

⁹³ Melissus penned collections of jokes and witticisms (Suet. *De Gram.* 21); cf. OCD⁴ s.v. Gaius Maecenas Melissus; PIR² M 38).

⁹⁴ At *VSD* 9 the biographer refers to *Ecl.* 2, and there are some other oblique mentions of literature: the token of poetic succession in the note that Virgil assumed the toga on the same day that Lucretius died (*VSD* 6), or the comment that both Alexander and Virgil's other boyfriend Cebe were poets (*VSD* 9).

⁹⁵ Horsfall 1995b:9; Peirano 2012:115. Note the rejection of rhetoric (and thus, perhaps, oratory?) in the pseudo-Virgilian *Catalepta* 2 and 5.

⁹⁶ His physical appearance testifies to his heritage: he retains a *facies rusticana* (*VSD* 8). Cf. Horace's portrait of a rustic at *Sat.* 1.3.30-1, thought by Ps-Acro (*ad loc.*) to refer to Virgil.

⁹⁷ Mantua, the last Etruscan stronghold of Cisalpine Gaul (cf. Plin. *HN* 3.130.4), was only fully integrated into Italy in 42 BCE, when Virgil was 28 years old. Virgil is insistent on his Mantuan heritage in all his works (cf. *Ecl.* 9.27-9, *G.* 2.198 and 3.12, *Aen.* 10.200-1).

⁹⁸ This element of Virgil's biography echoes Horace's autobiographical self-fashioning, especially in *Satires* 1. On Horace's transition from stuttering baby-talk to *sermo*, cf. Gowers 2003:69 n.76 and 70-1, 2009:44-6 and 2012 *ad Sat.* 1.1.25-6, 4.56-62, 1.6.45-88; on his rustic origins and subsequent entry to civilised society (mimicking the development of both Roman civilisation – cf. Cic. *Inv. rhet.* 1.4 – and the genre of satire itself), cf. Gowers 2003:74-7, 2012:217-19 and *ad Sat.* 1.18-19, 3.99-124. Rags-to-riches is a compelling narrative, and correspondingly prominent in ancient poetic biographies.

Virgil's initial failure of speech in this story to his later supreme eloquence in the written word, so magnificently attested – in retrospect, at least – in his three monumental poems.⁹⁹

Virgil's oratorical failure is not uniquely his. It taps into a conventional biographical trope: all the most famous speakers of antiquity struggle with this part of the job requirement. Demosthenes' speech impediment and his inventive methods for overcoming it – mumbling his speeches with pebbles in his mouth, shouting against the sea's roar, hiring actors as voice coaches, locking himself in a sound-proofed basement studio, declaiming in front of mirrors or while running up and down hills – are proverbial, but Plato, Aristotle and Isocrates all supposedly had weak voices or poor delivery as well.¹⁰⁰ Virgil's slow, unschooled speech serves, perversely, as a stamp of genius; his voice marks him out, not as incompetent, but as one of the greats. But where these Greeks trained themselves out of their weaknesses, Virgil takes refuge in (written) poetry instead. The anecdote gives an aetiology for Virgil's change of profession: who knows whether he would have written the *Aeneid* at all, had he been just a little bit more impressive in court.¹⁰¹

Unlike Demosthenes *et al.*, though, Virgil's voice seems to stay fragile throughout his lifetime. When, according to the *VSD*, he read the *Georgics* in their entirety to Augustus – not, technically, too overwhelming a task, especially with the two thousand-odd lines of the poem spread out over four days¹⁰² – he repeatedly had to delegate the task of recitation to his patron Maecenas, since the strain of reading was too much for his voice (*VSD* 27):¹⁰³

Georgica reuerso post Actiacam uictoriam Augusto atque Atellae reficiendarum
faucium causa commoranti, per continuum quadriduum legit, suscipiente Maecenate
legendi uicem, quotiens interpellaretur ipse uocis offensione.

Virgil read the *Georgics* over a continuous period of four days to Augustus when he returned after his victory at Actium, stopping at Atella for the sake of refreshing his throat. Maecenas took up the task of reading in turn, whenever Virgil himself was interrupted by pain in his voice.¹⁰⁴

This too is a conventional biographical trope. The poet with a weak voice, who must hand over his singing to an understudy, appears in biographical accounts of Sophocles, Pindar and Livius

⁹⁹ Note *VSD* 8 too: Virgil was apparently of weak health, manifesting especially in stomach, throat and head pain. Horace depicts Virgil as dyspeptic (*Sat.* 1.5.49; cf. Gowers 2012 *ad loc.*).

¹⁰⁰ Demosthenes (Plu. *Dem.* 6.3-7.3, 11.1; FGrHist 228 F17; Ps.-Plut. *X orat.* 844f, 845a; Quint. *Inst.* 10.3.25); Plato (Diog. Laert. 3.5); Aristotle (*Suda* s.v. Ἀριστοτέλης); Isocrates (Dion. Hal. *Isocr.* 1).

¹⁰¹ Virgil's identity as orator or poet was a topic of much debate: cf., e.g., Macrobius *Sat.* 5.1ff., Florus' dialogue *Vergilius orator an poeta*, Tib. Claud. Don. *Interpretationes* 1 *prooem.*

¹⁰² Though Smolenaars 2017:164 notes: 'If you already have a sore throat, the recitation of about 550 hexameters each day would aggravate your trouble considerably'.

¹⁰³ I will return to this anecdote again later in this chapter. Cf. Horsfall 1995b:17, characteristically sceptical, and Smolenaars 2017, making a case for the 'historical truth' of the anecdote. While I appreciate his argument, *contra* Horsfall, that the anecdote is not impossible, I am more concerned with its symbolic weight than its historicity.

¹⁰⁴ *uocis offensio* seems to mean a frog in his throat (*offensio* OLD s.v. 1: 'obstacle, blockage'), or perhaps general injury or pain (cf. e.g. Cic. *Fam.* 16.10.1, *Tusc.* 4.31). Pliny's *lector* Encolpius found the heat and dust from travelling so irritating to his throat that he spat blood (*Ep.* 8.1.2).

Andronicus, among others.¹⁰⁵ In the first and last of these, the deficiencies of the poets' voices are directly linked to their poetic and dramatic innovations, an *aition* for the course of literary history (*Vit. Soph.* 4, *Livy* 7.2.8-9):¹⁰⁶

καὶ πολλὰ ἐκαιούργησεν ἐν τοῖς ἀγῶσι, πρῶτον μὲν καταλύσας τὴν ὑπόκρισιν τοῦ ποιητοῦ διὰ τὴν ἰδίαν μικροφωνίαν, πάλαι γὰρ καὶ ὁ ποιητὴς ὑπεκριτὴν αὐτός. [...] καὶ τὸν τρίτον ὑποκριτὴν ἐξεῦρεν.

[Sophocles] was responsible for innovations in the dramatic competitions. He was the first to break the tradition of the poet's acting because his own voice was weak, for in the old days the poet himself served as one of the actors. [...] He also invented the third actor.

idem scilicet, id quod omnes tum erant, suorum carminum actor, dicitur, cum saepius reuocatus uocem obtudisset, uenia petita puerum ad canendum ante tibicinem cum statuisset, canticum egisse aliquanto magis uigente motu quia nihil uocis usus impediabat.

Like everyone else in those days, [Livy] acted his own pieces; and the story goes that when his voice, owing to the frequent demands made upon it, had lost its freshness, he asked and obtained the indulgence to let a boy stand before the flautist to sing the monody, while he acted it himself, with a vivacity of gesture that gained considerably from his not having to use his voice.¹⁰⁷

Both accounts set up an idealised form of primordial poetry – one in which the author fully *embodies* his poetry, not only creating but singing and acting it too – as a backdrop for subsequent poetic innovation.¹⁰⁸ Sophocles and Livy bring on more actors, dissociate creation from performance, and (in Livy's case) even separate voice from gesture.¹⁰⁹ What is lost in autobiographical authenticity is gained in poetic modernity (cf. *Arist. Rh.* 1403b23-4): the author is removed, at least in part, from the action, able to take a seat in the audience and cast an appraising eye over his own creation. The divorce of poetry from poet, like the innovation of writing itself after a 'primitive' oral culture, enables that poetry to become separate from the all-encompassing context of the poet's life, free to be performed and reperformed by other actors in other times and places.¹¹⁰ And in giving us a just-so story for how this separation of work

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Fairweather 1983:325. On Pindar, cf. *Σ Olymp.* 6.148a and Eustath. *Pind. parekbolai* prol. 31-2 BGM. Add too Pliny, who writes (relatably!) of performance anxiety when others recite his works: should he sit still, or pull faces and mumble along with the reading (*Ep.* 9.34.2)?

¹⁰⁶ Lefkowitz 1981:78 notes that Sophocles performs elsewhere in the biographies (*Vit. Soph.* 5 and 14; *Athen.* 1.20E [T28 Radt]; *Eust. Il.* 381.8 and *Od.* 1553.63 [T 29-30 Radt]) – but inconsistency is to be expected.

¹⁰⁷ According to Cicero's Antonius in *De Oratore*, audiences tolerate hoarseness less in dramatic performance than oratory: *nos raucos saepe attentissime audiri uideo: tenet enim res ipsa atque causa. at Aesopum, si paulum irrauserit, explodi* (1.259). Livy clearly intends to avoid being hissed off stage like Aesopus.

¹⁰⁸ On the idea of 'poetic primitivism', cf. Hardie 1986:11-22.

¹⁰⁹ Besides Livy, the other 'inventor' of Roman mime is Maecenas' boyfriend Bathyllus (*Ath.* 1.37; cf. *Tac. Ann.* 1.54.2) – an oblique connection to Virgil, perhaps.

¹¹⁰ Pliny provides a useful comparandum from another sphere: while he is happy to let other *lectores* recite his poetry (*Ep.* 9.34), he recites his own speeches in reperformance, since he originally delivered them and they are associated with his own voice.

from author came about, replayed for each poet in turn as if unique to him alone, it also allows the reader to retain the fantasy of an original performance, a scenario that continues to determine and shape interpretation of the work even in the absence of the author's performance of it.

In the case of Virgil's and Maecenas' recitation to Augustus, Virgil's sore throat is not explicitly connected by the biographer to any specific poetic innovation within the *Georgics*. But the trope established in earlier poet biographies carries over to this instance too. The restrictions on Virgil's voice, the reader is to infer, are one reason why his poetry is so good: like Sophocles, like Livius, he must work all the harder to ensure that his poetry retains its virtuosic qualities even when spoken by someone else (*contra* Montanus). What we see in this anecdote is a midway step between 'primitive' self-recitation, where the author takes full control of both the script and the performance, and fully modernised textual production, where once the poem leaves the poet's hands it can be recited, sung or performed by anyone.

In this story the poem is still partially under Virgil's sole control: he takes on at least some of the task of recitation, and his chosen understudy is not a stranger, nor yet a paid professional, but his own patron, the aristocrat Maecenas.¹¹¹ This detail is significant. Sophocles' and Livius' understudies are anonymous; there is no hint in the biographies that we should be able to find traces of these actors – of their identities, characteristics, interests – within the poetry they performed in place of the authors. But Maecenas is one of the addressees of the *Georgics* – perhaps even *the* single addressee – and appears intermittently throughout the poem.¹¹² The first-person narration of the *Georgics*, moreover, bears an unmistakably Virgilian stamp, from the opening apostrophes to Maecenas and Augustus to Virgil's decisive self-identification (*Vergilium me*) in the closing lines. So the *VSD*'s tale of a recitation *shared* between Virgil and Maecenas forces its readers to re-evaluate their understanding of the *Georgics*' narrative voice, finding something rather more malleable than the strict didactic template that Servius – ever the schoolteacher – decrees to be the poem's unvarying structure (*ad G. praef. 1*):¹¹³

et hi libri didascalici sunt, unde necesse est, ut ad aliquem scribantur; nam praeceptum et doctoris et discipuli personam requirit: unde ad Maecenatem scribit sicut Hesiodus ad Persen, Lucretius ad Memmium.

These books are didactic. Therefore they must be written *to* someone, for the genre needs, firstly, a body of knowledge, and secondly, the character of a teacher, and

¹¹¹ On the low class status of professional actors and performers (*infames*) in Rome, often overlapping with sex workers, foreigners and slaves, cf. (e.g.) Ducos 1990, Lebek 1996, Edwards 1997, Gunderson 2000:111-48. On the difference between recitation and performance, cf. Dupont 1997:46 n.5, Markus 2000:139-40. Like Markus, I am interested less in keeping the two categories separate than in how 'the poetic recital gets deliberately associated with, confused with and contaminated by its less prestigious counterparts among the performative genres' (140), a phenomenon I investigate further in later sections of this chapter.

¹¹² The analysis of *VSD* 27 that follows is greatly indebted to Emily Gowers; my thanks to her for letting me read her chapter on Maecenas in the *Georgics* in advance of publication.

¹¹³ Cf. Volk 2002:122-39 for a rather more perceptive account than Servius'.

thirdly, the character of a pupil. Thus Virgil wrote to Maecenas as Hesiod wrote to Perses, and Lucretius to Memmius.

After all, if Maecenas takes an active part in the reading of the *Georgics*, so too must Virgil retreat to the sidelines and take the position of his own poetry's addressee. Now classified neither as *doctor* nor as *discipulus* alone, Virgil and Maecenas disrupt the polarities of Servius' neat didactic schema. The biography's anecdote of collaborative performance demands a new model for understanding the narrative voice of the *Georgics*.

Indeed, the *VSD* seems to root this anecdote in an imaginative reading of the poem itself. Maecenas is practically marked as Virgil's understudy within the narration of Book 2 (39-46):¹¹⁴

tuque ades inceptumque una decurre laborem,
o decus, o famae merito pars maxima nostrae,
Maecenas, pelagoque uolans da uela patenti.
non ego cuncta meis amplecti uersibus opto,
non, mihi si linguae centum sint oraue centum,
ferrea uox. ades et primi lege litoris oram;
in manibus terrae. non hic te carmine ficto
atque per ambages et longa exorsa tenebo.

And you, Maecenas, be here, and trace together with me the task I have begun. O, my glory, o, with good reason the greatest part of my fame, unfurl your sails and fly over the open sea. I do not seek to embrace everything in my poetry – no, not even if I had a hundred tongues, a hundred mouths, an iron voice. Be here, and skirt the nearest shore; land is within our reach. I will not hold you here with poetic fictions or with rambling digressions and lengthy preambles.

This is a notoriously extreme statement of poetic incapability:¹¹⁵ not just the clichéd trope of the hundred mouths, throats, voices that the poet lacks,¹¹⁶ but a retreat from the high seas of epic to dry land, from sprawling all-encompassing 'everything' (*cuncta*) to a prescribed smaller topic. Virgil's appropriation of quintessentially epic forms of *recusatio* here has raised scholarly eyebrows: what could possibly be so daunting about varieties of arboriculture that the mere prospect of recounting them has the narrator quaking in his boots?¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ As Naumann 1981:11-12 suggests. Smolenaars 2017:163 reports that the suggestion is already made in Rostagni 1944; I have not been able to see the latter.

¹¹⁵ Thomas 1998 *ad G.* 2.42-4 notes that Virgil's *opto* (2.42) implies free poetic choice, not actual inability. Virgil claims Callimachean virtuosity and selectiveness: he *could* encompass 'everything' in his poem, but chooses another path. If I am right to juxtapose *VSD* 27 with this passage, then the biographer instead takes Virgil's reluctance as due to actual incapability – though physical, rather than poetic.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Gowers 2005 on this trope, with Farrell 1991:233 and Hinds 1998:34-47. The trope originates with Homer (*Il.* 2.488-93), and recurs in Ennius (fr. 469-70 Skutsch), Hostius (*Bell. Histricum* fr. 3 Morel), Plautus (*Bacch.* 128), Caecilius Statius (fr. 126-7 Ribbeck), and Lucretius, or perhaps Lucilius (Servius, *ad loc.*, *ad Aen.* 6.625). Virgil gives the same expression to his Sibyl at *Aen.* 6.625-7; it is then re-used by Ovid (*Ars* 1.436, *Met.* 533-5, *Tr.* 1.5.53-6), Persius (*Sat.* 5.1-2: *uatibus hic mos est...*), Valerius (*Arg.* 6.36-41), Silius (*Pun.* 4.525-8) and Statius (*Theb.* 12.797-9). Virgil's expression is exaggerated, even for this trope of exaggeration: he combines 'the maximum number of tongues and mouths with the premium grade of metal-plating' (Gowers 2005:172).

¹¹⁷ Cf., e.g., Farrell 1991:233, Gowers 2005:172 and 2016d:143-6.

In the light of the *VSD*'s anecdote, it is easy to read Virgil's unexpected plea for his patron's assistance here as something more literal than a conventional request for financial support, disembodied supporting presence and poetic approval (as at 1.18-25: *adsis... tuque...*). For the reader of the biographies, these lines transform themselves into stage directions, a lingering echo of the moment in this 'original' performance at Atella when Virgil finds himself overcome and calls Maecenas forward to take over the task. 'Come here, Maecenas; come here and *lege*' – both 'skim' (the shore) and 'read' (the poem). 'If I had a hundred mouths' – well, by the *VSD*'s telling, a second voice, Maecenas', is to be added to Virgil's paltry one to facilitate his reading of the *Georgics*. (Virgil's poetry does 'fly on the lips of men', *uirum uolitare per ora*, 3.9, then – and it is little surprise when the very next mention of Maecenas in the poem, at the stichometrically equivalent 3.41, is immediately followed by a reference to a 'doubled voice', *uox... ingeminata* at 3.45.)¹¹⁸ This passage is crammed with repetitions of words and sounds: *ades... ades..., o... o..., non... non... non..., centum... centum..., uolans... uela, mihi si, hic te... ficto*. Does it sound to the biographers like a sickly splutter, as Virgil's ragged voice (*non... ferrea uox*) finally fractures and he coughs his way through this brief first-person digression (*non... longa exorsa*)? And is the force of the contrast in the final lines of this passage not so much between 'skimming the shore' in cursory narrative and 'detaining' one's audience with digressions, but instead between the second-person *lege* and the first-person *tenebo*, between Virgil's and Maecenas' recitations?

Certainly the abrupt resumption of didactic narration proper in the following lines (*sponte sua quae se tollunt in luminis oras...*, 2.47) is smooth, confident and mannered. Little trace remains here of Virgil's poetic reticence, or indeed of his stated concerns with hard *labor* and Italian agriculture: the poem moves directly from grafting to an opulent description of foreign grapes, much more up Maecenas' famously decadent, hedonistic street than it is appropriate to practical Italian estate management.¹¹⁹ Perhaps we should imagine Maecenas taking a quasi-authorial role here, not just reading aloud but also infusing Virgil's poem with matters after his own heart – or perhaps Virgil tactfully chooses to pass the script over to his patron when he reaches the passages best suited to Maecenas' own voice. In any case, the *VSD*'s story invites the reader of the *Georgics* to envisage the poem's recitation in 29 BCE – and, in so doing, to mentally direct it, furnish it with stage directions and establish the distribution of lines to speakers. And it offers an aetiology for Virgil's strange, un-didactic narration in the *Georgics*:

¹¹⁸ The idea that the Homeric trope of poetic incapability might literally entail 'many mouths' at *Aen.* 6.625 is from Oliensis 2004 and Gowers 2005. The correlation of *uox ingeminata* with Maecenas' supportive reading is Gowers' too (forthcoming).

¹¹⁹ Cf. especially Geue 2018 on Virgil's double address to labourers and the moneyed ruling classes in the *Georgics*. Thibodeau 2011, by contrast, redefines *agricola* so that this category encompasses both active, hands-on farmers and land-owning aristocrats, integrating the actual audience of the poem with its *prima facie* addressees.

erratic, prone to sudden changes of tempo and tone, and peculiarly polyphonous,¹²⁰ given to apostrophes, quotations and inset speakers.¹²¹ Virgil's frailty of voice, according to the *VSD*, tells us something about the nature of his poetry, as well as about his life.

Patronage, poetry and prostitution

After comprehensively mauling Virgil's reputation as a singer, the very next section of the *VSD* suddenly reverses its approach and commends Virgil's delivery instead. Montanus' compliment of Virgil's voice – that his poetry only sounded good when the poet himself recited it (*VSD* 29) – damns by faint praise; Ovid's apparent yearning to have heard Virgil in the flesh disguises a more rivalrous relationship with his poetic predecessor. But between the account of Virgil's vocal failure at Atella and Montanus' double-edged opining, the biographer intervenes to salvage Virgil's standing as a performer (*VSD* 28):

pronuntiabat autem cum suavitate et lenociniis miris.

But his delivery was sweet and extraordinarily seductive.

The 'sweetness' of Virgil's recitation is the standard trope of mellifluence,¹²² the *poetica mella* (Hor. *Epist.* 1.19.44) claimed by poets from the earliest Archaic Greek poetry onwards.¹²³ And *miris* is an unsurprising intensifier: it is only common sense that so marvellous a poet as Virgil should have an equally marvellous way of reading. But this statement is far from an anodyne or conventional compliment, thanks to the peculiar force of the term *lenociniis*. Derived from *leno*, a 'pimp', *lenocinium* denotes anything from literal 'pimp-business' – the act of procuring sex workers¹²⁴ – to debauched behaviour more generally;¹²⁵ from the specific crime of marital

¹²⁰ Persius' multivocalic *Satires*, full of interrupting interlocutors, split personalities and self-interrogation, already literalise the 'many mouths' trope (5.1-2; cf. Hooley 1997:67-80) – and the interrupting voice of Persius' teacher Cornutus at 5.5 perhaps parallels Maecenas' own supportive voice.

¹²¹ In Book 4 there are even narratives-within-narratives-within-narratives: the didactic speaker quotes Proteus quoting Eurydice (4.494-8). On the polyphony of the *Georgics*, cf. Batstone 1997:134; Kronenberg 2009:14.

¹²² *suauitas* specifically of delivery: e.g. Cic. *Brut.* 259, recalled at Quint. *Inst.* 11.3.35.

¹²³ Most famously Hesiod *Theog.* 81-4. The trope is not only poetic (cf. Lefkowitz 2016): Homer calls Nestor's eloquence μέλιτος γλυκίων (*Il.* 1.249); Cicero reports bees settling on baby Plato's lips, anticipating his *suauitas orationis* (*De diu.* 1.78 and elsewhere). The same story is told of Pindar (Philostr. *Imag.* 2.12, *Vit. Pind.* 1.2 Drachmann, Paus. 9.23.2), and, later, Virgil: already in *VSD* 1 his father keeps bees, and the *Vita Focae* (54) has bees bring the infant Virgil honey (cf. *Ecl.* 4.18-30, *Aen.* 7.64-7).

¹²⁴ E.g. Plaut. *Merc.* 411, *Epid.* 581; Cic. *Red. Sen.* 11.7; Quint. *Inst.* 5.10.47, 5.12.17; Suet. *Tib.* 35.2, *Cal.* 40.1.

¹²⁵ E.g. Cic. *Mur.* 74.8, *Sest.* 20.13, 138.12.

lenocinium banned by Augustus in the *Lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis* of 17 BCE,¹²⁶ to any form of seduction (especially deceitful), flattery, ornamentation and blandishment.¹²⁷

As a metaphor for vocal performance, *lenocinium* would seem to encompass primarily that last set of meanings: a sort of seductive speech, teasing and enticing, full of artistry and artifice. But it is a very strange word to find here as an apparent compliment to Virgil's vocal delivery. I can find no parallel use of it to mean simply 'enticing' or 'seductive', without any further implications of either deceit or outright eroticism.¹²⁸ In extant literature the term *lenocinium* is invariably derogatory, including (or even especially) when it is used of voice, speech and performance. It turns up particularly frequently within the already highly sexualised and misogynistic discourse of rhetorical instruction,¹²⁹ where it is used as a heightened expression for modern depravity and the failure of oratorical masculinity; it is particularly prone to blossoming out gratuitously into extended metaphors of sex work and trafficking (most violently at *Inst.* 5.12.17).¹³⁰ Quintilian, for example, tells us that the performance of a virtuous orator (*uir bonus*, 1 *praef.* 9) must be clear, no-nonsense and unadorned; it must be strong and hardy (*fortis, durabilis*), not supple and soft (*leuis, mollis*, 11.3.20-3). Crucially, the orator will avoid 'pimping out' his voice with unnecessary adornments (*lenocinia*). When the narrative thread is strong, no other 'seductions' are needed (*caret enim ceteris lenociniis*, 4.2.118); natural delivery and style provide all the ornament an orator could want (*quae etiam si lenociniis destituta sit, satis tamen natura sua ornatur*, 12.1.30). If *Eloquentia* is a woman, the orator's duty is to marry her, guard her, keep her chaste, modest and Roman – not trick her out with cheap allurements to entice an audience of johns.¹³¹

Quintilian's vitriolic language of *lenocinium* speaks to a pervasive anxiety about the gendered associations of performance. According to Roman schematics of gender, ideal masculinity is self-contained, unadorned and undemonstrative. But oratory itself – and vocal performance more broadly – is suspiciously close to acting, or stage performance.¹³² It necessarily encompasses qualities that are conspicuously non-manly in Roman thought: these include, in Joy Connolly's words, 'the artful manipulation of words, the willingness to deceive, the equation of power with persuasion rather than action, verbal ornament, theatricality [and]

¹²⁶ I.e. a husband's complaisance with his wife's adultery; cf. *Dig.* 48.5.2.2; McGinn 1998:171-94, 216-4. Shaw 1999 rightly notes that there are very few records of actual prosecution of *lenocinium* (perhaps only Suet. *Dom.* 8.3; at Tac. *Ann.* 2.85, Titidius Labeo escapes on a technicality). Cf. *Juv. Sat.* 1.557, Ovid *Am.* 2.19.52-60.

¹²⁷ E.g. Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.146.11; Sen. *Contr.* 2.7.4, 9 *praef.* 1; Sen. *Ep.* 26.5, 80.9, *De breu. uit.* 10.3, *Ben.* 1.11.3, 7.1.2, *Helv.* 16.4; Suet. *Aug.* 79.1, *Cal.* 39.2, *Cl.* 7.1; Apul. *Met.* 6.9.4.

¹²⁸ The closest I can find is Pliny *NH* 35.145 – though still with a sense of deceit, guile and trickery.

¹²⁹ On the 'rhetoric of rhetoric' as prime locus for Roman anxieties of gender, class and race, see Gleason 1995, Gunderson 2000, Stroup 2003, Connolly 2007.

¹³⁰ Comparing the decay of rhetorical vigour (*neruus*) to child sex trafficking: teachers are like slave traders who castrate boys to increase their superficial beauty (*formae puerorum uirilitate excisa lenocinantur*). (Compare Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 7.9.1-5, where the effects of music alone are enough to temporarily 'enervate' boys.)

¹³¹ Personified *Eloquentia* is pervasive in Quintilian; cf. too Dion. Hal. *Orat.* 1, Cicero *Brut.* 51 and 330, *De or.* 1.234-5. On the text as woman in ancient and medieval hermeneutics, cf. Dinshaw 1989:18-25 and Stroup 2003.

¹³² Fantham 2002:363.

emotional demonstrativeness’, to which we might add sheer linguistic *jouissance* and the pursuit of aesthetic pleasure.¹³³ To reframe the orator as a *uir bonus* requires Quintilian to be assiduous in establishing and policing the boundaries of acceptable performance: an orator does not sing,¹³⁴ or seek to give pleasure before utility,¹³⁵ or indulge in ornamentation. Which is as much as to say, an orator is not a poet.¹³⁶ And if good oratory is, by definition, ‘not poetry’, then good poetry is ‘not oratory’ – a distinction which perhaps opens up space for a different set of aesthetic values, a different approach to vocal ornament, emotional affect or literary pleasure.

Now, I am not suggesting some kind of full-scale poetic reclamation of *lenocinium*-aesthetics, hidden in plain sight in Roman literary discourse.¹³⁷ The evidence is simply too slight (*VSD* 28 would be the only purely positive use of *lenocinium*), and Roman poetry remains deeply invested in asserting and defending its own masculine status, however much it dabbles in self-feminisation or flirts with campy aestheticism.¹³⁸ Misogynistic invective in literary criticism is hardly confined to oratory alone: just as Quintilian deflects charges of *lenocinium* onto poetry, or oratory done badly, so too poets pick a punching-bag further down the gendered hierarchy of performance genres – the tawdrier arts of acting, dancing, mime or sex work.¹³⁹ But the *VSD*’s use of the term *lenocinium* clearly demands a closer look, a little more interpretative pressure – especially since the biography has already worked hard to demonstrate Virgil’s failure in oratory, to set up his subsequent success in poetry (*VSD* 15). The description of Virgil’s voice as ‘seductive’ echoes, to a certain extent, Montanus’ criticism of Virgil’s poetry – the idea that the wondrous sweetness of Virgil’s voice and performance disguise the deficiencies of his poetry; it adds an almost Callimachean twist, quietly condemning the poet for ‘pimping’ out his poetry to all and sundry like a Plautine *leno*. But more than a simple synonymous echo of *suauitas*, I argue, the use of the term *lenocinium* prompts us to

¹³³ Connolly 2007:84. Cf. Habinek 2005:158-219 and Young 2016 on embodied performance; Gunderson 2000 on oratory’s ‘built-in erotics’ (19).

¹³⁴ Cf. Caesar’s quip *si cantas, male cantas; si legis, cantas* (*Inst.* 1.8.2).

¹³⁵ Quintilian’s paraphrase of Cicero’s three oratorical duties (*ut doceatur... ut delectetur, ut moveatur*, *Brut.* 185) downgrades ‘pleasure’ to third place: *doceat moueat delectet* (*Quint. Inst.* 3.5.2). Dozier 2012:349 summarises: ‘Giving pleasure is a mark of femininity and servility’; cf. Gunderson 2010:119. Quintilian’s proscriptions back his students into a corner: they must be expressive, like a tragic actor (11.3.167), but at the same time repudiate anything theatrical (1.11).

¹³⁶ Poetry ‘seeks only pleasure’ (*solam petit uoluptatem*, *Inst.* 10.1.28). Cf. *Inst.* 1.5.11, 2.4.3, 8.6.18, 10.1.27-30. On oratory defined against poetry, cf. (e.g.) Arist. *Rh.* 1401a24, 1406a12, Cic. *Or.* 68, Demetr. *Eloc.* 112, Ps-Longinus 15, with Dozier 2012. Poetry is, of course, less oratory’s opposite than its uncanny double.

¹³⁷ Ovid (*Am.* 3.12; cf. Martelli 2013:64-7) and Horace (*Epist.* 1.20; cf. Oliensis 1995, 1997:162-9, 1998:174-81) speak of their own poetry as (degraded) *lenocinium*.

¹³⁸ Though see Young 2015, arguing that Priapic poetry offers readers ‘the opportunity to openly enjoy ... a chance to transcend the traditional protocols of Roman masculinity and revel in the *cinaedus*’ liberating touch’.

¹³⁹ This grouping of performance genres is typical of Roman accounts; as Habinek 2005 argues, Roman performance arts are valued in inverse proportion to how much they foreground the performer’s own body. Vitriol for them is particularly conspicuous in satire: see Horace’s vitriol for the all-singing, all-dancing Hermogenes Tigellius (*Sat.* 1.2.1-3, 1.3.3-18, 1.9.24-5, with Gowers 2012 *ad locc.*), or Persius’ depiction of recitation as a sex act (*Sat.* 1.13-21; cf. Freudenburg 2001:210-21, Williams 2002).

recontextualise Virgil's voice within matrices of gender, sexuality and – particularly – power.¹⁴⁰ If Virgil's voice is charming, sweet and seductive, who is the target of these enticements?

The erotic overtones of the *VSD*'s phrasing – *suauitate et lenociniis miris* – seem to pick up on the anecdote recounted just before, where Virgil and his patron Maecenas share the task of reciting the *Georgics* to Augustus at Atella. Maecenas, after all, was famously flamboyant, in his speech as in all other part of his life. 'Isn't his speech just as loose as his unbelted clothing?', moralises Seneca in his notorious character assassination of Maecenas (*non oratio eius aequae soluta est quam ipse discinctus?*, *Ep.* 114.4),¹⁴¹ and the first of the anonymously-penned *Elegiae in Maecenatem* makes a point of the 'soft speech' of Bacchus, Maecenas' avatar (*mollius es... locutus*, 1.67). For post-Augustan writers, this 'looseness' of speech and character has unmistakably erotic dimensions: Maecenas is *solutus*, *discinctus*, *licens*, *prauus*, *eneruatus* and, above all, *mollis*.¹⁴² The link between the two sentences in the *VSD*, *autem* (28), might not so much contrast Virgil's vocal failure at Atella with his sweetly seductive speech, but rather *connect* his and Maecenas' style of delivery: the ruthless diplomat and right-hand man to the emperor,¹⁴³ together with the poet of *durus labor* and *arma uirumque*, both chiming together in dulcet tones. Indeed, Virgil's vocal failure itself perhaps already carries with it an air of effeminacy or even sexual deviance. A hoarse voice can have a strange allure of its own, a sexy sort of huskiness; the adjectives *effeminatus* and *fractus* are typically yoked together in discussions of the voices and performances of *cinaedi*, to the point of inseparability.¹⁴⁴ Like patron, like client: for Virgil's readers, something of Maecenas' *mollitia* clings to Virgil's voice, character and even the words of his poems (thus already Horace *Sat.* 1.10.44: *molle atque facetum*).¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁰ Markus 2000:170 notes, on *VSD* 28-9, that the biographer 'inadvertently describes recitals in the sexually colored terms in which satire attacks the perceived effeminization of epic. The language and the agenda of the recital's detractors find their way even into Suetonius' positive account of epic's public performance'. But where Markus sees this as accidental, or rather as symptomatic of second-century views of poetic performance, I see something more significant at work.

¹⁴¹ Seneca uses *oratio* interchangeably of vocal performance and textual substance (cf. Graver 1998:608). But reading Maecenas' poetry seems to conjure up the man himself, voice and all (114.6).

¹⁴² Seneca *Ep.* 114.4, 6-8; cf. *Ep.* 19.9, 101.10-12.

¹⁴³ Vell. Pat. 2.88 neatly encapsulates the *otium/negotium* paradox of Maecenas' character: a politician and general, but a decadent pleasure-lover in his off-hours.

¹⁴⁴ E.g. *effeminata et... fracta* (Quint. *Inst.* 1.10.31); *chorus erat cinaedorum... fracta et rauca et effeminata uoce* (Apul. *Met.* 8.26.1). Cf. *fractus* at Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 4.64, Quint. *Inst.* 5.9.14, Sen. *Ep.* 114.1, 115.1, *Vit. Beata* 13.4, Persius *Sat.* 1.18. Graver 1998 translates *fractus* 'queer'; Gleason 1995:67-8, 112, discusses the Greek equivalent (κατα)κεκλασμένος.

¹⁴⁵ Accounts of Virgil's own sexual behaviour also diverge from normative Roman masculinity. Despite his desexualised purity (*uita et ore et animo tam probum... ut... 'Parthenias'... appellatus sit*, *VSD* 11), there are many stories of his 'partiality for boys' (*VSD* 9; cf. Mart. 8.55, Servius *ad Ecl.* 2.1), along with a confused account of an entanglement with Plotia Hieria: Virgil either had an affair with her (Serv. *ad Ecl.* 3.20), or vehemently refused a polyamorous arrangement with her and her husband, the tragedian Varius (*VSD* 10). Pliny claims that Virgil wrote erotic poetry (*Ep.* 5.3.6; cf. 4.14); some poems of the *Appendix* perhaps attempt to substantiate Pliny's claim. Lurid details of their subjects' sex lives are run-of-the-mill in biographies (compare Suetonius' salacious *Vita Horati*), and there is fun to be had in twisting 'chaste Maro's' words to take on explicitly sexual sense (cf., e.g., Ovid *Tr.* 2.534 *contulit in Tyrios arma uirumque toros*, or Ausonius' *Cento Nuptialis*), just as there is in declaring Persius to have been *lenissimus*, *virginalis*, *pius* and *pudicus* (Suet. *Vit. Pers.*); the question is how these

Ellen Oliensis has drawn our attention to the eroticism of Roman patronage-discourse, an indirect approach to the power dynamics of patronage and its give-and-take of request and reward. But she also notes that this eroticism inevitably spills out from its immediate context, the closed world of Maecenas and his client-poets, to shape and configure their relationships with the emperor too, the ‘patron of patrons’, whether he appears as a smooth seducer, a rejected lover, a jealous erotic rival or an inscrutable spectator lurking in the background.¹⁴⁶ Following this suggestion, then, my argument in the final sections of this chapter is that the mention of Virgil’s vocal *lenocinium* at *VSD* 28 is, first, part of a sustained characterisation of his voice and poetic performances as particularly feminine and, second, directly pointed at Virgil’s relationship with Augustus. I will argue that this language of femininity is especially prominent in scenes of Virgil’s recitations to the emperor, and that it revolves in particular around his alignment with female characters within his own works, and around his manipulation of affect and emotion. The primary function of these anecdotes is of course to link Virgil’s works with Augustus by positing him as their original and most significant audience, and thereby to embed his poetry within an expressly imperial context to determine its permanent meaning and value – as if Virgil’s poetry is always spoken straight to Augustus, and we readers mere eavesdroppers on this first performance. But they also actively shape ideas of his personal relationship with the *princeps*. There is substantial discomfort in Virgil’s ancient reception around the precise terms of his relationship with Augustus: the question of his financial rewards for poetic production,¹⁴⁷ for example, or the emperor’s active involvement with the revision and posthumous editing of his works. The characterisation of his readings as (in some way) feminine provides Virgil’s readers with an oblique way of thinking through the power dynamics of the principate and of poetic patronage, mapping Virgil’s relationship with Augustus onto other, more familiar models. Virgil emerges from these anecdotes in various guises: a soothingly maternal sicknurse, a tragic heroine, a grieving mother or a dangerous agent of feminine chaos and textual (and political) disruption. Each of these authorial roles puts a new spin on the nature of his connection with Augustus, and on the function of his poetry within the new imperial regime. And Virgil’s voice – sometimes fragile, sometimes virtuosic, sometimes unheard or silenced, sometimes alluring – takes centre stage.

details then interact with other elements of Virgil’s life and poetry. On Virgil’s sexuality, cf. (e.g.) Fredericksen 2015, particularly valuable for his dissection of scholarly homophobia.

¹⁴⁶ Oliensis 1997:166: ‘although Horace’s immediate addressee is Maecenas, he seems to be glancing, as if over Maecenas’s shoulder, at someone else’. Fowler 2008:105 puts it more earthily: ‘above everything, the top of the tops, is the realest fucker of all, the emperor Augustus’.

¹⁴⁷ Cf., e.g., Hor. *Epist.* 2.1.245-7; Mart. 8.55; *VSD* 13 (*possedit prope centiens sestertium ex liberalitatibus amicorum*), 19, 20; Servius *passim*.

‘Music for a while | shall all your cares beguile...’

What, then, of the third attendee at the *Georgics*’ launch party? The *VSD*’s aside on the qualities of Virgil’s reading voice (*suauitate et lenociniis miris*) certainly has at least as much to do with Augustus’ presence as it does with Maecenas’. It is notoriously difficult to pinpoint what exactly Virgil’s second poem is about, but one answer is plainly Augustus, newly transformed into Rome’s sole ruler and at different points in the poem Virgil’s student, Italy’s guardian, triumphal centrepiece and all-consuming cosmic force.¹⁴⁸ His name bookends the poem (*G.* 1.25, 4.560). No surprise, then, when Virgil’s initial plea for Augustus’ presence (*adsis... tuque... uenias... Caesar*, 1.18-25) and benevolent attention (*uotis iam nunc adsuesce uocari*, 42) morphs, in the biographical tradition, into a scene of direct address to a live audience – and if the Caesar of the *Georgics* has not yet reached the temple of Book 3 (*mihi Caesar erit*, 3.16) or the celestial apotheosis that lies beyond Book 4 (*uiamque adfectat Olympo*, 4.562), neither has Augustus arrived in Rome for his post-Actium triple triumph of 29 BCE.

The *VSD*, naturally enough, takes Virgil as its subject, both biographically and grammatically: ‘Virgil read the *Georgics* to Augustus’ (*Georgica ... Augusto... legit*). But despite Virgil’s summons to Augustus in the opening lines of *Georgics* 1 (*adsis*, 18; *uenias*, 29), the recitation is not the poet’s own idea, nor arranged by Maecenas in his capacity as political mediator and poetic matchmaker;¹⁴⁹ it is not even the main reason for the detour. Augustus’ rest-stop at Atella, on his return from Actium to Rome, is primarily therapeutic, to cure his sore throat: *reficiendarum faucium causa* (*VSD* 27).¹⁵⁰ In Suetonius’ account, the emperor was a fussy, needy invalid: he liked everything just so, and had his own byzantine array of home cures and preventative measures for warding off illness (*Aug.* 80-2). He wanted Maecenas around when he was ill: *aeger autem in domo Maecenatis cubabat* (‘whenever he was sick he would sleep at Maecenas’ house’, 72.2).¹⁵¹ And when insomnia struck, he would call for readers and storytellers to lull him back to sleep (*si interruptum somnum recipere, ut euenit, non posset, lectoribus aut fabulatoribus arcessitis resumebat*, 78.2).¹⁵² Virgil and Maecenas, like Augustus’

¹⁴⁸ Virgil’s approach to Augustus in the *Georgics* is as controversial as it is in the *Aeneid*. A selective sample of scholarship: Morgan 1999, Hardie 2004, Nappa 2005, Nelis 2013.

¹⁴⁹ Maecenas as political and poetic middleman: cf. e.g. Hor. *Sat.* 1.5.27-9, 1.6.52-62, 1.9.43-59, with Gowers 2012 *ad locc.*

¹⁵⁰ Suetonius reports that Augustus was often ill (*Suet. Aug.* 8.1, 13.1, 16.1-2, 43.5, 59.1, 72.2, 80-2, 91.1, 98.5; cf. Wardle 2014:474-9, 500-1). Prone to head colds and summer flu (or hayfever: 81.2), he often lost his voice too (85.1); no wonder, if he habitually recited *libros totos* to the Senate (89.2). Is it pure coincidence that both poet and *princeps* have sore throats in *VSD* 27? Cassius Dio (51.22.9) reports that the emperor later came down with illness in Rome: ‘perhaps there was something in the air that summer’, as Thibodeau comments (2011:205).

¹⁵¹ Wardle 2014 *ad loc.* suggests, following Hor. *Sat.* 1.8.14 (*Esquiliis... salubribus*), that the Esquiline gardens were known for cleanliness – but Maecenas’ personal qualities and importance to Augustus are perhaps more relevant.

¹⁵² *lectores*, ‘readers’, were typically slaves or freed slaves (Starr 1991).

house-slaves, are at the emperor's beck and call, summoned to Atella to provide the in-house entertainment and home comforts he demands for his recovery.

Emily Gowers points out that the *VSD* inverts the relationship between poet and *princeps* found in the *sphragis* of Book 4. There, Virgil reclines (*ignobilis oti*, 566; *sc. recubans*, *Ecl.* 1.1) while Augustus' military exploits secure his poetic leisure (*Caesar... fulminat*, 560-1), whereas at Atella Virgil's poetry soothes Augustus' own rest.¹⁵³ But it recalls (and inverts) another relationship from the *sphragis* too: the maternal care provided to tender young Virgil by 'sweet Parthenope', nymph and avatar of the city of Naples (*illo Vergilium me tempore dulcis alebat | Parthenope*, 563-4).¹⁵⁴ Sweet-voiced Virgil takes over the nurturing role of his namesake Parthenope (*Neapoli 'Parthenias' uulgo appellatus sit*, *VSD* 11); Augustus refreshes himself with a moment of *ignobile otium*, in the form of the *Georgics*, before resuming the *negotium* of empire upon his return to Rome. Parthenope does not sing in the *sphragis*,¹⁵⁵ but Book 4 is filled with other singing nymphs: Cyrene, whose didactic instructions to her son Aristaeus are the only ones explicitly fulfilled within the narrative of the *Georgics* (387-414, 531-47),¹⁵⁶ and Clymene, who refashions Demodocus' song of Mars and Venus (345-6; cf. *Od.* 8.266-366) into a proto-Ovidian 'World History of Love' (*aque Chao densos diuum numerabat amores*, 347).¹⁵⁷ And each of these nymphs, like Parthenope, is mother to a poet: Clymene, by one local cult tradition at least, was Homer's mother, and Cyrene is the name of Callimachus' birthplace in Libya.¹⁵⁸ This agricultural poem makes for a strange lullaby, but the *VSD* frames Virgil's recitation to Augustus as an act of almost motherly devotion, as he and Maecenas put their *suauitas* and *mollitia* to good use in nursing the emperor through his sickness.

Passionate performances and imperial audiences

If Virgil's recitation of the *Georgics* to Augustus was by chance – the result of the sore throat that forced him to pause his journey for a few days, and of his route back to Rome from Greece and the East – then the later recitations of the *Aeneid* reported in the ancient biographical

¹⁵³ Gowers (forthcoming).

¹⁵⁴ Atella is a mere eight miles from Naples, as the crow flies. On Parthenope, see esp. Lightfoot 2014:344-5. Later authors also associate her with birth and motherhood: Ovid *Met.* 15.711-12 (*in otia natam | Parthenopen*); Stat. *Silv.* 3.5.108 (*genetrix alrixque*).

¹⁵⁵ Parthenope was thought to be one of the *Odyssey's* sirens: Lycoph. *Alex.* 712-37, Strabo 5.4.7. Virgil weakens the destructive power of her song by naturalising her as a Roman city-founding nymph.

¹⁵⁶ *haud mora: continuo matris praecepta facessit*, 548. On Cyrene as didactic poet, cf. Gale 2000:55-6, Kronenberg 2009:181; on Cyrene as mother, cf. McAuley 2016:94-111, Nelis 2012:407-8, Oliensis 2009:75, Geue 2018.

¹⁵⁷ Nymphs sing in the *Aeneid* too: Cymodocea, *fandi doctissima* (10.225), brings urgent news to Aeneas and instructs him (228-45).

¹⁵⁸ Clymene: Paus. *Perieg.* 10.24.2. If Parthenope is Virgil's Neapolitan foster-mother, he later claims a Mantuan foremother, *fatidica* Manto (*Aen.* 10.199-203); cf. maternal imagery in the pseudepigraphic epitaph, *Mantua me genuit...* (*VSD* 36).

tradition were the result of sustained, deliberate pressure from the emperor. The *VSD* reports that Augustus ramped up the pressure on Virgil to send him sneak previews, even the clumsiest first drafts of the poem (31):

supplicibus atque etiam minacibus per iocum litteris efflagitarat, ut ‘sibi de Aeneide,’ ut ipsius uerba sunt, ‘uel prima carminis ὑπογραφή uel quodlibet κῶλον mitteretur’.

He would demand, with begging and even jokingly threatening letters, that Virgil ‘send me’, to use his own words, ‘your first sketch of the poem, or whatever part of it you like’.

Virgil seems to have resisted this pressure; at least, there are no accounts of him sending *written* drafts to Augustus. Much later, though, when the *Aeneid* was approaching its final shape (*multo post, perfecta que demum materia, VSD 32*), Virgil supposedly gave a series of private readings to the emperor and his family. The precise selection of books chosen by the poet differs between accounts: Servius reports that he read *Aeneid* 1, 3 and 4, where the *VSD* names 2, 4 and 6.¹⁵⁹ But across all three reports of Virgil’s imperial recitations of the *Aeneid*, what remains consistent is a remarkable insistence on the powerful emotional quality of Virgil’s reading, and the extraordinary effect it has on his audience. Servius emphasises the beguiling nature of Virgil’s performance, twice in two sentences, when he notes that Virgil gave a private recitation to Augustus, including one of Dido’s speeches (*ad Aen. 4.323*):

dicitur autem ingenti adfectu hos uersus pronuntiasse, cum priuatim paucis praesentibus recitaret Augusto. nam recitauit uoce optima primum libros tertium et quartum.

Moreover Virgil is said to have delivered these verses with great passion when he recited them in private to Augustus, with only few other people present. For, in the finest of voices, he gave a reading of the first, third and fourth books.

Augustus’ reaction is not recorded here, but both Servius and the *VSD* famously preserve a highly dramatic account of another recitation by Virgil, now of Book 6, to Augustus and his sister Octavia. Anchises’ prophetic catalogue of Roman heroes comes to a climax with an elaborate *epicedion* for Marcellus (860-86) – Octavia’s son and Augustus’ nephew, son-in-law, heir and (at least in retrospect) great white hope, whose untimely death of illness in 23 BCE, at the age of nineteen, came as a devastating shock. As both the *VSD* and Servius report it, Virgil’s recitation of this passage entirely overwhelms his audience. In one account, Marcellus’ mother

¹⁵⁹ As often with numbers, the text is not certain (cf. Murgia 1968:332-335). Ziogas (2018) argues for Books 2, 4 and 6, finding this selection ‘the most consistent, reliable, and influential’ – but a good case could be made for Books 1 and 3 as well, given their connection with (e.g.) speeches, royalty, empire, the viewing of artworks, and Andromache’s emotional loss of speech in Book 3 too. In any case, the selection aligns suspiciously closely with the sections most often used in schoolrooms both ancient and modern, ignoring the less popular second half of the epic.

Octavia falls into a death-like swoon at Virgil's resounding apostrophe to her dead son and barely recovers (*VSD* 32):

cui tamen multo post, perfectaue demum materia, tres omnino libros recitauit, secundum quartum et sextum; sed hunc notabili Octauiae adfectione, quae, cum recitationi interesset, ad illos de filio suo uersus, 'tu Marcellus eris', defecisse fertur atque aegre focolata.

Much later, when he had refined his subject matter, he finally recited three whole books to Augustus, the second, fourth and sixth. But this last was to the marked distress of Octavia, who was present at the recitation: she is said to have fainted at the lines about her son that begin, 'You will be Marcellus' [*Aen.* 6.883], and to have been revived only with difficulty.

In the other, both Augustus and Octavia weep unquenchable tears, and Virgil is forced to bring his recitation to a premature halt (*Serv. ad Aen.* 6.861):

et constat hunc librum tanta pronuntiatione Augusto et Octauiae esse recitatum, ut fletu nimio imperarent silentium, nisi Vergilius finem esse dixisset.

And it is reported that Virgil recited this book to Augustus and Octavia with such skilled delivery¹⁶⁰ that, because they could not stop crying, they would have ordered him to fall silent, if he had not then said that he had reached the end.

Small wonder that this story is so tenacious in the biographical tradition, given its melodramatic staging, high-status *dramatis personae* and sentimental themes of feminine emotion and maternal anguish.¹⁶¹ Just as Virgil's epic so often exposes his characters' inner lives, the personal costs underpinning nationhood and ideology, and the behind-the-scenes emotional stakes of war, conquest, city-building and divine teleologies, so too this anecdote reveals the imperial family at their most private and domestic,¹⁶² still raw from recent grief. And if Aeneas spends most of the *Aeneid* suppressing his emotional wounds (*premit altum corde dolorem*, 1.209),¹⁶³ Servius' version of the anecdote gives us a more humanised emperor, one perhaps as likely to weep at the ravaged fields of Carthage as to salt them.¹⁶⁴ The real drama shifts from the internal plot of the epic to the frame of its production and recitation. And, embedded within

¹⁶⁰ Or, perhaps, 'in such an exaggerated manner'.

¹⁶¹ The anecdote has remained popular throughout Virgil's reception: cf., conveniently, *VE* 1362-4.

¹⁶² By Pliny's time, women would attend private recitations but not public ones (cf. Hemelrijk 1999:42-5): Pliny memorably writes of his wife attending his readings concealed behind a curtain (*Ep.* 4.19.3). Seneca writes that Octavia's grief drove her to total self-seclusion (*Ad Marciam* 2.5), but Horsfall (2001, 2013:588) overstates the value of this passage for 'disproving' the historical plausibility of *VSD* 32 (cf. Ziogas 2018).

¹⁶³ Cf. *curam sub corde premebat* (4.332). One notable exception is Aeneas' extreme emotional response to the pictures in Juno's temple, depicting his own traumatic history: he weeps (*lacrimans*, 459, 470; *umectat flumine uultum*, 465), groans (*gemens*, 465; *gemitum*, 485), gapes (*haeret*, 495), cries out (459-63), and begins to hope and trust (*sperare, confidere*, 451-2).

¹⁶⁴ Or perhaps Syracuse: besides Scipio's famous weeping at Carthage (Diod. Sic. 32.24), Marcus Claudius Marcellus (cf. *Aen.* 6.855-9) wept to see his destruction of Syracuse (Livy 25.24.11-14, Plut. *Marc.* 19.1-2). See Gowers 2010 on Augustus' apparent self-construction in the elder Marcellus' image.

the contexts of Servius' commentary and Donatus' prefatory *Vita*, these anecdotes provide the *Aeneid*'s readers with a roadmap for their own emotional and intellectual responses to the poem's famed pathos: weep here, swoon there, imagine that speech delivered with heart-rending passion.

In an excellent recent article, Ioannis Ziogas investigates the interrelation of the Marcellus anecdote with Virgilian and Homeric epic.¹⁶⁵ He highlights the way it mirrors epic scenes where audiences respond to narratives, songs or artworks, especially ones which depict or relate to the viewers' own lives: Penelope's pain when she hears Phemius' songs of the Achaeans' homecomings (*Od.* 1.325-59), Odysseus weeping at Demodocus' narration of Odysseus' participation in the Trojan War (*Od.* 8.83-96, 520-35), or Daedalus' repeated failure of artistry on the temple doors at Cumae, his grief twice preventing him from completing the depiction of his son Icarus' death. And the manifestation of Octavia's grief in *VSD* 32, he argues, echoes the many scenes in the *Aeneid* of parents grieving or lamenting, part of the epic's obsession with children who, like Marcellus, die *ante ora parentum* ('in front of their parents' eyes', *Aen.* 6.308; cf. 1.95): besides Daedalus, Octavia corresponds to Euryalus' unnamed mother, Mezentius, Evander and (Homer's) Andromache.¹⁶⁶

There is a sense, then, in which Virgil's recitation of his epic causes the contents of its narrative to spill out from the confines of fiction into reality. As Virgil reads, so the scenario of his recitation is reconfigured to map directly onto the scenes of the *Aeneid*: Octavia faints like Andromache; she falls to the floor (*defecisse*, *VSD* 32) as Daedalus' hand fell (*cecidere manus*, *Aen.* 6.33); Octavia and Augustus dissolve into tears like Aeneas in the Carthaginian temple; Virgil himself falls silent prematurely (*silentium*, *Serv. ad Aen.* 6.861), just as Daedalus failed to complete his artistic task. The end of Book 6 is a particularly suitable point for the boundary between fiction and reality to erode. Anchises' *Heldenschau* contains only the third explicit reference to contemporary Rome in the *Aeneid*;¹⁶⁷ the poem's prophecies and proleptic nods have otherwise been limited to the semi-mythical, pre-Roman past, predicting only as far as Aeneas' own lifetime or Romulus' founding of Rome. Here, though, the past stretches forward a ghostly hand to touch the present. In Virgil's underworld all of history seems to merge and overlap, as Aeneas encounters pre-Homeric heroes (648-50), his own acquaintances (334-83, 450-534, 676-702) and Augustus Caesar himself (792). And Anchises' description of Marcellus works particularly hard to blur the distinction between the fiction of the *Aeneid* and the world

¹⁶⁵ Ziogas (2018).

¹⁶⁶ Homer's Andromache faints to see Hector killed (*Il.* 22.466-76). But see too Virgil's Andromache, who momentarily loses the ability to speak when reminded of her own dead son Astyanax (*Aen.* 3.340).

¹⁶⁷ Jupiter's prophecy in Book 1 refers to *Caesar Iulius* (286-8), and in Book 5 Virgil gives genealogies of the Memmii, Sergii, Cluentii and Atii (117-23, 568). Book 5, however, is the one book of the first half of the *Aeneid* that both the *VSD* and Servius agree Virgil did *not* recite to Augustus – perhaps in part to avoid tackling Virgil's awkward choices of named contemporary families (cf. Horsfall 2013 *ad loc.*).

of its audience.¹⁶⁸ Beside the contemporary landscape of Augustus' newly built mausoleum on the banks of the Tiber (873-4), or the emphatic apostrophe of *tu Marcellus eris* (883) that the *VSD* singles out as the cause of Octavia's breakdown, Anchises' very next words continue with an imperative ('give lilies in handfuls', *manibus date lilia plenis*) apparently not addressed to anyone within the underworld scene, but instead directed outwards to the external audience.¹⁶⁹ The story of Virgil's performance of this passage to Octavia and Augustus activates these latent elements, reframing Anchises' narration as a direct communication from the poet to Marcellus' immediate family.

This sense of art as mimetic contagion is itself already present within the *Aeneid*. Daedalus' hands fall (*cecidere*, 6.33) from his artwork as he recalls Icarus tumbling from the sky (*casus*, 32); elsewhere, the violence, disorder, passion and *furor* depicted within artworks stir up the same emotions again in those who view or hear them.¹⁷⁰ This is not the 'catharsis' of Aristotelian theory of tragedy (*Poet.* 1449b), but something much more disturbing. Shadi Bartsch's classic analysis of art in the *Aeneid* notes the 'imitative pull of the representation of violence':¹⁷¹ where the Augustan political project demands precisely the containment and aestheticisation of destructive emotion, particularly the *furor* of the civil wars, artworks within the *Aeneid* repeatedly spur on their audiences to enact the same violence and loss of control that they depict.

Something of this same sense of mimesis, I would argue, is conveyed by the *VSD*'s description of Octavia's response to Virgil's recitation: *adfectio*, which I translated above as 'distress'. While partially overlapping with simpler terms for distress or extreme sadness (*dolor*, *luctus*, *tristitia*, *maeror*), *adfectio* carries a sense of response or reaction: Octavia's experience of emotion is directly caused by Virgil's performance.¹⁷² Indeed, Servius' two descriptions of Virgil's imperial recitations explicitly comment on Virgil's performance and manipulation of emotion: *ingenti adfectu... pronuntiasset (ad Aen. 4.323)*, or *tanta pronuntiatione... esse recitatum (ad Aen. 6.861)*. Across these anecdotes, a connection is drawn between the performer's display of emotion and the audience's experience of it. Octavia's (and Augustus') dramatic, uncontrollable reactions are not just the result of the contents of Virgil's poetry; they are a direct result of his live performance of it. Arguments *ex silentio* are unreliable, but I would wager it is no coincidence that there are no accounts of Augustus or Octavia reacting similarly

¹⁶⁸ West 1993:296 suggests that Anchises here takes on the role of Augustus, repeating or alluding to the words of his funeral speech for Marcellus (cf. Cass. Dio 53.30): Anchises' *nepotis* (884) refers literally to Augustus' 'nephew'.

¹⁶⁹ Tib. Claud. Don. is already troubled by this lack of addressee (1.884, at Georges 1906:617). See Horsfall 2013 *ad loc.* on the syntax of these lines. On the metaleptic effect of apostrophe, see De Jong 2009, Budelmann (forthcoming). Whitmarsh 2013:5 is right to point out that narratorial apostrophe is not always metaleptic, but in this case it contributes to a larger effect of narrative boundary-transgression.

¹⁷⁰ E.g. Aeneas' narrative of Books 2 and 3 to Dido, Pallas' baldric. On 'mimetic' or 'ecphrastic contagion' in ancient thought, see Whitmarsh 2002, Germany 2016; in the *Aeneid*, Biow 1994, Bartsch 1998.

¹⁷¹ Bartsch 1998:335.

¹⁷² *OLD* 2a; cf. (e.g.) Cic. *Top.* 68, 70 (*adfectio... ad res aliquas*). *adfectus* carries the same sense.

to their own private reading of Virgil's text, or to performances of it by *lectores* or actors. Virgil's voice and his extraordinary delivery of his poetry are the media that magnify the effect of his words and cause the fictions of his poetry to manifest in the reality of the Augustan court.¹⁷³

Ziogas argues that Octavia's sorrow, prompted by Virgil's recitation, is a quintessentially Virgilian form of maternal grief, distinct from fathers' reactions to the loss of their sons within the epic.¹⁷⁴ Noting the parallels between Euryalus and Marcellus,¹⁷⁵ he argues that Octavia's swoon echoes Euryalus' mother's debilitating anguish in *Aeneid* 9 (473-502). As with other forms of exaggerated feminine emotion throughout the *Aeneid*, the particular danger of Euryalus' mother's grief is that it risks infecting others (498-501) and bringing to a halt the teleological drive of the plot; 'epic action can resume only after the expulsion of a grieving woman's disturbing presence' (*corripiunt interque manus sub tecta reponunt*, 502). In Book 6, the younger Marcellus distracts from the highlight of Anchises' catalogue of future Roman heroes, the shining example of the elder Marcellus;¹⁷⁶ it is only after finishing the *epicedion* that Anchises can return to other aspects of Roman history which inflame Aeneas' heart with lust for war and glory (889-92). Octavia's grief is similarly disruptive: in the *VSD* her fainting causes a commotion, and in Servius' account, Augustus' and her tears even threaten to cut short Virgil's recitation of the *Aeneid* itself. Just as she momentarily takes on the guise of one of Virgil's mourning mothers, so the *Aeneid* becomes assimilated to the martial action and Augustan teleology of its own narrative, both threatened by uncontrollable female emotions.

But it is not just Octavia who resembles Euryalus' mother: the anecdotes seem to cast Virgil too in this role. On the one hand, Virgil voices Anchises' *Heldenschau*; he takes on the role of one of the *Aeneid*'s most authoritative speakers, responsible for the epiphanic unveiling of the poem's religious and historical mysteries. On the other, though, if Euryalus' mother is to be glimpsed in these anecdotes of Virgil's recitation, there is reason to see her not only in Octavia's all-consuming grief, but in Virgil's voice and speech too. The particular power of Euryalus' mother's grief is that it is expressed through lament: her *femineus ululatus* ('womanish howling', 9.477) takes the form of a seventeen-line long speech, just over a line

¹⁷³ The same dynamic, though rather more benign, is evoked in the anecdote of Virgil's extemporised composition discussed above (84-5), where Misenus kindles (*accendere*) martial ardour with his song (*cantus*), and Virgil sings with 'heat' (*calore*). In some ancient theories of music, song and melody are capable of arousing emotion even without words: cf. Diogenes of Babylon in Philodemus *On Music* 4.48.33-4.49.12, with Scade 2017:203 and Klavan (forthcoming).

¹⁷⁴ Following Nugent 1999:256-260, he argues that Mezentius, Evander and Aeneas experience 'valorizing sorrow' rather than (feminine) 'debilitating grief'.

¹⁷⁵ Marcellus and Euryalus are both made visible by their gleaming armour, whether in the gloomy underworld (6.861) or Latian thickets (9.373-4); both are associated with purple flowers (6.884, 9.435); both eulogised directly (6.868-86, 9.446-9). Pallas and Camilla are also linked with shining objects and purple flowers, and Aeneas will echo Anchises' exclamatory *miserande puer!* (6.882) in his funerary speeches for Pallas (10.825) and Lausus (11.42).

¹⁷⁶ On which see Freudenburg 2017:126-7, who also points out Virgil's hints of the negative traditions regarding the elder Marcellus (132).

shorter than Anchises' *epicedion* for Marcellus in Book 6. The contagious effect of her sorrow on the Trojan men is expressly brought about by this lament (498-502):

hoc fletu concussi animi, maestusque per omnis
it gemitus, torpent infractae ad proelia uires.
illam incendente luctus Idaeus et Actor
Ilionei monitu et multum lacrimantis Iuli
corripiunt interque manus sub tecta reponunt.

At that wailing their spirits were shaken, and a groan of sorrow passed through all the men; their strength for battle is numbed and crushed. And as she kindles their grief in this way, Idaeus and Actor, bidden by Ilioneus and Iulus (though he was weeping sorely), catch her up and bear her in their arms into the building.

Euryalus' mother's words recreate the same emotional effect in the Trojans that she herself experienced (475-80): they feel physically struck, lose their senses, groan and wail. The language of numbness and torpor in this passage parallels Octavia's fainting; Iulus' weeping resembles that of his descendants, Augustus and Octavia, and like theirs is only halted by bringing an end to the speech. And it is Virgil who, like a keening woman, brings about this loss of emotional control in the recitation room, setting loose his poem's contagious grief among his audience.¹⁷⁷ Something similar takes place in Servius' other anecdote of Virgil's imperial recitations too: the *ingens adfectus* and *uox optima* with which Virgil declaims Dido's speech (4.305-30) are as suited to his heroine's delivery as to his own. Dido's words are passionate, powerful and exaggerated (*furens*, 4.298; *saevit, incensa*, 300; *excita*, 301); her speech is a masterclass in both the expression of her own emotions and the manipulation of her audience's. In Servius' anecdote, Virgil seems transformed into Dido, throwing himself entirely into his performance of the tragic heroine; for a moment the accusatory voice of abandoned Dido rings out in Caesar's palace.¹⁷⁸

Why are these parts of the *Aeneid* chosen for the anecdotes of Virgil's imperial performances? That is, why does the biographical and exegetical tradition stage *these* particular passages as direct communications between poet and emperor? They are discomfiting scenes. It would be easier to imagine Virgil choosing to recite straightforward Augustan panegyric – to fantasise what Augustus' reaction might be to the vision of future Rome in Book 8, say, or even the portrait of the emperor in Actian triumph, standing high on the deck and wreathed with flames like Aeneas himself (8.678-84; 714-22). Just so, Suetonius reports that one line of the *Aeneid* that Augustus had committed to memory was *Romanos rerum dominos gentemque*

¹⁷⁷ Servius *ad Aen.* 9.479 notes that Euryalus' mother's speech ticks all the boxes as a perfect Ciceronian specimen of oratorical *miser cordia*.

¹⁷⁸ Ziogas notes, following Wiltshire 1989:53, that Euryalus' mother herself shows correspondences with Dido: the *femineus ululatus* (9.477; cf. 4.168, 609, 667), the identification of both as *infelix* (9.477; cf. 1.749, 4.68, 450, 529, 596), the rush to the walls (9.478, 4.410), their torn hair (9.478, 4.590).

togatam, ‘Roman masters of the world, the people of the toga’ (*Aen.* 1.282, *Aug.* 40.5) – the nationalistic climax of Jupiter’s prophecies in Book 1, a vision of *imperium sine fine* (279) and Julian dynastic supremacy (286-96).¹⁷⁹ But the accounts of Virgil’s readings eschew such triumphalism. Instead, each of these passages – Dido’s reproaches to Aeneas, Anchises’ *epicedion* for Marcellus – dwells on and awakens pity for those who suffer the cost of Aeneas’ foundation mission, or who represent the losses along the way of Augustus’ power struggles and establishment of an imperial dynasty. At the start of this chapter we saw how Adam Parry used the metaphor of Virgil’s ‘voice’ for what he saw as the private undercurrents of regret, sorrow or ambivalence running through the *Aeneid*, the poet’s personal sentiments given expression alongside the public perspective of Roman glory and Augustan flag-waving.¹⁸⁰ Here, too, by framing these particular passages in the context of Virgil’s live performance of them, the ancient testimonies seem to make the same association: Virgil’s voicing of these speeches not only challenges the dominant narrative of the *Aeneid*, but roots that challenge in his own individual opinions about the Augustan political project.

Just as the nature of a ruler can be discerned far more clearly in times of strife than in times of peace, so it is far more interesting to see how Augustus responds when confronted with Virgilian political ambiguities and wayward poetic sympathies than when he receives only straightforward panegyric dutifully toeing the Augustan party line. Ancient biographies, no less than modern readers, are fascinated by the problem of how to reconcile the troubling elements of disobedience, resistance or subversion that they perceive in Augustan poetry with the active literary role played by the emperor himself. Would he ignore these elements? Would they fly under his radar, in the style of Frederick Ahl’s postulated ‘safe criticism’?¹⁸¹ Would he take them as a joke, as a good-natured riposte to his own teasing commands (*minacibus per iocum litteris efflagitarat*, *VSD* 31)?¹⁸² Or would he take action to suppress and censor both poems and poets? How much, in short, could an Augustan dissident get away with?

The recitation scenes recorded in the *Vitae* and in Servius are one kind of laboratory for later readers to investigate different scenarios of poetic production under autocracy. Two of the three anecdotes do not mention Augustus’ own reaction, leaving us to imagine him either lenient or oblivious (*VSD* 32, *Serv. ad Aen.* 4.323; cf. *VSD* 27 too). In the other (*Serv. ad Aen.* 6.861),

¹⁷⁹ Admittedly, the context is bathetic: Augustus repurposes Virgil’s line to reproach a group of men in dark cloaks for their sartorial negligence. But this is the only quotation from Virgil that Suetonius attributes to Augustus. Lucan too reads the line as a direct address to the Caesars: his negation of it (*non rector ut orbis | nec dominus rerum, sed felix naufragus esses*, 5.698-9) is spoken to Julius Caesar by his officers.

¹⁸⁰ Parry 1967, discussed above (81). Scholarship has since qualified, challenged and added complex nuance to Parry’s proposition – but his association of ‘voice’ with both Virgil’s personal sentiments and the more elegiac aspects of the *Aeneid* is illustrative. (It is more than possible that Parry was influenced in his analysis by the ancient *testimonia* I discuss here).

¹⁸¹ Ahl 1984.

¹⁸² This is the tactic taken in *Suet. Vit. Hor.*, where the biographer expands Horace’s hints of good-humoured literary exchange between poet and *princeps*, found throughout his works (e.g. *Epist.* 2.1.1-4), into a personal friendship elastic enough to accommodate teasing banter, flirtation and outright obscenity from both sides.

Augustus' emotional reaction to Virgil's tugging on his audience's heartstrings – his floods of tears at the mention of his heir Marcellus – fashions him into something of an ideal reader for Virgil's epic, as responsive to its themes of sorrow, trauma and suffering as to its Roman triumphalism and cosmic sublimity. But at the same time, a hint of potential censorship lingers: Augustus is on the verge of calling the recitation to a halt (*imperarent silentium*). And Virgil is quick to respond to this threat of suppression: he self-censors his poetry, acquiescing to Augustus' unspoken command (*Vergilius finem esse dixisset*).¹⁸³ Virgil remains in favour, his *Aeneid* retains its place at the top of the Augustan bookshelf – but the dangers of imperial poetic production are laid bare.

Coda: Virgil's audiences

In Chapter 1, we saw how the ancient biographical tradition is as fascinated with Virgil's casual speech as with his poetry. The fragments they preserve of his day-to-day conversation, of his habitual sayings and bon mots, become collector's items, to be stored up and pored over for clues and insights into his personality and authorial processes. Virgil behind the scenes, or Virgil unmasked: for his readers, the best way to understand what he says in his poetry is to find out what he says *outside* his poetry. For Virgil's readers, these utterances are as worthy of close attention and study as his poetry itself. But one strange thing about the anecdotes about Virgil's casual speech, as noted in that chapter, is that they present it as barely 'casual' at all. The poetic nature of his statements – vatic pronouncements, expressed in simile form, always related to his writing processes – and their habitual, repeated nature ('Virgil *used to say*...') mean that they seem premeditated, formalised or even scripted.

Traces of Virgil's unpolished words and unscripted voice are to be found, not in these remnants of his casual speech, but in the stories of his public or private recitations. The half-lines that the *VSD* tells us were improvised on the spot, *quo non praestantior alter Martemque accendere cantu* (*Aen.* 6.164-5, *VSD* 34), are revealed to be the only fragments of Virgil's extemporised poetry to be included as part of the permanent text of his poems without first having gone through his usual methods of lengthy, ruthless self-revision (*VSD* 22-4). From a different angle, the tale of Virgil's and Maecenas' joint recitation of the *Georgics* to the emperor transforms passages of the poetry not just into explicitly metapoetic signals – that is, into comments on their nature as poetry – but into narration of their own initial performance; they seem quasi-improvised, as if Virgil were incorporating his requests for Augustus' presence

¹⁸³ Perhaps another way in which the scene of the recitation mirrors elements of the poetry: Virgil's recitation, like Marcellus' life, is cut off in its prime.

in *Georgics* 1 and Maecenas' help in *Georgics* 2 into the words of the poem itself. And if poetic recitations in Augustan Rome were, in a sense, work-in-progress seminars, designed to allow poets to air their unfinished work among groups of friends, colleagues and patrons and elicit criticism and feedback,¹⁸⁴ the stories of Virgil's recitations found in the biographical and exegetical traditions offer their readers a privileged glimpse into this otherwise hidden process. They encourage their readers to see Virgil's poems, not as timeless, unchanging monuments handed down from author to reader, but as objects in flux, palimpsests which contain within themselves the traces of their earlier forms and of the circumstances under which they were produced.

At the start of this chapter, we noted the paradoxes inherent in the cultural status of the voice: embodied and immaterial, divine and human, natural and constructed, unique and replicable. One further paradox emerges from investigating the biographical reports of Virgil's recitations: to speak of an author's voice is to speak of his audience. Where Virgil's initial composition and redrafting of his poetry was a private affair, undertaken with perhaps only his amanuensis present (*dictare solitus*, *VSD* 22),¹⁸⁵ his performance of his works disseminates it to an audience. Each of the anecdotes discussed in this chapter dramatises the involvement of his audiences: from the anonymous heckler of *VSD* 43, who disrupts Virgil's poetic performance, to Augustus himself, whose silent presence and enigmatic responses are the gravitational forces which shape and direct the significance of Virgil's imperial recitations. Virgil's own portrayals of artworks within his poems repeatedly turn a spotlight onto acts of viewing and listening, dramatising the way in which narrative, art and memory are always collaborative efforts between creator and audience.¹⁸⁶ Just so, the reports of Virgil's voice and performance rest on his audience's involvement: their responses, interruptions, supportive participation, and the way hearing Virgil's voice has the power to change and influence their own authorial identities. In the biographical tradition, Virgil's recitations are as much a way to think through the nature of reception as to throw light on Virgil's role as an author.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Quinn 1982, Starr 1987, Markus 2000.

¹⁸⁵ As ever, the crucial presence of slaves is too easily omitted in discussions of the solitude of elite Roman men, both in the ancient sources and in modern scholarship.

¹⁸⁶ Cf., e.g., Freudenburg 2017:134: 'Remembering is itself an act of construction: not a matter of calling up facts and experiences from the past... but an active process of reshaping the past and imposing fresh interpretations on those facts and experiences; a process more about doing (selecting, forgetting, re-interpreting, re-narrativizing) than receiving... [I]t is not just the monuments' artisans, such as Daedalus and Anchises, who create in the crafting of cultural reminders, but those who engage with their works are equally creative in the memories they make from those reminders.'

CHAPTER 3

READING VIRGIL'S (SELF-) ALLEGORISING

‘Le parti que j’ai pris d’écrire et de me cacher est précisément celui qui me convenait. Moi présent, on n’aurait jamais su ce que je valais, on ne l’aurait pas soupçonné même.’

(Jean-Jacques Rousseau)¹

‘We ought to perceive Virgil in the guise of Tityrus here, but not everywhere: only where reason compels it’ (*hoc loco Tityri sub persona Vergilium debemus accipere; non tamen ubique, sed tantum ubi exigit ratio*). So writes Servius in his note on the first word of the *Eclogues*, introducing biographical allegory as a legitimate reading strategy appropriate to Virgil’s work but immediately qualifying it with a note of scholarly caution. ‘Here, but not everywhere’: the reader must remain alive to the possibility that the author lurks hidden somewhere within the text, but without reducing Virgil’s poetry to a simple *roman à clef* of one-to-one correspondences. Servius’ vaunted *ratio*, his guiding principle for allegorical reading, is not defined at the outset (or indeed anywhere else).² Instead, as his reading of the *Eclogues* unfolds, he outlines his approach to Virgil’s autobiographical ciphers for his schoolboy readers’ benefit, giving the arguments for and against allegorical readings at various points in the *Eclogues*, as well as their interpretative ramifications.³

Biographical allegory has long been a sticking point for modern understandings of ancient scholarship. Ancient commentators seem to insist that Virgil’s text conceals details of his own life to be decoded by the reader, and that this biography – recovered in dribs and drabs, and only partially at best – is the true, central meaning of Virgil’s complex and multivalent poetry. This jars with the sensibilities of modern readers trained on the ‘death of the author’ and on a New Critical repudiation of intentionalist or biographical strategies of reading.⁴ The blatant

¹ Rousseau 1819:233: ‘My decision to write and to hide myself is precisely the one that suits me. With me present, one would never have known what I was worth, or even have suspected it.’

² The closest Servius comes to a universal principle of allegory comes later, at *Ecl.* 3.20, in the course of vehemently dismissing the interpretation of Damon’s stolen goat as an allegory for a tragedy (*caper ~ τράγος*) stolen from Virgil by Varus; he states that the only allegories to be accepted in the *Eclogues* are those relating to the land confiscations (*sed melius simpliciter accipimus: refutandae enim sunt allegoriae in bucolico carmine, nisi cum, ut supra diximus, ex aliqua agrorum perditorum necessitate descendunt*). While the land confiscations are certainly Servius’ chief allegorical interest throughout his commentary (cf. Starr 1995), he does not entirely keep to his self-imposed rule: his allegorical interpretation at *Ecl.* 10.71, for example, is purely metapoetic (*allegoricus autem significat se composuisse hunc libellum tenuissimo stilo*).

³ E.g. *ad Buc.* 1.27-28: Servius accounts for obstacles in mapping (young, free-born) Virgil onto (old, apparently enslaved) Tityrus, and ultimately makes the case for maintaining biographical reading by distorting the sense of the text: he reads *candidior* (*Ecl.* 1.28) with *libertas* (27), rather than (more naturally) with *barba* (28). He devotes equally substantial argumentation, however, to the case *against* allegorising.

⁴ The *loci classici* for the revolution in biographical analysis are Fairweather 1974 and 1981 and Lefkowitz 1981; their approach was subsequently developed by (e.g.) Graziosi 2002, Peirano 2012, Marmodoro and Hill 2013,

circularity of the relationship between Virgil's text and Virgil's biography, too, casts a shadow on the value of biographical allegory. To the modern reader, it is clear that many (if not all) details of the poet's life are pure extrapolations from his poetry, rather than independent sources – often even tendentiously reshaping known aspects of the biography to accommodate literary readings. As well as casting doubt on the historicity of the recovered biography, this circularity allows for only the flattest of interpretative moves: the poet's life is both the master-key to reading his works, which must therefore be known before approaching them, *and* the ultimate product of the act of interpretation. The line is repeatedly blurred between allegory as an authorial strategy, whereby authors encode hidden meanings in their writing,⁵ and as an interpretative mode allowing readers to derive secondary meaning from a text, whether or not the author intended them to be there.⁶ What's more, the surviving ancient testimonies to allegorical reading strategies do not necessarily inspire confidence in their methodology. Servius not only withholds his promised *ratio*, but frequently offers his readers such a frenzied plethora of different, incompatible biographical scenarios that each choice seems less probable than the last.⁷ The temptation for modern critics is to retreat to scorn: biographical allegory is too simplistic, too fallible, too fantastical and too poorly executed to offer us much in the way of Virgilian exegesis.⁸

Despite its apparent naivety as an interpretative tool, however, and regardless of the veracity of its historical imaginings, the widespread use of biographical allegory offers us a valuable glimpse into ancient criticism's various modes of reading, understanding and theorising the literary text. In the last few decades, much interest has arisen in what biographical allegory can reveal about the assumptions underlying ancient hermeneutics and about later authors' creative, imitative or antagonistic engagement with their predecessors.⁹ Chief among these, naturally, is the readerly desire for an authorial presence. By subordinating the *prima facie* meaning of the text to the poet's self-representation, biographical allegory foregrounds the figure of the author, and assumes that the act of poetic creation is always primarily an

Fletcher and Hanink 2016, towards analysing the dynamics and significance of this circularity. See my discussion in the Introduction.

⁵ Cicero, for example, explicitly associates allegory with secretly encoded writing: *iam enim, charta ipsa ne nos prodat, pertimesco... itaque posthac, si erunt mihi plura ad te scribenda, ἀλληγορίας obscurabo* (Att. 2.20.3.1-3). The trusted reader (in this case, only Atticus – and the later readers of Cicero's published letters) knows how to derive Cicero's unspoken encoded message from his letters; hostile readers see only innocuous or irrelevant writing.

⁶ Early Christian readings of Virgil's texts, for example, often explicitly deny authorial intention and locate the allegorical power solely with the Christian reader: cf., e.g., Lactantius and Augustine on *Eclogue* 4 (with MacCormack 1998:24-9), or Fulgentius on the *Aeneid* (which I discuss elsewhere: cf. Kearey, forthcoming).

⁷ Most notably, his note on *Ecl.* 2.1 offers four scenarios in quick succession: Corydon is Virgil and Alexis is Augustus; Alexis is Pollio's slave; Alexis is Caesar's slave; Corydon is Pollio's slave and Alexis Pollio's sweetheart...

⁸ Horsfall 1995b, for example, takes this extreme position of scepticism.

⁹ Cf., e.g., Whitman 1987, Starr 1995, Graziosi 2002, Korenjak 2003 and the chapters in Fletcher and Hanink 2016. Even Horsfall admits, 'Once we are rid (well rid, indeed) of bucolic autobiography, we may still wish to study the growth of the biographic-allegorical scholia' (1995b:12).

autobiographical act. Indeed, as Raymond Starr points out, ancient biographical interpretations of poem collections like the *Eclogues* assert that there is narrative continuity and coherence across the collection – but that this narrative is that of the poet’s life and times, not produced by elements internal to the collection such as plot, character and theme.¹⁰ There can be no divorce between the ever-looming figure of the controlling author and the poetic text, as the one is considered practically equivalent to the other. I wrote in the Introduction to this thesis that ancient scholarship displays a fascination with ‘the author in an active state of authoring’; biographical allegory naturally offers a rich opportunity to investigate this fascination.

As I outlined in the Introduction, too, the picture of credulous ancient critics accepting simplistic biographical allegory is complicated by these critics’ own acute sensibility of allegory’s shortcomings and limitations (not least Servius’). This should not, after all, be surprising: ancient authors themselves were deeply troubled by the loss of authorial control that would occur when their works left their hands, often expressing fear that the sentiments and actions within the text would be read automatically (and erroneously) as their own.¹¹ Critics were also conscious of the distinction between *persona* and external authorial reality. Servius, for example, devotes an extensive note to the problem (*ad Buc.* 3.1), contrasting poetry in which the poet speaks directly (*Ecl.* 4 and 10) and that in which he uses characters (*personae*).¹² Naturally, to a certain extent it is this very distinction between authorial and character speech that enables biographical allegory as a reading strategy: the distance between the author Virgil and the Virgil-like character Tityrus must be crossed by the reader, rather than closed by the author.¹³ But Servius’ careful distinction between first-person poems and those spoken by characters is consistent with his caution regarding biographical allegory: *some* of the characters, *some* of the time, should be equated with Virgil, but the identification is to be made with caution, and only where sound interpretative sense can be found.¹⁴ Servius’ use of biographical

¹⁰ Starr 1995:137.

¹¹ Authors were particularly worried about interpretative instability at points when their poems risked bringing their own moral standing into disrepute. Powell 2011:126n260 cites various examples, including Catullus (*qui me ex uersiculis meis putastis, |quod sunt molliculi, parum pudicum*, 16.3-4), Ovid (*crede mihi, distant mores a carmine nostri*, *Tr.* 2.353) and Martial (*lasciua est nobis pagina, uita proba*, *Epig.* 1.4.8).

¹² *Ecl.* 4 and 10 are the only ‘true’ authorial monologues in the collection, since *Ecl.* 6 is (famously) revealed to be spoken by ‘Tityrus’, and *Ecl.* 2 rapidly abandons the opening frame to give Corydon’s monologue. Servius quotes the first lines of each, perhaps to flag up the first-person voice: *canamus* (4.1), *mihi concede* (10.1). The question of how far the pastoral narrators of each *should* be identified with Virgil is still an active question; on a formal level, however, Servius’ typology is justified.

¹³ I explore this problem below with regard to Propertius: the gap between the author and the narratorial voice is perceived to be much narrower in elegy. Whitman comments (1987:2): ‘the more allegory exploits the divergence between corresponding levels of meaning, the less tenable the correspondence becomes. Alternatively, the more it closes ranks and emphasizes the correspondence, the less oblique, and thus the less allegorical, the divergence becomes. In this way, allegory tends to be at odds with itself, tending to undermine itself by the very process that sustains it.’

¹⁴ See note 2 above, on Servius’ discussion of *Ecl.* 1.27-8. *Serv. Dan.* also reports Asinius Gallus’ declaration that he was the promised miraculous child of *Ecl.* 4 (*ad Buc.* 4.11; cf. Suetonius *De gramm.* 23.4, on the grammarian Palaemon’s similar declaration): does this blatantly self-serving appropriation of allegorical techniques cast doubt on the method’s validity elsewhere in Servius’ commentary?

allegory as an interpretative tool is not an unconscious reflex, but rather a deliberate choice; his decisions on where, how and to what effect to employ it reflect complex hermeneutic principles, and his openness about his methodology encourages his readers to be aware of their own reading strategies as well.

Servius is the earliest surviving scholarly work on Virgil to make substantial use of biographical allegory. Before him we find only fleeting references in Quintilian,¹⁵ as well as in the *VSD*,¹⁶ where the products of allegorical reading are presented as biographical ‘fact’. There can be little doubt that allegory was a popular technique for reading Virgil from the very earliest stages: it was, after all, a long-established mode of literary interpretation in the ancient world. But in the absence of earlier scholarly work, it is difficult to discern whether Servius’ approach, midway between credulity and scepticism, is unique or representative of ancient approaches to Virgilian biographical allegory – let alone to trace the development of allegorical interpretation before Servius. There is simply too little evidence.

In this next half of my thesis, then, I investigate a slightly different use of biographical allegory in Virgil’s ancient reception. I am particularly interested in two poetic texts, spanning a period from just before Virgil’s death to the mid-first century CE, both of which treat the figure of Virgil himself allegorically within their *own* fictions, but which (crucially) belong to two very different genres: Propertius 2.34 and Calpurnius Siculus’ *Eclogues*.¹⁷ While their use of biographical allegory is clearly on a continuum with Servius’, their status as poetry introduces other dynamics than pure scholarly biographical interest. In particular, I want to investigate the extent to which these texts not only apply biographical allegory as an interpretative strategy, but seem to attribute it to Virgil as a compositional method within his *own* writing. That is, where my first two chapters investigate the ways in which ancient readers discussed ‘how Virgil wrote’, ‘how Virgil performed’ – exploring their appropriation and manipulation of biographical anecdotes within their own works, as well as investigating the anecdotes themselves – this section investigates the ways ancient readers discussed ‘how Virgil wrote *about himself*’. Examining the use of allegory in this poetic context, I argue, sheds light on the surprising degree of complexity with which it can be employed in biographies, commentaries and other apparently ‘factual’ texts, and the way it encourages its readers to collaborate and participate in its ways of reading Virgil’s master-text.

¹⁵ Quintilian identifies Menalcas (*Ecl.* 9.7-10) as Virgil in his definition of a biographical subcategory of *allegoria* (*Inst.* 8.6.46-7).

¹⁶ Especially *VSD* 9, 14 and 19.

¹⁷ I have decided not to address Martial 8.55, since it is amply discussed by Peirano 2012a:60-4.

CHAPTER 4

‘A TASTE FOR MASKS AND MIRRORS’:¹ PROPERTIUS’ VIRGIL

The earliest extant author to hint at allegorical ways of reading an autobiographical Virgil – that is, not just to write about Virgil and of his works but to mimic his own modes of self-representation, that characteristic metaleptic turn whereby he slips between extratextual authorial existence and intratextual fictionality – did so within Virgil’s own lifetime. The last poem of Propertius’ second book of *Elegiae*, probably published around the mid-20s BCE,² contains a lengthy digression on Virgil and the progression of his literary endeavours (2.34.59-84):³

me iuuet hesternis positum languere corollis,
quem tetigit iactu certus ad ossa deus. 60
Actia Vergilium custodis litora Phoebi,
Caesaris et fortis dicere posse ratis,
qui nunc Aeneae Troiani suscitatur arma
iactaque Lauinis moenia litoribus.
cedite Romani scriptores, cedite Grai! 65
nescio quid 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 uilis pomis mercaris amores!
huic licet ingratae Tityrus ipse canat.
felix intactum Corydon qui temptat Alexin
agricolae domini carpere delicias!
quamuis ille sua lassus requiescat auena, 75
laudatur facilis inter Hamadryadas.
tu canis Ascraei ueteris praecepta poetae,
quo seges in campo, quo uiret uua iugo.
tale facis carmen, docta testudine quale
Cynthius impositis temperat articulis. 80
non tamen haec ulli uenient ingrata legenti,
siue in amore rudis siue peritus erit.

¹ Genette 1987:53: the use of pseudonyms unites ‘a taste for masks and mirrors, for indirect exhibitionism, and for controlled histrionics with delight in invention, in borrowing, in verbal transformation, in onomastic fetishism’. I owe this quotation to Peirano 2012a:1.

² Book 2 was probably published no later than 24 BCE: cf. Lyne 1998:522-4. Despite arguments for regarding Book 2 as an amalgam of two earlier books (Heyworth and Morwood 2011:22-4) I regard 2.34 as the last poem of a single Book 2, due to closural motifs in the poem and their structural and thematic echoes in 3.1. The sense of ring composition between 2.1 and 2.34 also prompts my treatment of Book 2 as a single entity. My argument is not significantly affected, however, if we regard 2.13, the proposed first poem of ‘Book 2B’, as a matching book-end to 2.34.

³ I have followed the text printed by Fedeli 2005, though aware of the severely damaged textual tradition – *quot editores, tot Propertii*, as Phillimore has it. Like most recent editions (e.g. Heyworth 2007, Goold 1990, along with White 1964, Lefèvre 1980, Stahl 1985, *et al.*), I consider Prop. 2.34 to be a single poem. O’Rourke 2011 raises possible stichometric arguments for dividing the poem, but concludes that it is ‘meaningful as a single unit’ (492).

nec minor hic animis, etsi minor ore, canorus
anseris indocto carmine cessit olor.

My delight is to loll amid yesterday's garlands, for the god of unerring aim has pierced me to the bone. For Virgil, it is to tell of the Actian shores which Apollo watches over, and Caesar's brave fleet; even now he rouses to life the arms of Trojan Aeneas and the walls he founded on Lavinian shores. Make way, Roman writers; make way, Greeks! Something greater than the *Iliad* is coming to birth.

[67] You sing of Thyrsis and Daphnis with his well-worn pipes, under the pinewoods of shady Galaesus, and how ten apples, or the gift of a kid fresh from its dam's udders, can win the love of girls. How happy you are, who can buy your love cheaply with apples! Even Tityrus can sing to her, even if she is unkind. How happy is Corydon, who tries to steal away Alexis, still chaste, the darling of his rustic master. Though he is tired, and rests from his piping, he is praised by the gentle Hamadryads.

[77] You sing the teachings of the old Ascrean poet: in what fields the crops flourish, on which hill the grapes. You create the kind of song that Cynthian Apollo fashions, with fingers set to his learned lyre. But these songs will not fail to please any reader, whether he is unskilled or accomplished in the arts of love. The melodious swan, showing no lesser talent in this lesser style, has not disgraced himself with the unlearned song of a goose.

This career overview is remarkable for several reasons, not least for the fact that it interrupts, disrupts, and ultimately dominates an otherwise cohesive and coherent poem. The elegy begins with an address to 'Lynceus': the speaker (henceforth 'Propertius')⁴ complains that this Lynceus, a friend of his (5-8), has made advances on the girl he loves (10-12), creating an unbearable situation for Propertius (13-20).⁵ There is one excuse: that Lynceus was drunk, despite his habitual show of asceticism (21-4). At this point, Propertius finds a silver lining and moves from mock-offended diatribe to teasingly vindictive exultation: Lynceus, he announces to the world, has finally fallen in love (*seros insanit amores*, 25). This is a matter for rejoicing, since it will force him to join Propertius in writing love poetry (26), or at least 'lighter' poetry (31-2; 43) – a far more agreeable occupation than his usual weighty philosophical compositions (27-30), epic poetry or tragedy (33-42). He invites Lynceus to begin immediately (*incipi iam*, 43), since his current literary path is hardly one attractive to women (45-6, 51-4)⁶. Admittedly, this mid-life career change will not be easy, and Lynceus will suffer the hardships of love (47-50) – but Propertius sets himself up as an encouraging example of one who has undergone the agonies of love and is now, though born to little wealth and ancestral glory (55-6), acclaimed for his poetic talent – the rewards of which are sympotic leisure, and hordes of women clustering around him (57-60).

⁴ As I shall argue, this poem simultaneously encourages and interrogates the idea that elegy rests on the personal biographical experience of the poet, who speaks *in propria persona*.

⁵ Compare Propertius' rebuff of Gallus' approaches to Cynthia in 1.5. Gallus, already an elegiac poet, requires no instruction in love-poetry (though he may do in love affairs: 1.10).

⁶ With Heyworth (*et al.*) I understand 2.34.45-6 with an implicit 'otherwise': 'if he does *not* write elegy, he will be no better off than Antimachus and Homer, who are both represented by Hermesianax as suffering for their love' (2007 *ad loc.*).

It is at this point that Propertius introduces the passage on Virgil quoted above: he reminds Lynceus that, though Virgil is now labouring over his epic project of the *Aeneid* (61-6), he is nonetheless a poet of lighter material – the *Eclogues* (67-76) and *Georgics* (77-80) – and therefore *felix* (71, 73), since he knows the ways of love. His poetic works are not only pleasing to both novices and old hands in such matters of the heart (81-2), but far from shameful productions for a poet otherwise of epic stature (83-4). Propertius rounds off his argument with a speedy catalogue of love poets and their beloveds, emphasising at every juncture that writing love poetry was the ultimate source of their (and their beloveds’) fame: Varro, Catullus, Calvus, Gallus, and, in place of honour, Propertius himself again (85-94).⁷

The central messages of *Elegiae* 2.34 are that being in love is a wretched but glorious state; that the writing of love poetry is to be vaunted over other genres, even (or especially) those supposedly superior and weightier; and that Propertius’ opinions are moreover practical and sensible, since even those who disavow his form of elegiac life and poetry will inevitably succumb sooner or later – and even benefit from that. These arguments are hardly new at this moment in the Propertian corpus. Over the course of several poems in both his first and second books, Propertius engages in self-reflexive discussion of the benefits (or otherwise) of love poetry and of being in love, in the form of addresses to his friends, themselves writers of poetry: Tullus (1.1, 6, 14), Bassus (1.4), Gallus (1.5, 10, 13, 20, 21) and Ponticus (1.7, 9) in the first book, Maecenas (2.1) in the second.⁸ Indeed, for one who proclaims his beloved as his be-all and end-all in extravagant terms – *Cynthia prima fuit, Cynthia finis erit* (‘Cynthia was first, Cynthia will be last’, 1.12.20); *ingenium nobis ipsa puella facit* (‘my girl herself creates my genius’, 2.1.4) – Propertius spends a remarkable proportion of his books reenacting the literary and philosophical debates of his (real or imagined) coterie.⁹ The poems to Ponticus are the closest in tone and message to 2.34. In the first (1.7), he defends elegy, his chosen genre, against the more conventionally esteemed genre of epic, in which his friend Ponticus excels; his rather disingenuous pose of suffering and hard-working humility (5-8, 15-16) lasts only a short while before he comes clean about his preference for elegy (17-26). Propertius confronts Ponticus with the prospect of being caught unawares by all-consuming and merciless love, with no poetic tools lying ready to alleviate his pain. The threat is realised in the second poem (1.9), a marvellously self-satisfied ‘told you so!’ in which Propertius gloats about his predictions

⁷ Powell 2011:140 notes that each of these writers also wrote non-elegiac 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’. Cairns’ theory of Propertian *deformazione*, the misrepresentation and appropriation of other poets, is relevant here (2006 *passim*).

⁸ Tullus: nephew of L. Volcatius Tullus, and (unlike the other addressees) a foil for Propertius’ elegiac sentiments. Gallus: presumably the elegist Cornelius Gallus. The poets Bassus and Ponticus are both mentioned, alongside Propertius, by Ovid (*Tr.* 4.10.45-7), and the former is perhaps the same Bassus of Horace *Carm.* 1.36.14; the question of their (ir)reality will be discussed below (141-6).

⁹ On Propertius’ imagined or desired cliques, cf. especially Gold 1987, Cairns 2004 and 2006.

coming true (*dicebam tibi uenturos... amores*, 1.9.1). Ponticus has indeed been laid low by love and is utterly without the *facilis copia* ('ready material', 1.9.15) that his more experienced friend can rely on. The only thing to do is to commence writing love poetry: *dicere quo pereas saepe in amore leuat* ('it often eases the burden of love to tell the reason for your ruination', 1.9.34).¹⁰

But, despite the similarity of the poems' imagined situations and recommended approaches, 2.34 is still a very strange beast in comparison with the Ponticus poems. Why the name *Lynceus*?¹¹ Why the particularly circuitous route from Lynceus' offence against Propertius – that is, impinging on his romantic territory – to the substance of the poem, that is, the superiority of elegiac poetry over epic? And why such a lengthy digression on Virgil? This last is perhaps the trickiest aspect of the poem. The digression is unwieldy: compare the one or two lines granted each of the other five poets in lines 85-94, or the other poems entirely dedicated to Bassus, Ponticus and Gallus without competing digressions. It is difficult in tone, too: how can the compliment (65-6) to the *Aeneid* be genuine, given Propertius' explicit preference for lighter poetry throughout? And how are we to interpret the weight given to the Virgilian digression in the poem's structure? Given that we never return to Lynceus after Propertius turns to Virgil, and that there is little sign of Virgilian themes in the first half of the poem before Virgil is explicitly introduced at 2.34.61, how are we to relate the two parts of the poem to one another? Would we be better off just slicing it in half, King Solomon's fix-all for textual criticism?¹²

Some of these difficulties are surmountable. Virgil's works and career, as Propertius tendentiously recounts them, are obviously suited to the argument of 2.34. While the Virgil who is the writer of epics labours over his task – not only *dicere* ('telling', 62) but *arma suscitāt* ('rousing up weaponry', 63) – the author of the *Eclogues* finds his material summarised as flirtation (69-72), singing (74-5), Corydon and Alexis (73). In short, *amores* (71), an easy life (59), fame and adoration (75-6, 79-84) – precisely those things vaunted by Propertius over epic and tragedy in the earlier half of the poem. He sets Lynceus and Virgil in opposite but symmetrical motion: one towards epic, one towards elegy.

Richard Thomas accounts somewhat for the length of the Virgilian digression in an attractive numerological reading, whereby Propertius devotes a suitable number of lines to each of Virgil's works. Six lines for the twelve books of the *Aeneid* (61-6)¹³ and two for the four-

¹⁰ Cf. Stahl 1985:48-71 on the Ponticus poems.

¹¹ I discuss Lynceus' name and identity more fully below (127-8). On Propertius' character names, cf. Wyke 1987, Sharrock 2000, Cairns 2006:65-9, Heslin 2011.

¹² Thus Barth 1777, Heimreich 1863, Jacob 1827.

¹³ The *Aeneid* was almost certainly not finished when Propertius circulated his *Elegies* Book 2. Propertius apparently had a relatively full understanding of the shape of the *Aeneid* (including the number of its books), and knew certain passages in detail; O'Rourke 2011:464-73 gives an excellent account. Extraordinarily detailed

book *Georgics* (77-8), with the *Eclogues* – the ‘lightest’ of Virgil’s works on Callimachean lines, and thus the one most privileged in Propertius’ hierarchy of genres – receiving a line per poem (67-76). Thomas even suggests that for the *Eclogues* it might be possible to match each line to its corresponding poem; while this clearly works for some (67 ~ *Ecl.* 1.1; *mala* 69 ~ *malo* and *mala*, *Ecl.* 3.64 and 71; *Tityrus* 72 ~ *Ecl.* 6; *lassus requiescat* 75 ~ *Ecl.* 9; *Hamadryades* 76 ~ *Ecl.* 10.62), others are less or not at all convincing. But his account of 2.34 is otherwise elegant: he finds the Virgilian digression ‘a conscious effort at rewriting, in miniature, the book of *Eclogues* ... The erotic potential of the *Eclogues* has ... become the sole preoccupation: elegy rewrites pastoral (perhaps as that very pastoral had itself once rewritten Gallan elegy) and in the process creates and re-creates its genre’.¹⁴

Part of the joke, of course, is that in Propertius’ telling the ‘miniaturised’ *Eclogues* is lengthier than the other two works’ summaries put together. Just as in Propertius’ estimation elegy is superior to epic, just as the epic writer Lynceus finds himself in need of elegy and the pastoral writer Virgil moves into the sphere of epic, so the *deductum carmen* (‘slender song’, *Ecl.* 6.5) swells and overshadows both the epic *maius Iliade* (‘greater than the *Iliad*’, 66) and the didactic, whose scope (in both subject matter and length) stretches over the entire *campus* (78). And in this light, the exaggerated compliment of lines 65-6 – *cedite, Romani scriptores, cedite Grai! | nescio quid maior nascitur Iliade!* – need not be seen as some pompous yet context-blind flattery, nor as a hostile piece of sarcasm. The sheer audacity of Propertius’ re-evaluation of literary value (and reworking of the literature itself) frames the implicit criticism of Virgil’s current epic project as humorous, only ever as much as half-serious. While Propertius does enroll himself in the significant final place in the poem (and the book), asserting his own right to glory and fame for literary achievement, the detailed attention to Virgil’s works conveys a certain respect – even for the epic. As Stahl points out, 2.34’s exploration of Virgil’s poetic path is a fitting counterpart to Propertius’ *recusatio* in 2.1, his ‘cautious but firm and even witty refusal to cooperate with the Emperor’s wish, communicated through Maecenas, to be glorified in a historical epic’: here at the end of the book we see that road not taken illustrated with the example of another author, neither entirely endorsed nor entirely denigrated.¹⁵

Yet, even after such attempts at exegesis, the Virgilian digression is still somewhat inscrutable in its function within 2.34 as a unit, particularly with regard to its precise relation to the opening two thirds of the poem. However intricate its imitative effects, however daring

imitation of another poet’s unfinished work was not unusual: cf. Starr 1987, Gurd 2012:13, Kearey (forthcoming, on Horace).

¹⁴ Thomas 1999:266.

¹⁵ Stahl 1985:172-3. In fact, Propertius’ final poem of his next book, 3.24, sees the poet renouncing both love and elegy; even if Book 4 proves this false, many have perceived in Propertius a tentative career-fashioning similar to Virgil’s (as portrayed in Prop. 2.34), with ‘the personal material of Books 1 and 2 opening out to more general material, discursive and moral in 3, aetiological in 4’ (Heyworth 2010:89, although Heyworth argues against this view.)

its re-evaluation of poetic genre and however elegant its argument, it still seems to add little of substance to the essential argument of 2.34 that would not still be there if it were omitted. Sheer utilitarianism is a clumsy method of interpretation, to be sure, but the Virgilian digression is both so flashy a set-piece and at the same time so well integrated into the poem as a whole that it would be disappointing if there were not something more to be made of it.

At this point I would like to return to the topic of biographical allegory. This may seem like a strange consideration for this poem: there is no statement as direct as Quintilian's comment on *Ecl.* 9.7-10, that *hoc... loco praeter nomen cetera propriis decisa sunt uerbis, uerum non pastor Menalcas sed Vergilius est intellegendus* ('in this passage, everything is explicit in the words except for the proper name, but it is not the shepherd Menalcas but Virgil who is meant'),¹⁶ for example, nor the one-to-one mapping of character-to-person that we find in Calpurnius Siculus' Virgilian Tityrus. Yet Propertius' reworking of Virgil's texts and summary of his career reflects a peculiarly biographical way of reading – one that is subtle and ambiguous, resting more on knowledge of quirks of authorial self-representation and narrative voice than (as with Servius) on historical and biographical context. Propertius, I contend, employs this mode of biographical reading not to explain Virgil's texts and life in Servius' scholarly manner, but rather to introduce the *strategy of biographical reading* as a theme within 2.34 and his elegies as a whole, and to appropriate Virgil and the Virgilian corpus in his own poetic programme, subordinating authorial production to the act of reading and interpreting. I shall illustrate this with a close reading of lines 61-84, exploring the ways in which Propertius both reads Virgil quasi-biographically and uses this biographical reading to support his poetic argument of the first half of the poem, especially in terms of Propertius' 'elegising' of Virgil. I conclude with a further exploration of *why* Propertius might approach Virgil in this manner in 2.34.

nescio quid maius: Virgil writing the Aeneid

How, then, does the Virgilian digression present Virgil in his role as author? First of all, the summary of his works shows a changing attitude to his method of literary composition. Propertius begins with a straightforward comparison between his own authorial activities – *mi iuuat... languere* ('my delight is to recline...', 59) – and Virgil's: *Actia Vergilio custodis litora Phoebi, | Caesaris et fortis dicere posse rates* ('Virgil's is to tell of the Actian shores which Apollo watches over, and Caesar's brave fleet', 61-2). The contrast is exact: while Propertius

¹⁶ *Inst.* 8.6.46, under the heading *Allegoria*. This passage is often cited as the first occurrence of explicit biographical allegory in Virgil's reception (e.g. by Peirano 2012a:17).

stretches out in leisure (*languere*), Virgil gets on with the business of poetic production (*dicere posse*).¹⁷ The next action attributed to Virgil is more interesting: *nunc Aeneae Troiani suscitāt arma* (‘now he rouses to life the arms of Trojan Aeneas’, 63). This is a very slight metalepsis – that is, a ‘slip’ between narrative levels, whereby the actions which the poet narrates are represented as being *performed* by the poet.¹⁸ To say that the author Virgil ‘now stirs up the weapons of Trojan Aeneas’ is to conflate the narration with the narrated action, as if Virgil were not the external narrator but a participant in the action – one of the divine forces that compel the plot of the *Aeneid*, perhaps (note Jupiter at *Aen* 2.618, *suscitat arma*, and 11.727-8, *Tarchonem in proelia saeva | suscitāt*), or one of his Trojan or Italian leaders stirring up fighting spirit in their men (Turnus *in arma uiros... suscitāt*, 9.463; Aeneas *suscitat iras*, 10.263; *se suscitāt ira*, 12.108; *terribilis saeuam nullo discrimine caedem | suscitāt*, 12.498-9).¹⁹

It is notable that Propertius’ attention here is almost unwaveringly fixed on self-reflexive passages of the *Aeneid* in the first-person narrative voice, specifically the two proems. *Aen.* 1.1-4 is echoed at 2.34.61-4 (note *arma*, *Lavini-*, *iact-*, *litor-*), and *Aen.* 7.44-5 (*maior rerum mihi nascitur ordo*, | *maius opus moueo*, ‘a greater order of affairs is coming to birth for me; I arrange a greater work’) finds its reflex in Propertius’ *nescio quid maius nascitur Iliade* (‘something greater than the *Iliad* is coming to birth’, 2.34.66).²⁰ The technique of biographical allegory is often characterised as indiscriminate plunder of any and all elements of an author’s texts, however distanced they may be from the author’s own life or narratorial persona. In some cases, of course, this accusation is justified: I mentioned in the Introduction, for example, the story of Euripides’ death which mirrors Pentheus’ in the *Bacchae*, not only a bizarre choice of dramatic plot-point to see as intertwined with the poet’s own life but one that clearly could not have been designed as such by Euripides during his lifetime. Propertius, by contrast, is careful to stay close to moments in the *Aeneid* more easily associated with the narrator, and by extension with the author himself too: first-person proems, and the verb *suscitat*, used by Virgil for figures

¹⁷ *Actia* is interesting: Virgil does not, of course, narrate recent Roman history in the *Aeneid*, and the closest he comes to Actium is the triumphant Augustus on the shield of Book 8 (*Actius... Apollo* at 8.704). Does Propertius misunderstand (or deliberately twist) Virgil’s project? Or did earlier drafts narrate Actium? Propertius’ two couplets on the *Aeneid* are a clever conflation of Virgil’s narrated and implied subjects: in the *Aeneid* he writes of Augustus and Actium (Prop. 2.34.61-2), as he has promised in the *recusationes* of his earlier works, through telling of Aeneas and Italy (Prop. 2.34.63-4).

¹⁸ On (Genettian) metalepsis: Genette 2004, Whitmarsh 2009 and 2013, Pier 2014, Kearey (forthcoming). This is an instance of metalepsis on a purely discursive level, not narrativized on the level of the plot. It has some overlap with the ‘*poeta creator* motif’, whereby the author is implicated in the process he describes (cf., e.g., Lieberg 1982, Masters 1982:6-7, Morgan 1999:56-61). In the *Georgics*, Lieberg cites 2.7-8, 2.37-8, 3.46, 3.286-7; cf. Volk 2002:127.

¹⁹ Other bloodthirsty or violent instances of *suscitat*: Entellus at *Aen.* 5.454; Aeneas at *Aen.* 5.743; a military metaphor at *G.* 1.97; punishments at *G.* 4.454-6. There are only two gentler usages: Aeneas at *Aen.* 5.743, and the housewife at *Aen.* 8.410. While it is unclear how much of the nascent *Aeneid* was in circulation when Propertius penned 2.34, at least some of these instances of *suscitat* in Virgil’s poetry must have been known to him.

²⁰ Perhaps a hint, too, of *Ecl.* 4’s miraculous child: *paulo maiora canamus* (4.1), *magnus... nascitur ordo* (4.5). I discuss metaphors of birth at greater length in Chapter 1.

with a gods'-eye view of agency, control, authority, quasi-theatrical direction or military command. Thus far, at least, his Virgil is one clearly recognisable from the Virgilian corpus.

Tityrus-Corydon-Virgil: the *Eclogues*

Propertius continues to conflate the act of narrating with participation in the narrated action more and more explicitly later in the passage, in the five couplets devoted to the *Eclogues* (67-76). At first sight the description is uncomplicated. Propertius begins both this section and the passage on the *Georgics* with *tu canis* (67 and 77), 'you sing', a straightforward description of Virgil's poetic production which recalls his own terminology within his works: most famously in the first line of the *Aeneid* (*cano*, 1.1), but also elsewhere in the epic (9.525, in the apostrophe to Nisus and Euryalus), near the beginning of books or key passages in the *Georgics* (1.5 and 1.12, 2.2 and 2.176, 3.1, 4.119), retrospectively in the last line of the *Georgics* (*cecini*, 4.566), and in the *Eclogues* in the supposedly zero-degree voice, that of the extratextual narrator Virgil (4.1, 4.3, 6.3, 6.9, 10.8, 10.70).²¹ *tu canis* is an appropriate description, then, of Virgil's composition, on a par with *iuuet... Vergilium... dicere posse* (2.34.59-62).

But then, the tense of *canis* is strange. Propertius has thus far been careful with his tenses: he writes that the *Aeneid* is at this very moment coming to birth, *nascitur* (66), and *nunc* at 63 stresses that Virgil is writing contemporaneously with Propertius' production of 2.34. One would reasonably expect that the account of Virgil's previous works would be in a past tense: one topic of the poem, after all, is poets' transitions from genre to genre over the course of time, with Lynceus' move from epic, philosophy and tragedy to elegy the inverse of Virgil's own transitions from elegiac-tinged pastoral, via didactic, to epic. The present-tense *canis* is jarring: especially given the echoes of the first few lines of the *Aeneid* in 2.34.61-4, *tu canis* is more easily taken as a recapitulation of Virgil's *cano* in *Aen.* 1.1 introducing more lines on the *Aeneid* than as a transition to discussion of his previous works.²² Unless it is read as a historic present, quite a difficult reading in context, the force of the present is to give a sense of simultaneity: all these events, both Virgil's acts of composition and the compressed narratives of the *Eclogues* that follow, happen at the same time.²³ Perhaps there is a hint of the 'academic' present tense –

²¹ *Ecl.* 2, 4 and 10 are the only poems in the collection framed by or entirely narrated by an unidentified character, and thus 'zero-degree' (Leach 1974, Perkell 1996). *Ecl.* 6 seems to follow this pattern until the end of the fourth line, where the narrator is addressed as *Tityre*. *canere* is overwhelmingly associated with *authorial* production throughout Virgil's corpus: see Chapter 2.

²² Cf. Heyworth 2007:276.

²³ Poetic simultaneity: Volk 1997. Starr 1995:134 n.27 notes that many Virgilian commentators who employ biographical allegory seem to compress Virgil's poetic career into a single moment. Perhaps the prominence given to Actium at Propertius 2.34.61 recalls the shield of *Aen.* 8, with its own pictorial representation of history happening all at once.

that is, the scholarly convention in both modern and ancient circles to describe the action of a text and the author's role in the present tense (I write 'Propertius begins'; Servius constantly repeats [*Vergilius*] *dicit*). If this is the case, Propertius' descriptions of Virgil's poetic activity (*canis* and *facis carmen*, 67, 77, 79) suggest more the scholarly opinions reached through reading Virgil's texts than objective historical writing or invented narrative: Propertius is demonstrating his reading of Virgil's texts, not telling us what Virgil actually did.²⁴

This linguistic difficulty is immediately compounded by another grammatical ambiguity in the form of a potential ἀπὸ κοινοῦ construction in lines 67-7:

tu canis umbrosi subter pineta Galaesi
Thyrsin et attritis Daphnin harundinibus...

You sing of Thyrsis and Daphnis with his well-worn pipes, under the pinewoods of shady Galaesus...

To whom does the phrase *umbrosi subter pineta Galaesi* apply? The question depends on how the sentence is construed. According to one reading, *tu canis* forms a self-contained clause and the rest of the couplet describes the contents of Virgil's song; according to the other, the first line accounts for person, action and manner, and the second line the contents of the song. 'You, [sitting] beneath the pine-woods of shady Galaesus, sing of Thyrsis and Daphnis' or 'You sing of Thyrsis and Daphnis [as they sit] beneath the pine-woods of shady Galaesus'? I do not think this question of attribution is easy to resolve. (It seems unlikely that it is due to textual corruption: such casual ἀπὸ κοινοῦ constructions are frequent in Latin, especially literary Latin with its flexible word order.)

Most importantly, it echoes Virgil's own technique, especially in the *Eclogues*, of slippery authorial self-identification: is the narrator of the poems Virgil, or a shepherd in a fictional pastoral world, or somewhere in between? This is too large a topic to run through in full here, but a few key elements stand out in their similarity to Propertius' use of structural ambiguity. First, the *Eclogues*, in the order in which we have them transmitted,²⁵ alternate odd-numbered dialogues with even-numbered monologues (with the exception of the dialogic *Ecl.* 8). The monologues, however, do their utmost to evade either simple attribution to the narratorial 'Virgil' or simple classification as 'monologues'. *Ecl.* 2 consists almost entirely of a *prosopopoeia* of Corydon's words (6-73), framed by a narrative introduction (1-5); *Ecl.* 6

²⁴ O'Rourke 2011:485 reads the tenses nicely: 'the epic poet tells us that he "sang" (*cecini*) of Tityrus and "is [now] singing" (*cano*) the *Aeneid*, whereas for the elegist it is Virgil's agro-pastoral poetry which remains current (*canis*)'.

²⁵ It is possible they were originally written or circulated in a different order; cf. Coleman 1977:14-21, Cucchiarelli 2012:28-32. The order was certainly settled by the time of Donatus, though, and if Thomas' numerological theory (1999:266, cited above) has anything to it, the order was fixed by the time of Propertius 2.34 too. I find it hard to believe the order was substantially different at the time of Virgil's death. Cf. O'Rourke 2011.

dodges authorial attribution by having the speaker addressed as *Tityrus* at the end of the fourth line, and like *Ecl.* 2 is largely given over to others' words (Apollo 4-5, Silenus 23-6 and in indirect speech 31-81); and *Ecl.* 10 narrates the conversation between shepherds, Apollo, Pan and Gallus (21-69). Evasiveness of attribution and ambiguity of voice are central to the *Eclogues* on a formal and structural level.

Second, Virgil consistently blurs the lines between narrator and narrated material, casting the basic narrative voice of the *Eclogues* as a pastoral character. This is perhaps most explicit in *Ecl.* 10. The unnamed narrator bears Virgilian characteristics: he is aware that this is the final poem of the collection (*extremum hunc... laborem*, 10.1), and addresses *Gallus* (10.2 and *passim*), identifiable as the 'real' person Cornelius Gallus, the famous elegist. But a mere six lines in we begin to realise that, as in *Ecl.* 6, the narration is in fact embedded within a pastoral world (10.6-8):

... sollicitos Galli dicamus amores,
dum tenera attendent simae uirgulta capellae.
non canimus surdis, respondent omnia siluae.

Let us tell of Gallus' anxious loves, while the snub-nosed goats crop the tender shrubs.
We do not sing to deaf ears: the woods echo it all back.

The first-person narrator is revealed to exist in an environment where singing takes place while goats graze – that is, like that of *Tityrus* (1.9-10), *Corydon* (2.28-31), *Mopsus* and *Menalcas* (5.12), *Corydon* and *Thyrsis* (7.1-5), and *Damon* and *Alphesiboeus* (8.1-5) – and echoes the first description of pastoral song in the poem, which takes place in the quintessential bucolic landscape (*respondent omnia siluae* 10.8 ~ *resonare doces... silvas* 1.5). Not only is the narrator somewhere between Roman reality and Arcadian pastoral fiction, moreover, but Gallus is too: the next lines establish that the elegist has been transplanted to a landscape filled with sheep, tamarisks, streams, shepherds and swineherds, and rustic deities such as *Silvanus* and *Pan* (9-21). The rest of the narration maintains this same metalepsis, and the narrator ends the poem by declaring that he will simultaneously end his rustic tasks, finishing the basket he is weaving (71) and driving his goats home (77). The singer of the *Eclogues* is both a character within that same poem and a historical entity that exists outside them; the 'real' Gallus is subordinated to the same fiction.

Propertius' first couplet on Virgil's composition of the *Eclogues*, then, introduces a note of ambiguity familiar from the *Eclogues* themselves, echoing their own mode of authorial identification. Interestingly, there is a verbal echo too: Propertius' line *tu canis umbrosi subter*

pineta Galaesi not only paraphrases *Ecl.* 1.1,²⁶ but the choice of *subter* over *sub* prompts an audience familiar with the Virgilian original to expect *sub tegmine*.²⁷ This reminiscence of *Ecl.* 1.1 might swing the balance in favour of one reading of the ἀπὸ κοινοῦ construction: by analogy with Tityrus, who is the *tu* of *Ecl.* 1.1 and is the one to whom the phrase *patulae... sub tegmine fagi* applies (made clear by the inclusion of *recubans*), perhaps it is the *tu* of Propertius 2.34.67 to whom *umbrosi subter pineta Galaesi* should apply. But the ambiguity is not that easily resolved: Propertius' line echoes not only *Ecl.* 1.1 but the repetition of that same line in the *sphragis* of the *Georgics*, where Virgil looks back at his youthful poetic production.²⁸ This is the most explicitly biographical moment in Virgil's texts – the only time he mentions his own name and gives details of his life and poetic career thus far.²⁹ The *sphragis* ends with an almost verbatim quotation of *Ecl.* 1.1 (*G.* 4.565-6):

carmina qui lusi pastorum audaxque iuuenta,
Tityre, te patulae cecini sub tegmine fagi.

... I who played shepherds' songs and, daring in my youth, sang of you, Tityrus,
under the shelter of the spreading beech-tree.

Here Virgil has pre-empted Propertius' move and introduced his own momentary ἀπὸ κοινοῦ construction, by means of the syntactical assimilation of the quotation of *Ecl.* 1 into the *sphragis*. Without the *recubans* of *Ecl.* 1.1, it is ambiguous whether *patulae... sub tegmine fagi* at *G.* 4.566 refers to Tityrus or Virgil: in context it is most naturally taken with *cecini*, fulfilling the pastoralising momentum of the previous few lines (note *dulcis... Parthenope* 563-4, *florentem* 564, *carmina... lusi pastorum* 565), until the recognition of the quotation recalls the syntax of the original and restores the description to Tityrus.³⁰ Propertius' first description of Virgil writing the *Eclogues*, therefore, closely imitates not only Virgil's overall project but even his own textual strategies of ambiguous authorial presence in the *Eclogues*.³¹

The second couplet of Propertius' summary of the *Eclogues* (69-70) is straightforward, if somewhat tendentious: Virgil can hardly be claimed to have said that *decem... mala* were a fail-

²⁶ Note the close syntactical echo: the hyperbaton of *patulae... fagi* in Virgil is mimicked by that of *umbrosi... Galaesi* in Propertius, and the surprisingly sudden apostrophe in Propertius (*tu*, 67) is perhaps influenced by Meliboeus' address of Tityrus in *Ecl.* 1.1.

²⁷ Metrical concerns apply, of course, but nonetheless I think Propertius' choice of *subter* is significant.

²⁸ O'Rourke 2011:474-5 notes that *Galaesi* also recalls the *Georgics*: Virgil's strong eyewitness statement at 4.125-7 (*memini me... uidisse*) surrounds his only mention of Galaesus at 126.

²⁹ The biographical details – that Virgil studied Epicurean philosophy at Naples (*me... dulcis alebat | Parthenope, studiis florente, ignobilis oti*, 563-4) – are verified by evidence not dependent on Virgil's texts, in particular the Herculaneum papyrus of Philodemus' *On Flattery* (*Pap. Herc. Paris* 2.22-3; fragmentarily at 1082, 253).

³⁰ It is worth noting here that, while many commentators on the *sphragis* assume that Virgil here identifies himself as the *Tityrus* of the *Eclogues* (as hinted at in *Ecl.* 1 and 6), in *G.* 4.566 full assimilation of Tityrus to Virgil is ultimately precluded. In both *Ecl.* 1.1 and *G.* 4.566 Tityrus is the addressee and object of song (*Tityre, tu/te*), contrasted with the speaker of the lines (Meliboeus in *Ecl.* 1, Vergilius in the *Georgics*).

³¹ See my discussion of evasive authorship as a possible stamp of Virgilian identity, in the Introduction.

safe way to *corrumpere*... *puellas*, given that the ten apples of *Ecl.* 3 are given by Menalcas to Amyntas (not *puella* but *puer*, *Ecl.* 3.70-1),³² and apples are elsewhere thrown *by* women: thrown by Galatea at Damoetas (*Ecl.* 3.64-5), and *not* thrown by Amaryllis at anyone else in Tityrus' absence (1.36-7). Here the use Propertius is making of Virgil's poetic career begins to become clear. It is in this couplet that he explicitly casts Virgil in the *Eclogues* as a *praeceptor amoris* – not merely singing of shepherds singing of love (as implied in *atritis Daphnin harundinibus*) but directly explaining the amorous arts. Virgil's pastoral is appropriated as elegiac, even didactic – and it is perhaps this didactic slant on Virgil's role as author of the *Eclogues* that is illustrated in the next couplet (71-2) and that enables a further level of biographical reading:

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

How happy you are, who can buy your loves [or 'your *Amores*'] cheaply with apples!
Even Tityrus can sing to her, even if she is unkind.

The second-person address in 71 seems to follow directly from the *tu canis* of 67, implying that Virgil is the object of the *makarismos*, the *felix* one who can 'buy his loves cheaply with apples'. If a didactic tone is perceived in 69-70, this interpretation is natural: didactic is assured by the eyewitness or personal experience of the author, and so Virgil's happiness in his love affairs qualifies him to write about them (69-70).³³ Another biographical reading, then: the *Eclogues* deal with love in the way that their author experienced it.

Indeed, the formulation *felix qui* is particularly fitting. Virgil famously uses it in his 'double *makarismos*' at the end of the second book of the *Georgics* (490-540) to introduce the praise of the man who understands both the workings of the universe (*qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas*, 490), and also the rural arts (*fortunatus et ille*, 493, 513-531).³⁴ The references to the recipient of the praise are generic (*qui* 490, *ille* 493, *agricola* 513), bestowing a gnomic or aphoristic sense on the passage;³⁵ many scholars also see here praise of Lucretius, the didactic

³² Propertius' heterosexualising of the bisexual *Ecl.* 3, in which the initial contrast between Menalcas' passion for Amyntas and Damoetas' for Galatea (64-75) sees both characters profess love of Phyllis (76-79), is not unexpected: as Heslin points out (2011:63), 'there is only one kind of Latin love elegy which is explicitly, absolutely and programmatically heterosexual, and that is Propertian elegy.'

³³ Note Virgil's perpetual *ipse uidi* (*vel sim.*) in the *Georgics* as a guarantee of authorial *fides*: 1.193, 197, 318, 365, 451, 471-2, 2.32, 186-7, 4.125-7, &c. Thomas 1988 *ad G.* 1.193.: 'this is not autobiographical, but didactic, emphatically asserting the veracity of the detail which follows'. I agree that it is primarily a didactic convention but I would argue that, however conventional, it still rests on assertion of autobiographical experience, and can be (and was, and is) taken as true autobiography: cf., e.g., the origin of the pseudepigraphic *Culex* in *G.* 3.425-39 (Peirano 2012a:10). The first-person voice of the *Georgics* makes this poem particularly liable to biographical allegory, in Virgil's broader reception: the image of Virgil as a farmer is apparently hard to shake off.

³⁴ I understand *et* in 2.493 as conjunctive rather than separative: the *felix* and *fortunatus ille* are the same man. Cf. Volk 2002:41-45.

³⁵ Cf. Gale (2000:9) '*Makarismoi* of this kind need not, of course, have specific reference to a particular individual: in fact, they are more usually applied to groups'.

forefather of the *Georgics*, or Epicurus, the object of Lucretius' own *makarismos*.³⁶ In my opinion one possible further identification of this *makarismos* in context is Virgil himself, given that such understanding of both the universe and the practical arts of agriculture is both his stated ambition in the *Georgics* (2.275-89) and demonstrated throughout the didactic poem – though in any case the very ambiguity of the aphorism's referent, and its 'doubled' quality, is relevant here. Propertius' own use elsewhere of *felix qui*, by contrast, is rather more cutting.³⁷ *felix qui potuit... mutare calores*, he remarks at 1.12.15-18, 'happy the man who can change his beloved' – an impossibility and, what's more, a moral outrage for Propertius, who declares his own hapless devotion to Cynthia. An ironic tone carries over to 2.34: Virgil's easy way with women, and his didactic surety in writing his *amores*, is some distance from the theme of elegiac agony and constant metapoetic discussion portrayed in Propertius Books 1 and 2, and recapitulated in the opening of 2.34.

At this point, I think, the tone of this passage – which has teetered between the reverential and the dangerously ironic – becomes decisively humorous. Propertius' portrayal of Virgil and the *Eclogues* has departed both from the actual contents of the *Eclogues* and from Propertius' previously-stated values and opinions regarding love poetry, and thus taken on a slightly more fantastical air. The next few lines (72-4) illustrate the *felix* nature of Virgil in his supposed approach to love by comparison to two of his characters – never quite fully assimilating him to them, as we would expect from biographical allegory proper, but certainly toying with ideas of shared identity.³⁸ In line 72 the amorous activity is changed from apple-throwing to singing: *Tityrus ipse canat* to a girl who doesn't listen to him (*ingratae*). In the next couplet the identification of the *makarismos* is extended to the famously miserable Corydon, even as he woos the as yet unwon Alexis (*intactum... Alexin*, 73).³⁹ These two choices of characters, as comparanda for Virgil, are not random: Tityrus, as addressee of *Ecl.* 1, Virgil-like speaker of *Ecl.* 6, and favoured character of *G.* 4.566, is perhaps most easily assimilated to Virgil among the cast of the *Eclogues*,⁴⁰ and Corydon is the speaker of the longest monologue in the poem,

³⁶ Cf. Hardie 1986:39-40, emphasising not a single referent of the praise but rather the line of didactic-epicurean tradition to which praise is attached. Ross 1975:30 points out that when it comes to a *makarismos* 'the convention [of ambiguous reference] is necessarily a generality'. Thomas 1988 *ad loc.* vehemently denies Lucretian identification: 'it is typical of Virgilian imitation that he creates a new, individual situation through reference to a predecessor.'

³⁷ Cf. Stahl 1985:181.

³⁸ Powell 2011:145-6 discusses the somewhat opaque sense of the changes of subjects in these lines: *tu* (Virgil) in 67-70, *felix qui* (presumably Virgil) in 71, Tityrus in 72, Corydon in 73-4, and *ille* (presumably Virgil) in 75-6. I do not find the identification of *felix qui* as difficult as Powell, nor do I think the relation of *huic... ingratae* in 72 to *amores* in 71 is ambiguous, but I do agree that the rapid paratactic sentences are worthy of comment.

³⁹ Again, note Propertius' attention to detail: Prop. 2.34.73 corresponds closely to *Ecl.* 2.1, with *-at Alexin* at line-end, *Corydon* at the centre, an adjective in *-f-* at the beginning, and the same metrical structure.

⁴⁰ As reflected in the subsequent reception of the *Eclogues*, of course, in which Tityrus does become a consistent cipher for Virgil. See my following discussion of Calpurnius (Chapter 5), and look ahead to Nemesianus and later Latin and English pastoral.

with only a five-line introduction standing between him and full conflation with the authorial voice.

But the examples are not neutral. The incredulous ring of *Tityrus ipse canat*, ‘even Tityrus may sing’, recalls Tityrus’ other guise⁴¹ in the *Eclogues* as the lowly man-of-all work, spoken of but never speaking (*Ecl.* 5.12, 8.55, 9.23-4).⁴² Indeed, there is perhaps a nod to the *adynaton* of *Ecl.* 8.55, almost synonymous with *Tityrus ipse canat*: ‘let wolves flee sheep,’ says Damon, ‘sterile trees bear fruit, flowers and amber, owls sing like swans’, and *sit Tityrus Orpheus*. Is this proverbial non-singer a fitting comparison (or allegory) for Virgil? And how can Tityrus’ and Corydon’s fruitless wooing stand next to Virgil’s supposedly efficacious methods (*possint corrumpere* 69, *mercaris* 71), even if his arduous devotion in the face of rejection is closer to Propertius’ own elegiac stance? Propertius problematises the prospect of biographical allegorical reading of the *Eclogues* even as he sets it up.

The final couplet on the *Eclogues* also relies heavily on Virgil’s own quasi-allegorical mode of self-representation. In Thomas’ schema mentioned above, lines 75-6 correspond to *Eclogues* 9 and 10, summarising them first by means of the theme of ending poetic production (*Ecl.* 9.51-4 ~ Prop. 2.34.75) and, secondly, the mention of the Hamadryads (*Ecl.* 10.62-3 ~ Prop. 2.34.76):⁴³

quamuis ille sua lassus requiescat auena,
laudatur facilis inter Hamadryadas.

Though he is tired, and rests from his piping, he is praised by the gentle Hamadryads.

To my mind, both lines of this couplet seem rather more to echo Virgil’s own strategy of self-insertion in the last poem of the *Eclogues*. The *auena* of 75 set down by the tired poet (*ille*)⁴⁴ in this closural motif alludes to Gallus’ pipe (*auena*) at *Ecl.* 10.51.⁴⁵ This reference to *Ecl.* 10 is particularly appropriate to Prop. 2.34. The final poem in the *Eclogues* – like Prop. 2.34 – is itself a narrativised discussion of poetic careers and the interaction between elegy and pastoral: the narrator consoles the elegist Gallus for his *sollicitos... amores* (6, cf. *indigno... amore*, 10) by inserting him in a pastoral type-scene derived from Theocritus’ First *Idyll*, and the character Gallus goes on to waver between pastoral and elegy as suitable poetic methods of pain-relief.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Cf. Rumpf 1999/2008 for a discussion of the fungibility of character names in the *Eclogues*.

⁴² Note that Tityrus is always emphatically *spoken to*, even when also speaking: Meliboeus in *Ecl.* 1, Apollo at 6.4-5.

⁴³ Thomas 2002:266.

⁴⁴ *ille* signals a contrast with the *Corydon* of the previous couplet, rather than continuity (on signifier-level, that is, since ‘Corydon’ also seems to represent Virgil through allegory).

⁴⁵ On the metapoetics of such activities, see Chapter 1. On *auena* in the *Eclogues*, note Tityrus’ at 1.2.

⁴⁶ Gallus, unmentioned yet lurking beneath the surface in 2.34.75-6, is important in Propertius. The addressee or subject of five poems in Book 1 (5, 10, 13, 20, 21), which trace his (fictionalised) elegiac arc in tandem with Propertius’ own, he appears only once in Book 2, likely due to his fall from Augustus’ favour between the composition of the two books.

His speech begins with an explicit turn from elegy (*Chalchidico... uersu*, 50) to pastoral (*carmina pastoris Siculi*, 51), before he then decides in favour of elegy in 62-3.⁴⁷

Ecl. 10 is moreover Virgil's most explicit conflation of the narrated and the narrating, such that the narrative of the *Eclogues* itself ends with the same pastoral tasks as its characters must resume when they themselves stop singing. Propertius' recounting of it here takes up the same fiction, that the pastoral *ille* who stops singing (*requiescat auena*) is met with celebration (*laudatur*) by the thronging Hamadryads. These Hamadryads have an obvious parallel earlier in the poem at 2.34.57, where Propertius claims that his elegies, disparaged by Lynceus (*hoc... quo tibi nunc elebor, ingenio*, 58), nonetheless bring him the attention of all kinds of women: *regnem mixtas inter conuiuia puellas*. By echoing this contemporary image of poetic (elegiac) success in his pastoral pastiche of Virgil's own success, Propertius blurs the lines between woodland nymphs and Roman *puellae*, between singing shepherds and Augustan poets – just as Virgil himself did in *Eclogue* 10.

Poetic inspiration: Cynthius and Cynthia

Last in Propertius' summary of Virgil's poetic career come the four lines on the *Georgics* (77-80):⁴⁸

tu canis Ascraei ueteris praecepta poetae,
quo seges in campo, quo uiret uua iugo.
tale facis carmen, docta testudine quale
Cynthius impositis temperat articulis.

You sing the teachings of the old Ascraean poet: in what fields the crops flourish,
on which hill the grapes. You create the kind of song that Cynthian Apollo fashions,
with fingers set to his learned lyre.

Compared with the passages on the *Aeneid* and *Eclogues*, these lines seem to offer little by way of biographical allegorical reading: the first two lines, at least, are a staid exposition of the genre

⁴⁷ Indeed, the basket-weaving that features so prominently at the close of *Ecl.* 10, and is hinted at in Propertius' *auena*, is itself subordinated to this clash of genres: Hardie 2016a:6-7 writes of *Ecl.* 10 that 'basket-weaving, the figure for the *Eclogues* poet's own textual activity... will provide no therapy for Gallus, even if near the beginning of the book Gallus' *alter ego* as an immoderate lover, the Corydon of *Eclogue* 2, envisages such activity as a realistic alternative to the immoderate power of love' (*Ecl.* 2.71-2).

⁴⁸ These lines have frequently been transplanted to different places in the poem (most often to precede 67, following Ribbeck: thus Goold, Heyworth, *et al.*). I believe they come last of the three sections, tacked on to the *Eclogues*-summary rather than preceding it: not only because of the subordination of this passage to the *Eclogues*-singer (as explained below), but also due to the significant use of *docta* in line 79 which contrasts neatly with *indocto carmine* at 84. Fedeli 2005:999-1001 offers further convincing discussion *contra* Ribbeck, Propertius' order – *Aeneid*, *Eclogues*, *Georgics* – coincides with Servius' in his commentaries. That said, Heyworth 2007:277 comments with good cause that 'the patterning of allusion is so complex that any ordering would be appealing'.

(Hesiodic didactic) and declared topic (agriculture) of the *Georgics*, mimicking the first few lines of Virgil's poem: *quid faciat laetas segetes, quo sidere... ulmisque adiungere uites / conueniat* ('What makes the crops glad, under which star it is right to wed vines to elms', 1.1-3).⁴⁹

Yet the second two lines provide rather more of interest. In particular, the prominence given to Cynthius Apollo as a parallel for Virgil in poetic composition (*tale facis carmen... quale | Cynthius*, 79-80) is worth comment. While Virgil does invoke Apollo among other deities at the opening of *Georgics* 3 (*pastor ab Amphryso*, 3.2) and 4 (*Apollo*, 4.7), it would be difficult to call him the most important deity of the poem: not only are others more thematically relevant and mentioned more frequently (e.g. Ceres and Bacchus, metonymically the crops and grapes that are the topics of the poem), but Virgil repeatedly invokes more than one at the same time – the opening run of deities in Book 1 includes at least nine discrete entities. Throughout the poem Virgil repeatedly thwarts attempts to name only one primary divine helper.⁵⁰

One further mention of Apollo does, however, stand out: the crowning glory of the (highly metapoetic) temple of *Georgics* 3, the proposed statue of *Troiae Cynthius auctor* (3.36), regarding which Kraggerud remarks that 'there is hardly a phrase more fraught with meaning and implications in this proem or in the whole poem for that matter'.⁵¹ Cynthius Apollo, the creator of Troy: Virgil's lexical choice here synthesises two distinct aspects of the god. On the one hand, the Augustan Apollo implied in this context – not only 'founder of Troy' but, as Augustus' tutelary deity at Actium (cf. Prop. 2.34.61 *Actia... custodis litora Phoebi*) and saviour of Aeneas at Troy (*Il.* 5.436-53), founder of the new Rome⁵². On the other, the god of poetry, as indicated not only by the Callimachean epithet *Cynthius* (*Aet.* 1 fr. 1.12-30 Pf.; *H.* 2.105-12) but by *auctor*, a meaningful term in the *Georgics*.⁵³ Propertius' choice of epithet at 2.64.80 is significant: Virgil's composition of the *Georgics* is compared to Apollo's activities in the spheres of politics and poetry alike, perhaps recalling the description of Virgil's nascent

⁴⁹ 'Declared' topic: the *Georgics* are notoriously digressive and unwilling to remain within the confines of agricultural didactic. Rather than summarising the actual topics covered, Propertius confines himself to Virgil's own description of the poem, just like his imitation of Virgil's first-person proems in the *Aeneid* summary (2.34.61-6).

⁵⁰ In *G.* 1: Bacchus, Ceres, Fauns, Dryads, Neptune, Aristaeus, Minerva, Triptolemus, Silvanus – and perhaps Caesar, elevated to the near-divine in the *sphragis* (*G.* 4. 562: *uiamque adfectat Olympo*). Maecenas, Virgil's human patron, is most consistently mentioned throughout the books, at 1.2, 2.41, 3.41, 4.2. Gowers 2016d explores the relevance of Bacchus to the *Georgics* (and to Maecenas). I do not think Aristaeus should be seen as a stand-in for (rather than son of) Apollo (cf. Morgan 1999:90-1).

⁵¹ 1998:13.

⁵² Cf. *Actius... Apollo*, *Aen.* 8.704.

⁵³ Usually prompting an interpretative tussle between politics and poetics (cf. Feeney 2002, Freudenburg 2014): Augustus is the *auctor frugum* at *G.* 1.25-7; Thomas (1988 *ad loc.*) and Bing (1990:285 n.7) see Aratus in the *certissimus auctor* of 1.432, and Brown (1963) sees Virgil himself; the unidentified *auctor* of 2.315 is a rival didact to Virgil. Recall the significance of *Augustus < augeo/ auctoritas/ auctor* (cf. Rowe 2013, Galinsky 1996:10-41, Crook 1997:288). Lowrie 2009:156 n.41, with Morgan 1999:74, considers 'the epic poet... analogous to the divine d[e]miurge.' See below on Calpurnius *Ecl.* 7 (Chapter 5).

Aeneid a few lines before, in which the promise of *Georgics* 3's *recusatio* – that Virgil will compose a political epic in honour of Caesar – finally comes to fruition.⁵⁴

Or another vein of interpretation, with another *recusatio*: *Cynthius* is familiar in the Virgilian corpus as the admonishing deity of the *Eclogues*, in Virgil's replay of Callimachus' programmatic *recusatio* cited above (*Ecl.* 6.1-12 ~ *Aet.* 1 fr. 1.12-30 Pf.). The narrator, addressed by Apollo as the shepherd *Tityrus* (6.4), declares that he has been warned by the god to stay within the pastoral realm rather than singing of *reges et proelia*: a famous moment of metapoetic confusion, as the reader is invited to conflate Virgil – the zero-degree first-person voice, the writer of the present pastoral volume, and the person acquainted with Alfenus Varus – with the pastoral character *Tityrus*, to whom all these traits are suddenly attributed. This *Cynthius* is a pastoral Apollo – almost the Apollo *Nomios* of *G.* 3.2 (*pastor ab Amphryso*, recalling Callimachus *H.*2.47-8: Νόμιον κικλήσκομεν ἐξέτι κείνου | ἐξότ' ἐπ' Ἀμφρυσσῶι...)⁵⁵ – who orders pastoral poetry to be written.

What might it mean, in this reading, for Propertius to compare Virgil writing his *Georgics* to *Cynthius* composing poetry? *tu canis Thyrsin et Daphnin... tu canis Ascraei ueteris praecepta poetae* (Prop. 2.34.67, 77): the same author composes both the *Eclogues* and the *Georgics*, and, says Propertius, there remains something Eclogian about the latter poem. *Tityrus*, after all, turns up again after *Ecl.* 6 in the *Georgics*' final *recusatio*, when Virgil asserts his authorship of the *Eclogues* as well as the current poem: *carmina qui lusi pastorum... Tityre, te... cecini* (*G.* 4.565-6). As multifaceted as Apollo is – the shepherd *Nomios*, the poetic *Cynthius*, the political *Actius* – so does Virgil's poetic career encompass pastoral, didactic and the epic he is currently writing: a fitting example of generic flexibility for Propertius to present to *Lynceus*.

In citing *Cynthius* as comparandum for Virgil's writing of the *Georgics*, then, Propertius participates in Virgil's own various fictions of biographical allegory. But there is yet another significant element in Propertius' privileging of *Cynthius* here. For Propertius' poetic pseudonym for his beloved is *Cynthia* – like Gallus' *Lycoris* and Tibullus' *Delia*, drawn from a cult-name of Apollo. This moment is the only occurrence of *Cynthius* in Propertius' *Elegies*: he scrupulously avoids it elsewhere, presumably to avoid confusion with *Cynthia*, and usually settles on *Phoebus* or *Apollo*, with a handful more references to *Lycius*, *Actius* and *Pythius*.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Compare Propertius' own third-book *recusatio* in 3.1, similarly rejecting political epic (*multi, Roma, tuas laudes annalibus addent*, 3.1.15) in favour of Callimachean 'lighter' verse (*exactus tenui pumice uersus eat*, 3.1.8). Propertius' favoured metapoetic image here is not a Virgilian temple but rather Callimachean paths and Hesiodic groves and mountains, again assimilating didactic to love poetry rather than epic (cf. Virgil in *Ecl.* 6).

⁵⁵ Thomas 1988 *ad loc.* notes that *ab Amphryso* is in the same position as ἐπ' Ἀμφρυσσῶι.

⁵⁶ *Phoebus* (20 occurrences): 1.2.17, 1.2.27, 2.15.15, 2.31.1, 2.31.5, 2.31.10, 2.32.28, 2.34.61, 3.1.7, 3.3.13, 3.12.30, 3.20.12, 3.22.30, 4.1a.3, 4.2.32, 4.5.15, 4.6.27, 4.6.57, 4.6.67, 4.6.76. *Apollo* (9): 1.8b.41, 2.1.3, 3.2.9, 3.9.39, 3.11.69, 4.1b.73, 4.1b.133, 4.6.11, 4.6.69. *Lycius* (1): 3.1.38. *Actius* (1): 4.6.67 (with *Phoebus*). *Pythius* (2): 2.31.16, 3.13.52 (and a reference to *Python*, 4.6.35).

And in fact Propertius even seems to encourage our hearing this echo of *Cynthia* in *Cynthius* by referring to Apollo's lyre of the previous line as *doctus* (*docta testudine*, 79), his favourite epithet for Cynthia, his *docta puella* (cf. 1.7.11, 2.11.6, 2.13.11, 2.28.28).⁵⁷ *doctus* is the obvious term for an author of didactic poetry, as Virgil and Apollo are here, and to a certain extent the clichéd nature of the term in this context allows it to sit naturally here⁵⁸ – but the collocation of *docta Cynthius* is nonetheless remarkable, given Propertius' avoidance of both terms elsewhere except in referring to his beloved.⁵⁹ Indeed, given that Cynthia's *docta* nature rests in part on her musical abilities (*ludere docta lyrae*, 2.3.20)⁶⁰, the masculine ending of *Cynthius* comes as something of a surprise – might we not expect, instead, *docta testudine quale | Cynthia impositis temperet articulis?*⁶¹

It is difficult to discern the full implications of this fleeting reminiscence of Propertius' beloved for the outline of Virgil's didactic poetry. I am inclined to see in it a tacit assertion on Propertius' part of the all-encompassing nature of love-poetry and its superiority over other genres, similar to his tendentious representation of the *Eclogues* (67-76) as almost solely concerned with the topic of love. Propertius' relationship with didactic is variable: unlike Ovid, he doesn't present himself formally as a *praeceptor amoris*, even though he frequently offers advice on both the conducting of love affairs and the composition of love poetry, and in his *recusatio* of epic at 2.10 he declares that he has not yet crossed from love-poetry even to didactic: *nondum etiam Ascraeos norunt mea carmina fontes, | sed modo Permessi flumine lauit Amor* ('nor are my verses yet acquainted with Ascraean springs; Love has only washed them in the stream of Permessus', 25-6).⁶² Yet elsewhere he seems to see didactic as not only within his reach but his current occupation: in 2.13 he equates his love-poetry (the *graciles Musae* of *Amor*, 2.13.2-3) with not only didactic (*iussit et Ascraeum sic habitare nemus*, '[Love] ordered me to dwell, as I do, in Ascra's grove', 4) but (Virgilian) pastoral, referring to Orpheus (2.13.5-

⁵⁷ I include this last (2.28.28), though it applies properly to Semele, since in context it explains the reason why Semele – herself a *docta puella* – might be inclined to sympathise with Cynthia. *doctus* is also associated with Cynthia at 2.3.20 and 2.30b.16. On the phrase *docta puella*, cf. Habinek 1998:128-9, Hemelrijk 1999:79-81, Wyke 2002:46-77, James 2003.

⁵⁸ Cf., e.g., Ovid's pose as *doctus amator* (*doctus amet*, programmatically at *Ars Am.* 1.2), Statius on Lucretius (*doctus Lucretius, Siluae* 2.7.76, with Kenney 1970), or Servius on the *Georgics* (*hi libri didascalici sunt, unde necesse est ut ad aliquem scribantur: nam praeceptum et doctoris et discipuli personam requirit, ad G. praef.*). The Alexandrian connotations are not irrelevant here either.

⁵⁹ While a few uses of *doctus* in the *Elegies* are unmarked or neutral, it far more often relates to Cynthia (as above) or Propertius himself and his relationship with Cynthia: thus 2.30b.38, 2.32.20, 2.34.89 (i.e. *doctus* Calvus as parallel with Propertius), 3.23.1. Even *doctae Athenae* at 1.6.13 and 3.21.1 serves as a foil to Propertius' passion for Cynthia.

⁶⁰ Perhaps this parallel helps explain the presence of the lyre (*testudine*, 79) in 2.34, which is puzzling in a discussion of didactic (and 'lighter' genres more broadly). Virgil does not write lyric, but Apollo and Cynthia do, and Propertius asserts that it is love (both in poetry and in life) which motivates and subsumes all other genres, including lyric.

⁶¹ Metrically impossible, of course, and I see no reason to doubt *impositis* (for *impositis articulis* in this line, cf. *attritis harundinibus* 68, *impressis uberibus* 70): I am not proposing an emendation!

⁶² This description relies on Virgil's depiction of Gallus' poetic transformation from elegist to Hesiodic poet at *Ecl.* 6.66-73: note *errantem Permessi ad flumina* (66) and *Ascraeo* (70).

6) and Linus (8) as his counterparts.⁶³ In 2.1, too, Propertius sets up a rivalry between Apollo and Cynthia; he rejects Apollo's guidance (*non haec mihi cantat Apollo*, 2.1.3) but rather vaunts Cynthia (*ingenium... puella facit*, 2.1.4) as coauthor of lyric (*siue lyrae carmen digitis percussit eburnis*, 2.1.9), epic (*longas... Iliadas* 2.1.14) and history (*maxima... historia* 2.1.16), all subsumed into his current love poetry.⁶⁴ For Propertius love is the motivating factor in all his poetry, and all his poetry is love poetry (recall *Cynthia prima fuit, Cynthia finis erit* at 1.12.20); his *docta Cynthia* is his overriding preoccupation, and even other topics – reading Virgil's *Georgics*, for example – prompt thoughts of her.

Fictions of acquaintance: poets and pseudonyms

In this reading of Propertius' Virgilian digression, then, we see Propertius tentatively demonstrating for his audience the process of reading Virgil's texts, playing with the idea that Virgil half-inhabits his own fictional world in the process of creating it; and doing this in ways directly influenced by Virgil's own techniques of authorial self-representation. So what is the effect or function of this? What role does this quasi-allegorical reading of Virgil's authorship play within the poem, within Propertius' poetic programme as a whole, and in Virgil's reception even within his lifetime?

James Powell suggests that this technique absorbs Virgil into the fundamentally autobiographical conceit of love-poetry to which Propertius at least gives the impression of subscribing: that is, the idea that the writing of love-poetry is driven by true emotional experiences.⁶⁵ Throughout his corpus Propertius constructs a romantic autobiography in which the vagaries of his affair with Cynthia and his ensuing emotional states determine the type of poetry he is able to produce.⁶⁶ In 2.34, Powell argues, Propertius' need to portray Virgil as a poet of *amores* as well as epic demands that his personal relationship with those *amores* must be emphasised – that is, he must have lived them as well as written about them, a *praeceptor amoris* whose didactic authority stems from his experience.⁶⁷ Indeed, 'the overarching theme

⁶³ Propertius follows this assertion of poetic power with the definition of his ideal audience – his *docta puella* (2.13.11). For the Virgilian nature of Propertius' conception of didactic and pastoral, cf. *Ecl.* 4.57 (*Orphei... Lino*), 6.30, 6.67.

⁶⁴ Propertius still rejects political epic along the vein of the *Aeneid* or the proposed temple of *Georgics* 3: *bellaque resque tui memorarem Caesaris* (2.1.25). On Prop. 2.1 and its generic play, cf. Zetzel 1983:90-3.

⁶⁵ Powell 2011:148-9.

⁶⁶ This 'reality effect' is naturally something of an illusion. Cf. Liveley and Salzman-Mitchell 2008 on this topic generally; Wyke 1987 on Cynthia; Sharrock 2000 on Propertius' other characters.

⁶⁷ O'Rourke, though, notes that Propertius avoids characterising Virgil as an elegist exactly where he might have done so to the most striking effect: that is, in his description of the *Aeneid* (2011:471-3). (Compare Ovid, who does so repeatedly and provocatively: e.g. *Tr.* 2.534: *contulit in Tyrios arma uirumque toros*.) Propertius also omits mention of *Ecl.* 8 and *G.* 3, overt expressions of passionate (= elegiac?) love; O'Rourke 2011:482-3 argues that this is especially prominent an omission since Propertius has reworked *G.* 3.206-11 just before, at 2.34.47-50. Propertius' Virgil, then, is not simply an elegist.

of 2.34 is that poets who are in love should write love poetry'.⁶⁸ Lynceus' new ventures into the sphere of romance make him now capable, in Propertius' eyes, of writing elegy. Not only does Virgil's poetic career provide Lynceus with a demonstration of mid-career genre-hopping, but the biographical techniques imputed to him by Propertius support Propertius' advice to his addressee, to let his poetry follow his life in theme and genre.

This interpretation is compelling, and certainly helps account for Propertius' marked elegising of Virgil. I would add another element, however. Rather than solely assimilating Virgil to the 'reality effect' central to Propertius' writing of *amores*, Propertius conspicuously introduces the strategy of biographical reading *as a theme* within 2.34, to prompt reflection on his own methods of biographical writing. The Virgilian digression highlights not only the reader's role in generating meaning through biographical reading but also the inherent limitations of biographical allegory or life-writing as an exact method of representing reality in literature. This self-consciousness, I contend, spills out into the rest of 2.34 and Propertius' work more generally; the Virgilian digression of 2.34 reiterates problems of the relationship between reality and fiction that are thematised throughout Propertius' elegiac corpus. Poem 2.34 not only *uses* the technique of biographical allegory, but offers a masterclass in it.

Propertius represents Virgil's supposedly biographical methods of authorship in various ways, often drawn from Virgil's own tactics of authorial self-representation. There is the idea that to depict something is at the same time to enact it: Virgil supposedly 'rouses up arms' (*suscitat arma*, 63), directly involving himself in the action of the *Aeneid*. The sections on the *Eclogues* and *Georgics* introduce two distinct forms of biographical allegory: first, that the narrator of the poem is both Virgil and a pastoral character (67, 75-6, alluded to in *Cynthia*, 80); and second, that when Virgil depicts certain characters, he is in fact encoding information that applies to himself (*Tityrus ipse* and *felix Corydon*, 72-3). The allusion to *Ecl.* 10 (2.34.75-6) recalls Virgil's own narrativised discussion of Gallus' love affairs and consequent poetic career. Propertius refuses to commit himself to an single or exact answer to the question 'who is Virgil?', or 'how does Virgil write about himself?', instead offering a dizzying plethora of different options to be taken all at once, singly, or not at all. This profusion of different approaches, distinct if somewhat blurred at the edges, is notable in itself: it is playful, in the same way that Martial's multiple identifications of Virgilian stand-ins in *Ep.* 8.55 are a joke in themselves.⁶⁹ The sheer number of methods provided for 'reading Virgil out of his text' exposes them as *methods*, rather than unique and indubitable truths necessarily evident from the text.

This is not wholly unparalleled within Propertius' poetry. Propertius habitually includes his friends and peers in his poetry: Bassus in 1.4; Ponticus in 1.7 and 1.9; Gallus, dominating

⁶⁸ Powell 2011:149.

⁶⁹ Tityrus and Corydon as Virgil, the *iuuenis* of *Ecl.* 1 and the *Iollas* of *Ecl.* 2 as Maecenas, and Galatea, Thestylis and Alexis as Virgil's beloveds. On Martial 8.55, cf. Peirano 2012a:60-4.

Book 1 in five poems out of twenty-two (1.5, 10, 13, 20, 21); and of course his peculiarly poetic girlfriend Cynthia. Although the function of these people in Propertius' poetry is to give 'an immediacy of presence to the poetry, a sense that we are involved in something *real*,'⁷⁰ none of them are straightforward representations of historical entities who existed alongside the author Propertius. In each case this seems to be flagged up in a way that goes beyond the basic theoretical assumption that literary (or mimetic) representation of a person always involves some departure from their historical existence.

The character Cynthia was recognised as at least pseudonymous in antiquity, like the *amicae* of other elegiac poets.⁷¹ Modern scholarship has questioned the assumption that Cynthia must have been based on a real historical counterpart, not only thanks to her overtly composite and self-contradictory depiction⁷² but also her particular status within the text. As Alison Sharrock writes, 'a revolution... came in the work of Maria Wyke, who taught us to see Cynthia as an embodiment of the poetry itself and as a construct of the text whose apparent reality was in fact a "reality effect".'⁷³ Despite Propertius' claims that the only compulsion to write *amores* is the actual experience of being in love, and that the only relief for being in love is the writing of *amores* – and even if some real woman existed who shared Propertius' Cynthia's many disparate characteristics – her representation in the *Elegiae* cannot be anything but a poetic fiction.⁷⁴ Indeed, the closing lines of 2.34 come close to stating this directly: Cynthia will not gain true immortality, but *uiuet uersu* ('will live on in poetry', 93).

Gallus, too, poses a problem. I do not believe there can be any doubt that Propertius is referring to the poet Cornelius Gallus, rather than some other Gallus.⁷⁵ Gallus and Lycoris stand in the sequence of poets and their beloveds in 2.34.85-94; the sequence 1.5, 10, 13, 20 follows a similar pattern to the Ponticus, Bassus and Lynceus poems, which are explicitly to fellow poets; and the various allusions in Propertius to Virgil's *Eclogues* 6 and 10, in connection with Gallus, seem to conclusively point to Cornelius Gallus. It is important to distinguish between prosopographical ambiguities and points of interest inherent to the text and those caused by our

⁷⁰ Sharrock 2000:268.

⁷¹ Ovid *Tr.* 2.427-8, in imitation of Prop. 2.34.87-8: *sic sua lasciuo cantata est saepe Catullo | femina, cui falsum Lesbia nomen erat* (cf. *Tr.* 4.10.60, *nomine non uero dicta Corinna mihi*); Apuleius *Apol.* 10: *eadem igitur opera accuset C. Catullum, quod Lesbiam pro Clodia nominarit, et Tigidam similiter, quod quae Metella erat Perillam scripserit, et Propertium, qui Cunthiam dicat, Hostiam dissimulet, et Tibullum, quod ei sit Plania in animo, Delia in uersu*. Cf. Bright 1981, Maltby 2002:42-6. Note that Virgil is adduced as a *modestius* example a few sentences later: *quanto modestius tandem Mantuanus poeta, qui itidem ut ego puerum amici sui Pollionis bucolico ludicro laudans et abstinens nominum sese quidem Corydonem, puerum uero Alexin uocat*. The difference is that Virgil is supposed to write of both his beloved and himself *wholly* pseudonymously (*abstinens nominum*), whereas the elegiac poets mix truth and fiction with abandon.

⁷² Cf. Cairns 2006:67.

⁷³ Sharrock 2000:264; Wyke 1987, 2002. Cf. Keith 2012:389-93.

⁷⁴ As the first word of Prop. 1.1, *Cynthia* is both the name of the beloved and the name under which Propertius' *Elegiae* – or at least Book 1 – would have circulated in antiquity: Cynthia 'textualised'. Cf. 2.10.8, *scripta puella* (with Wyke 1987).

⁷⁵ Aelius or Caninius; cf. Syme 1978:99-103, Du Quesnay 1992:77-8. For a fuller discussion of the identity of Gallus, cf. (though with caution) Cairns 2006:70-8, esp. 78-81 on the difficult evidence of Prop.1.5.23-4.

distance from its original context;⁷⁶ the ‘actual’ identity of Gallus is one of the latter, since no one first reading Propertius can have been in doubt as to who was meant. But Propertius, like Virgil in *Ecl.* 10, also seems to problematise the identity of Gallus outright throughout his poems, as well as opening up questions of poetic representation more broadly.

In 1.21, for example, an epitaph in the voice of a dead ‘Gallus’ (1.21.7), killed in battle and addressing a passing soldier. Can this be the same Gallus depicted elsewhere, given that this was not the death undergone by Cornelius Gallus (or any other Gallus, for that matter)?⁷⁷ It is certainly difficult to suggest that the *Galli* of two consecutive poems can be distinguished, in the absence of any indications of a different character.⁷⁸ Nigel Nicholson argues, moreover, that certain thematic continuities can be seen between the Gallus of the first four poems and the Gallus of 1.21: the idea of being watched (1.10.1, 6; 1.13.14-15; 1.20.52; 1.21.3), of being known or unknown (1.5.4, 5, 18, 26, 23; 1.21.8), and, most importantly, of dying, either a real or an elegiac death (*orientem*, 1.10.5; *cupere animam deponere*, 1.13.17; *periturus amore*, 1.13.33).⁷⁹ The theme of Gallus dead either in actuality or metaphorically occurs at the end of 2.34, too, when Propertius depicts Gallus ‘dead for love of Lycoris’, *Lycoride Gallus | mortuus* (2.34.91-2). (Recall that, by the time this poem was published, Cornelius Gallus was dead for wholly unromantic causes.⁸⁰ Propertius’ depiction is certainly tendentious.)

Nicholson concludes that the death of Gallus in 1.21 is an experimental approach to reifying the metaphor of elegiac ‘erotic death’, one of Propertius’ key preoccupations throughout the *Elegiae*: Gallus is rendered less a real person, the historical Cornelius Gallus, than ‘a character formulated by this particular text as a specific response to the Gallus of the earlier elegies,’ and perhaps to Gallus’ own elegies.⁸¹ Gallus is translated to a wholly literary realm – an effect intensified by Propertius’ frequent references to *Eclogues* 6 and 10: he is not the first to have used Gallus in this way, but rather follows in Virgil’s footsteps. Thus, for example, at 1.20.14-15, the fate to be avoided by Gallus is reminiscent of Virgil’s landscape of Gallus’ desolation: *ne tibi sit duros montes et frigida saxa, | Galle* (‘lest you endure bleak mountains and icy crags’), drawing on Virgil’s wintery landscapes: *sola sub rupe... et gelidi... saxa Lycaei* (‘beneath a lonely rock... the crags of cold Lycaeus’, *Ecl.* 10.14-15), *frigora...*

⁷⁶ Cf. Nicholson 1998/9:147.

⁷⁷ Cornelius Gallus’ death was suicide under Augustus’ instigation, in 27 or 26 BCE: cf. Dio Cass. 53.23, Servius *ad Buc.* 10.1, *ad G.* 4.1.

⁷⁸ Nicholson 1998/9:147-8 discusses changes of referent without explicit information.

⁷⁹ Nicholson 1998/9:151-3.

⁸⁰ Heyworth 2007:99 argues that *Gallum* (1.21.7) is a corruption, assimilated from 1.20. I do not find this satisfactory.

⁸¹ It would be surprising if there was no specific allusion to and quotation from Gallus’ literary works, but – *pace* Cairns 2006 – it is an impossible task to determine where in Propertius those might be.

frigora and *glacies... aspera* ('cold... fierce cold', 47-9).⁸² The contrafactual in Propertius points to the Virgilian alternative, in which Gallus in fact meets with such a fate.⁸³

Returning to 2.34, we find several more instances of Propertius' friends turning out somewhat more like mirages. The otherwise unattested Lynceus has not escaped suspicion: Francis Cairns has recently revived Jean-Paul Boucher's suggestion that Lynceus is in fact a pseudonym for Varius (Rufus), the friend of Virgil and Horace.⁸⁴ Cairns' reasoning is multifaceted: he detects an overriding Epicureanism in both the Lyncean and Virgilian sections of 2.34, which is suitable for Varius in connection with Virgil; he notes the suitability of the pseudonym *Lynceus*, 'lynx-like', perhaps referring to Varius' 'keenness' as a critic,⁸⁵ or playing on *uarius* ('spotted') as an adjective associated with lynxes, in Virgil (*G.* 3.264, *quid lynces Bacchi uariae*) among other authors;⁸⁶ he points out that pseudonyms were apparently all the rage among Philodemus' circle of Epicureans, with Philodemus known as *Socrates*, his wife as *Xanthippe*, Siro as *Silenus*, and Virgil as *Parthenias*.⁸⁷ Most persuasive, in my eyes, is the fact that a fragment of Varius' work *De morte* seems to be echoed in Propertius 2.34: Varius writes *ceu canis umbrosam lustrans Gortynia uallem* (fr. 4.1), Propertius *tu canis umbrosi subter pineta Galaesi* (2.34.67).⁸⁸

If this identification of Lynceus as Varius is correct, and supposed to be recognised by Propertius' readers, there are certain corollaries. Cairns emphasises the Epicurean content of 2.34, which perhaps becomes more apparent if Varius emerges as a counterpart for Virgil. He also notes that the Virgilian digression becomes much more securely rooted in the poem as a whole: Varius has already been 'Virgilianised' by the nickname *Lynceus*, and the exhortation to become more like Virgil by writing love poetry – however tendentious a representation of Virgil this may be – takes on different nuances when directed specifically to a close friend of Virgil. But most importantly, I would add, it also goes some way towards explaining Propertius' focus in the Virgilian digression on modes of biographical reading – a prompt to look again at Lynceus, perhaps, or a validation of Propertius' ways of incorporating fictionalised versions of contemporary poets in his poetry. If Virgil, writer of epic, pastoral, didactic, and (so says

⁸² Cf. Thomas 1986:188-9 on 'window references'.

⁸³ Heslin's argument that Ponticus and Bassus are pseudonyms for other poets of Propertius' acquaintance (2011) is ingenious but not ultimately convincing. It is nonetheless valuable for its approach to the (ir)reality of Propertius' friends in his *Elegies*: Propertius' friends, companions and poetic rivals, who lend his poems an air of reality, turn out to be just as fictional as Cynthia.

⁸⁴ Boucher 1958, Cairns 2004 and 2006. Varius, author of a *Thyestes* and a hexametrical Epicurean poem *De morte*, is attested in Virgil (*Ecl.* 9.35, with Cinna: see below), Horace (*Sat.* 1.5.39-42, 1.5.93, 1.6.54-5, 1.9.22, 1.10.81-3, *Ep.* 2.1.247 and *AP* 55), *Catalepton* 7, and, crucially, Philodemus *On Flattery* (*Pap. Herc. Paris* 2.22-3; fragmentarily at 1082, 253). Cf. *EV sv.*, Goold 1970:122-30, Thomas 2001:59ff.

⁸⁵ Lynceus was an Argonaut, famed for his keen (lynx-like) sight; cf., in Latin texts close to Propertius in time, Cicero *Ad fam.* 9.2.2, Horace *Serm.* 1.2.90, *Epist.* 1.1.28, Virgil *Aen.* 9.768, Ovid *Heroides* 14, *Met.* 8.304.

⁸⁶ Hyginus *Fabulae* 259 (*lynxem uarii coloris*), Eur. *Alceste* 579 βαλῖαι τε λύγκες.

⁸⁷ The evidence is, as usual, difficult. Cairns 2004:302, citing Sider 1997:20, 23-4, 34-8.

⁸⁸ Note, too, the place names in *G.* Cairns suggests that Propertius is playing on the 'famous pseudo-etymological derivation of *canis*... from *canere*... first found in Varro *De lingua latina* 5.99, 7.32'.

Propertius) even *amores*, can write of himself and his own contemporaries both under their real names and under pseudonyms, this shifting strategy of representation is authorised as appropriate for love poetry, justifying Propertius' own use of it earlier in the same poem. And Propertius' tongue-in-cheek appropriation of Virgil for his openly tendentious elegiac manifesto in this poem is painted as a tactic attributed, equally jokingly, to Virgil himself.

CHAPTER 5

*SIT TITYRUS ORPHEUS:*¹ CALPURNIUS SICULUS' VIRGIL

'Kathy, by which I mean I, was getting married. Kathy, by which I mean I, had just got off a plane from New York.'
(Olivia Laing, *Crudo*)²

Biographical allegory and the role of genre

Propertius' elegising reading of Virgil, I argued in Chapter 4, playfully transforms Virgil's hints of authorial self-representation in the *Eclogues*, *Georgics* and *Aeneid* into full-blown statements of autobiography and encourages his own readers to attribute to Virgil the same values of literary or mimetic 'truth' that he himself displays in his *Elegies*. This transformation is necessarily tongue-in-cheek: one more readily accepts the idea that Propertius' love poetry arose from his own experience in love than that Virgil literally *suscitat arma* (2.34.63), courted his amours by presenting them with apples and kids (70) or reclined among the *Hamadryades* (76). The sheer multiplicity and fantastical nature of the partial biographies that Propertius attributes to Virgil, moreover, compel the reader to question the validity of Propertius' own (auto)biographical fictions.

Propertius' representation of Virgil as autobiographer rests on the generic divergence between Virgil's output – pastoral, didactic, epic – and his own elegiac poetry. The different conventions of self-representation and the 'reality effect' in these different literary forms allow Propertius to reflect on his own poetic practice by conflating his own and Virgil's genres, by assimilating Virgil's into elegy, or by contrasting them. Which elements still continue to work, if the genre is altered? Which don't? And which produce a surreal sort of *reductio ad absurdum*? This is the approach also taken by Martial and Juvenal in the supposedly more personal genres of epigram and satire, when they represent Virgil as poeticising his own life and set him in explicit comparison to their own, apparently autobiographical methods of poetic production.³

Something different happens, however, when authors writing in the *same* genres as Virgil reproduce, develop, alter and interrogate the modes of self-representation they perceive in his work. In these instances the key questions are, first, the extent to which this continued use of biographical allegory becomes codified as a feature inherent to the genre – or, at least, as a

¹ Virgil *Ecl.* 8.52-6: 'let wolves flee sheep,' says Damon, 'sterile trees bear fruit, flowers and amber, owls sing like swans', and *sit Tityrus Orpheus*, 'let Tityrus be an Orpheus'.

² Laing 2018:1.

³ Martial 8.55, Juvenal 7.69-71. Juvenal's reference to Virgil's *puer* as a *sine qua non* of Virgil's writing surely rests on long tradition of that anecdote in the biographical tradition, including Martial's poem.

feature inherent to the post-Virgilian conception of the genre – and second, the extent to which it remains associated with a specifically *Virgilian* usage. To a certain extent this is true of all aspects of a particularly significant individual work within a single genre: genre works cumulatively, such that each work is in part defined by its use (or rejection) of elements from previous works within that genre; and while some elements become assimilated entirely, others retain a connection with the author or work in which they most notably appeared. But biographical allegory, and tropes of self-representation more generally, are uniquely problematic. If a trope is drawn from a previous author, how well can it claim to represent the unique biographical position of the current author? How personal can it possibly be if it is conventional within a literary tradition? This, of course, is a difficulty Virgil exploits with characteristic opacity in his own work: as Joseph Farrell notes, Virgil’s supposedly biographical poetic statement at the opening of *Ecl.* 6 (*canerem reges et proelia...*, 3) has ‘no biographical authority at all’, since it is a close paraphrase of Callimachus’ own famous poetic statement (fr. 1, 21-4, Pf.).⁴ The surprise of Virgil’s subsequent relegation of the statement to the voice of the character Tityrus (4) only compounds and highlights the problem.

Allegory writ large: the case of Calpurnius Siculus

The first extant work of post-Virgilian Latin pastoral,⁵ Calpurnius Siculus’ collection of seven *Eclogues*, offers us a chance to observe this particular dynamic of reception in action, and to explore its ramifications for biographical allegory in the ancient Virgilian tradition.⁶ Calpurnius’ poems, like most pastoral, are notable for an almost over-determined degree of generic self-consciousness: they are characterised both by a high level of dependence on previous pastoral works (scarcely a single element of Theocritus’ *Idylls* and Virgil’s *Eclogues*

⁴ Farrell 2010:437. An example from within pastoral: Virgil’s use of (translated) quotations from Theocritus within *Ecl.* 9: 23-5, spoken by Moeris and attributed to the (somewhat Virgilian) Menalcas (drawn from *Id.* 3.3-5); 39-43, spoken by Lycidas (*Id.* 11.42-7).

⁵ Not counting the so-called *Antibucolica* of Numitorius attested by Donatus, a two-poem pastiche of dubious quality (*insulsissime παρωδήσας*, *VSD* 43) surviving in two short fragments (cf. Scarcia 1969, Farrell 2010:439, 445; see my discussions in Chapters 1 and 2 (47-8, 68 n.43, 71), or the *Dirae*, the authorship and dating of which are uncertain. On Latin pastoral after Virgil, cf. Mayer 2006:451-3, who cites Horace *Ep.* 2 as semi-parodic pastoral. Ovid refers tantalisingly to an otherwise unknown ‘Passer’ who ‘returned Tityrus to the meadows’ (*Tityron antiquas... rediret ad herbas*, *Pont.* 4.16.33).

⁶ Both the author’s identity and the date of the collection remain uncertain. ‘Siculus’ is suspicious: a generic indicator, resting on Theocritus’ Sicilian identity? ‘Calpurnius’ is perhaps an attempt to assert Neronian credentials: compare Calpurnius Piso (and the *Laus Pisonis*). Whether they were written under Nero (thus Haupt 1854, Mayer 1980, Townend 1980, Wiseman 1982, Mayer 2006, Henderson 2013) or at a later date (Severan: Champlin 1978 and 1986; post-Neronian: Courtney 1987, Horsfall 1997), it is largely uncontroversial to view at least their dramatic date as Neronian (Mayer 2006:454-6). I do not intend to readdress the question of the collection’s dating, and incline towards viewing them as Neronian in both dramatic and actual date. I do not believe my argument would be significantly altered if a later date were assumed, other than to allow more influence on Calpurnius from the (prose) Virgilian commentary tradition.

is not echoed to some degree in Calpurnius) and by a distinct effort to *redefine* pastoral, moving away from many of the established traits and components of the genre. Political ideology moves to the forefront, with an acceptance of outright imperial panegyric unprecedented in previous pastoral;⁷ the preference for rustic simplicity and ease over contemporary urban reality expressed in Virgil is replaced by an active desire to escape a barren and limited countryside life and move to the city, and by a clear-eyed and pragmatic approach to the financial necessities of supporting oneself.⁸ Even the *locus amoenus*, the utopian landscape that is the hallmark of earlier pastoral, does not remain a stable element but becomes in the eyes of Calpurnius' characters a rather less pleasant locale.⁹ Calpurnius frames each of these changes or developments in the explicit context of earlier (Virgilian) pastoral, with the result that his poems constitute a polemical revision of the genre as typified by Virgil's *Eclogues* at the same time as they maintain an obsessive focus on perpetuating it.¹⁰ Thus, for example, in poem 7¹¹ his reworking of the first few lines of Virgil's *Ecl.* 1 dislocates Virgil's key epithets from the context of pastoral ease and applies them instead to the city, or transforms their sense from positive to negative. The urban amphitheatre, not the beech tree of *Ecl.* 1.1, is *patula* (7.6); and while Corydon, in his return from the city, is *lentus* like Tityrus, this is more in the sense of 'reluctant' or 'slow to leave Rome' (*lentus ab urbe uenis*, Calp. 7.1; *lentus abes*, 7.11) than 'relaxed in the shade' (*lentus in umbra*, *Ecl.* 1.4).¹² Calpurnius repeats Virgil's key epithet, and retains its context in the *Eclogues* as part of the pastoral trope of 'retreat and return'¹³ – but in his repetition he transforms, or reverses, its meaning in Virgil, fitting it to a new conception of pastoral.

This exercise in the redefinition of pastoral is matched by Calpurnius' remarkable focus throughout his collection on poetic production and performance, and especially on processes of literary reception. While all the poems seem to focus on literary production and criticism,

⁷ Cf. Newlands 1987, Martin 1996.

⁸ Cf. Leach 1973 and 1975, Henderson 2013. Note the twist in the tale, Corydon's disillusioned return to the countryside in Calp. 7.

⁹ Cf. Damon 1973, Baraz 2015. Virgil frequently overshadows his pleasant pastoral landscape with destruction, menace, and lack of fulfilment, especially in *Ecl.* 9, and Calpurnius' focus on patrons and money reflects Virgil's dedications to Pollio and Varius, as well as the theme of the land confiscations in *Ecl.* 1 and 9. If my discussion here tends towards smoothening out the complexities and ambiguities of Virgil (and Theocritus), so does Calpurnius: to be a successor is to oversimplify, requiring a monolithic predecessor, and scholarship on reception texts often follows suit (cf. Hinds 1998).

¹⁰ I should mention that my use of 'genre' (rather than, e.g., 'form') to refer to pastoral is deliberate, despite ongoing debate as to the nature of pastoral (cf., e.g., Halperin 1983, Alpers 1997, Fantuzzi and Papanghelis 2006:vii-xvii). As Mayer notes, 'in Calpurnius' hands pastoral is clearly treated as a genre, with its appropriate code' (2006:463); cf. also Damon 1973:298, Magnelli 2006, Baraz 2015.

¹¹ I shall refer to Virgil's *Eclogues* as '*Ecl.* x', and to Calpurnius' as 'Poem x' or 'Calp. x', to try to avoid confusion.

¹² Mayer 2006:460-1 adds that the *fagus* of Virgil *Ecl.* 1.1, programmatic throughout the collection (cf. 3.12), is dismissed by Corydon at Calp. 7.5 as dull *ueteres fagos* inferior to the *spectacula* of Rome – perhaps recalling Virgil's own desolate, broken, almost post-pastoral landscape of *Ecl.* 9 (*ueteres, iam fracta cacumina, fagos*, 9.9).

¹³ Cf., e.g., Gifford 1999:81, Mayer 2006:460.

whether overtly or on the level of subtext,¹⁴ the so-called ‘Corydon narrative’ of poems 1, 4 and 7 traces the character Corydon’s development as a poet, forming a sustained and cohesive multi-poem narrative of a type not seen before in ancient pastoral.¹⁵ In the first poem we meet him as a hesitant pipe player who asks Ornytus to sing to his instrumental accompaniment (1.16-18) and to read Faunus’ prophecy aloud to him (1.24-7, 31-2). By poem 4, Corydon is an accomplished and ambitious pastoral poet (4.5-82), who discusses various aspects of poetry and literary composition with his patron Meliboëus: the process of composition (1-8; *quid tacitus, Corydon?*, 1), poetic topics from pastoral to panegyric (5-49), how poets can make a living (58-72), the qualities and effects of good poetry (147-51), and literary criticism and editing (12-13, 50-2). In poem 7, Corydon returns from the city to the countryside and tells Lycotas of his experiences there in a long monologue (23-72) allowing him the chance to put the skills he honed as a pastoral poet into practice on panegyric themes; this climax of his poetic development is undercut not only by his failure to speak to the emperor in the city, but by the persistently pastoral nature of his speech, despite its new urban topic.¹⁶ Indeed, even though the amphitheatre he describes may stand for a potential future epic project, like Virgil’s temple of poetry in the proem to *G.* 3, this ambition remains unrealised; Corydon’s description of the amphitheatre in *Calp.* 7 remains his only quasi-epic endeavour within the collection.

Is this biographical allegory? Enrico Magnelli confidently asserts that ‘most scholars agree that the shepherd Corydon... must represent the author himself.’¹⁷ The narrative that Calpurnius constructs for his central character Corydon is based on poetic development and literary communities, explicitly situated in the early imperial context of literary patronage, and as such it is easily transferable to the author Calpurnius. Scholars have indeed tried to fit Corydon’s narrative to a conjectured Calpurnian biography, despite our lack of sure knowledge about the author’s actual life. Corydon’s desire to write panegyric and to gain ever more prestigious patronage recalls the outright patron-courting poetry of extant Flavian poets such as Martial and Statius.¹⁸ If he is indeed an avatar of the author Calpurnius, did Calpurnius intend to use

¹⁴ In brief: Poems 2 and 6 contain poetic contests, complete with evaluation, judging and criticism; 6 is purely *about* singing contests, ultimately failing to enact one. Poem 3 depicts the drafting, via dictation and transcription, of a letter to stand in place of speech. The tension between orality and textuality – and between improvised speech and drafted, rehearsed, reperformed literature – that pervades Virgil’s *Eclogues* (cf. Breed 2006a and 2006b, Papanghelis 2006, my discussion at the start of Chapter 2) is brought to the forefront of Calpurnius’ collection, and often resolved in favour of the written and rehearsed. Both hesitation in poetic production and anxiety over reception are significantly more present in Calpurnius.

¹⁵ Servius reads Tityrus as Virgil over multiple poems in the *Eclogues* (*ad Buc.* 1.1, 3.96, 6.3), and relates multiple poems to the narrative of land confiscations (*passim*), both in direct identifications of key players and more subtly. He does not, however, discern a multi-poem narrative throughout the collection, with the same cast and the same allegorical concerns; his method is more *ad hoc*.

¹⁶ Cf. especially Green 2009:59. On the Corydon narrative as ‘a chronicle of disappointment’, cf. Leach 1973 (85-7), Newlands 1987, Henderson 2013:180.

¹⁷ Magnelli 2006:469-70. *Contra*: Davis 1987:30 (building on Leach 1973:86) and Newlands 1987:227-9. On allegory in Calpurnius, cf. Langholf 1990, Korenjak 2003.

¹⁸ Cf. Coleman 1986, Nauta 2002. Note that imperial patronage was different under Nero, who seemed to have cultivated only those poets with access to his inner circle already (Seneca, Lucan, *et al.*). Does Corydon’s more

his poetry collection to win such patronage for himself? Details of the text have been adduced to support this reading: much speculation has surrounded the hypothesised real-life counterpart to Corydon's patron Meliboeus, for example, with suggestions including Seneca, Calpurnius Piso, Columella, or the consul M. Valerius Messala Corvinus.¹⁹ With Corydon fixed as Calpurnius, retrospective evidence can be found in the text: John Henderson notes that Corydon's concern regarding the height of the tree in poem 1 'evokes a childhood friend of the poet Persius, one Calpurnius "Statura," presumably toting a heightist nickname.'²⁰

But though scholars like Magnelli present this reading as obvious and natural, the theoretical assumptions that underlie and enable it are worth unpacking. For one thing, this style of thorough-going, all-encompassing allegory is not common, either in ancient literature or in modern classical scholarship. With the possible exception of scholiastic readings of Homer's gods as abstract metaphysical concepts, few ancient texts unambiguously participate in the sort of allegorical representation whereby the *entire* narrative, characterisation and literary treatment of one character are taken to 'mean' another, whether internal to the work's fiction or (as with the Corydon-Calpurnius equation) external – not until the wholly allegorical works of Prudentius, Boethius and Martianus Capella, or Fulgentius' exegesis of the *Aeneid*.²¹ In modern scholarship, too, Servius' maxim *hoc loco Tityri sub persona Vergilium debemus accipere, non tamen ubique, sed tantum ubi exigit ratio* (*ad Buc.* 1.1, discussed in Chapter 3) holds fast for questions of symbolism, metapoetics, and metaphor: fragmentary or partial readings are favoured over one-to-one correspondence, such that Aeneas (for example) here exemplifies a trait of Augustus, there of Julius Caesar; here he resembles Achilles, there Hector.²² Raymond Starr writes of Servian and post-Servian allegorical interpretation that 'the shifting analysis is radically unstable,' due not only to the habits of *uariorum* commentary (so the analysis is pursued lemma by lemma, and recording each alternative interpretation rather than committing to a single reading) but also to a multiplicity inherent to methods of allegorical reading.²³

Modern scholars' readiness to take Corydon as an allegory for Calpurnius is curious, too, in light of the absence of particular prompts conventional in pastoral poetry by this point.

Flavian-seeming behaviour betray a non-Neronian date of Calpurnius' composition? Calpurnius' presentation of patronage is, however, not just Flavian but also somewhat Horatian (cf. Feeney 2009, Freudenburg 2014, and note Henderson 1998:169-71 and 2013:181-2 on Calpurnius' Horatian instincts). In his presentation of Augustan-style patronage, Calpurnius perhaps suggests that he is to both Virgil and Horace as Nero is to Augustus.

¹⁹ Seneca: Sarpe 1819 (the only suggestion to make good use of details from *Ecl.* 4: Meliboeus as poet of astronomy and weather-signs as well as *dulcia carmina*, tragedy and lyric, 4.53-7). Piso: Haupt 1854, Schenkl 1885. Columella: Chytil 1894. Corvinus: Hubaux 1930. Wernsdorf (1780) suggests that Iollas at 4.59 is a scholar or poet who prompted the writing of the *Eclogues*. Cf. Schröder 1991:29-34, Vinchesi 1996:11-2.

²⁰ Henderson 2013:181, explaining rather than committing to the allegory: 'CS wrote Corydon and co., he didn't have to *be* him or them.'

²¹ With the exception of post-Theocritean Hellenistic pastoral: cf. Fantuzzi 2006:235-62. Farrell 2016: 405: 'Theocritus' followers... had little doubt that Simichidas was simply Theocritus'.

²² See my discussion at the opening of Chapter 3.

²³ Starr 1995:136.

Theocritus and Virgil both gesture towards the possibility of authorial identification in pastoral by encouraging a certain slippage between the ‘world’ of the fiction and reality. Not only do they allow their pastoral characters to coexist with real people, who appear to a certain extent in pastoral guise but under their real names,²⁴ but they also employ something of a bait-and-switch approach to authorial identity. Both *Id.* 7 and *Ecl.* 6 begin emphatically in the first person – but in both poems the speaker is then abruptly addressed under the name of a pastoral character, Simichidas or Tityrus.²⁵ The two authors at times prompt the reader towards identifying the pastoral characters with themselves or other contemporary figures, and at other times obstruct such readings: ‘a delicately suggestive balance of irreconcilable elements’, as Farrell puts it.²⁶

Neither of these two indications that the pastoral fiction is merging in some way with reality is present in Calpurnius. He scrupulously avoids introducing historical names and characters into his pastoral world;²⁷ even the emperor who looms offstage in poems 1, 4 and 7 is mostly referred to as *Caesar*, *iuuenis* or *deus*, in a show of rustic naiveté following Tityrus’ terminology for his saviour in Virgil’s *Ecl.* 1.²⁸ Nor is there any possibility of slippage between a zero-degree narrative or authorial voice and that of Corydon: Corydon’s three appearances are all in dialogic poems, none of which opens with a first person statement in Corydon’s voice, and Corydon is framed unambiguously as a pastoral character from the start. The boundary between fiction and reality, between Corydon’s and Calpurnius’ respective worlds, is more strictly enforced than in Theocritean or Virgilian pastoral.²⁹ If Theocritus’ Simichidas and Virgil’s Tityrus are pastoral *personae*, ‘masks’ which conceal (but only partially) the actors behind them, Calpurnius’ Corydon must be more like a marionette. Though perhaps modelled after its puppeteer, it nonetheless participates in a drama confined to a different realm and on a different scale from the puppeteer’s reality – and its operator remains hidden out of sight behind the scenes.

²⁴ Th. *Id.* 7: Eucritus, Amyntas, Phrasidamus, Antigenes, Asclepius, Philitas. In the *Eclogues*: Cinna, Pollio, Varus, Varius, Caesar, Gallus. Bion in the anonymous *Epitaph on Bion* also retains his own name but takes on pastoral traits. Cf. Farrell 2016:404 on Theocritus.

²⁵ I discuss this slippery or evasive authorial self-representation more fully in Chapter 4, regarding Propertius’ reception of it.

²⁶ Farrell 2016:405. Note that ‘biographical allegory’ requires the character within the text to have not just pastoral characteristics but full pastoral identity: those characters like Asclepiades or Gallus, who appear thinly fictionalised under their own names, are not allegorical, although their presence in the text can prompt or obstruct other allegorical readings.

²⁷ Numa (1.65) is historical, but belongs to the mythicised history of Rome, rather than the Rome contemporary to Calpurnius.

²⁸ Virgil: *iuuenis*, *Ecl.* 1.42; (*ille...*) *deus*, 1.7; *Caesar*, 9.47. Calpurnius: *iuuenis*, 1.44, 4.10, 4.85, 4.137; *deus* (*ipse*), 1.46, 1.73, 1.84, 4.7, 4.30, 4.48, 4.100, 4.141, 4.165, 7.6; *iuuenis deus*, 7.6; *Caesar*: 4.87, 4.94, 4.97, 4.132, 4.143 and 1.82 (a previous emperor).

²⁹ It is possible that this strict separation of fiction and reality in fact *enables* the thorough biographical allegory critics see in Corydon-Calpurnius: in a way it is easier to compare two distinct things than two that are inextricably and indeterminately merged together.

Enter the absent Tityrus

One other element of the Corydon narrative, however, decisively prompts the reader to allow for the presence of biographical allegory, even if Calpurnius' framing of this interpretative figure differs vastly from the Virgilian or Theocritean template. This is the inclusion of Tityrus, a pastoral character who, like Corydon, is a poet. Absent from the action of the text but praised extensively by the characters of poem 4, Tityrus becomes ever more familiar through an accumulation of Virgilian tropes of authorship, until by the end of the poem an allegorical identification is inescapable.

Tityrus first appears in Corydon's excursus on the role played by financial support and patronage in the life of a poet (4.29-63). Corydon announces that he will prove his poetic mettle to his own patron, Meliboeus, and declares that his pipes have an important lineage since they were once owned by his poetic predecessor Tityrus (58-63):

... forsitan illos
experiar calamos, here quos mihi doctus Iollas
donavit dixitque: 'truces haec fistula tauros
conciliat nostroque sonat dulcissima Fauno.
Tityrus hanc habuit, cecinit qui primus in istis
montibus Hyblaea modulabile carmen auena.'

'Perhaps I might try out those reeds which skilful Iollas gave me yesterday, saying, "This pipe wins over savage bulls, and sounds out the sweetest songs to our Faunus. Tityrus owned it once – the man who was the first in those hills of yours to sing his tuneful song on the Hyblaeian pipe.'"

Tityrus is introduced as a distinguished singer of pastoral song,³⁰ now absent from the rustic community to which Corydon, Amyntas and Meliboeus belong: note the firm past tense of *habuit* and *cecinit*. Calpurnius' depiction of Tityrus associates him closely with tropes of authorship from the *Eclogues*, and with references to poetic lineage in particular. The transmission of instruments as a signal of literary inheritance appears twice in the *Eclogues*.³¹ First, at *Ecl.* 5.85-7, Menalcas rewards Mopsus' singing with a pipe which 'taught' him two songs identified by their titular first lines, compressed versions of two first lines of the *Eclogues*,

³⁰ *Hyblaea auena* indicating the Sicilian Theocritus. Note Virgil's geopoetics: *Sicelides Musae* (*Ecl.* 4.1), *Syracosio uersu* (6.1), *fluctus Sicanos* (10.4), *carmina pastoris Siculi modulabor auena* (10.51; compare Calp. 4.63, *montibus Hyblaea modulabile carmen auena*). The primacy that Calpurnius attributes to Tityrus is not negated by the reference to Theocritus: *in istis montibus* modifies *primus*, such that Tityrus is 'the first to sing Latin pastoral, in these mountains'. For assertions of primacy similarly circumscribed by geography, cf. Horace *Sat.* 1.10.31-9, *Ep.* 1.19.21-34, Virgil *G.* 3.174-6, 3.1-48. Cf. Volk 2002:150 on this trope's imperialist undertones, and now Feeney 2016.

³¹ The trope develops Theocritus *Id.* 7.128-9, where Lycidas rewards the young, ambitious poet Simichidas (= Theocritus?) with a shepherd's crook; cf. Farrell 2016:415. Calpurnius' use of the trope already at 2.28-31 establishes it as a standard detail of pastoral, rather than a specifically Virgilian trope.

2.1 and 3.1. Second, in *Ecl.* 6 the mythical shepherd-poet Linus gives to Gallus a pipe which, he says, the Muses once gave Hesiod, and which bestowed upon him Orphic powers of poetry: *calamos... quibus ille solebat | cantando rigidas deducere montibus ornos* ('the reeds... with which Hesiod, as he sang, would draw down the unyielding ash trees from the mountains', *Ecl.* 6.69-71).

Both of these scenes in the *Eclogues* find further resonance in the next passage of Calpurnius' depiction of Tityrus. While the Menalcas of *Ecl.* 5 is a parallel for Tityrus as the previous owner of a set of pipes, the absence of Calpurnius' Tityrus from the pastoral scene of *Calp.* 4 is also similar to that of Virgil's other Menalcas, the absent master-singer of *Ecl.* 9 whose brilliant poetry is discussed by the self-consciously lesser poets Lycidas and Moeris.³² Linus' depiction of Hesiod as an Orphic figure in *Ecl.* 6 is echoed by Meliboeus' reply to Corydon, painting Tityrus not merely as vaguely Orphic but as a *uates sacer* who could outdo even Orpheus himself (4.64-9; cf. *G.* 4.509-10):

magna petis, Corydon, si Tityrus esse laboras.
 ille fuit uates sacer et qui posset auena
 praesonuisse chelyn, blandae cui saepe canenti
 adlusere ferae, cui substitit aduena quercus.
 quem modo cantantem rutilo spargebat acantho
 Nais et implicitos comebat pectine crines.

'You seek great things, Corydon, if you strive to be Tityrus. He was a sacred bard, one who could on the reed-pipe outplay the lyre. Often, when he sang, wild beasts frolicked around him, and the oak came close and stopped there. Whenever he sang, a Naiad would adorn him with red acanthus, and comb his tangled hair.'

Corydon agrees with Meliboeus' assessment (*est – fateor, Meliboee – deus, 70*) and proceeds to sing his panegyric composition for the bulk of the remainder of the poem, to his listener's approval (82-146). At the close he makes a bid for Meliboeus' continued patronage and, specifically, for Meliboeus to act as intermediary between him and the emperor (158-9), since Corydon is still trammelled by poverty's constraints (155-6):

uellit nam saepius aurem
 inuida Paupertas et dicit: 'ouilia cura!'

'Too often, hostile Poverty plucks my ear and says, "Take care of the sheepfold!"'

Calpurnius here reworks another key Virgilian trope of authorship from the *Eclogues*, the *recusatio* of *Ecl.* 6.4-5 in which Apollo rebukes Virgil's Tityrus for attempting to sing non-pastoral songs of *reges et proelia* – itself inherited from Callimachus (fr. 1, 21-4, Pf.), of course.

³² For Menalcas as Virgil: Quintilian 8.6.47, on *Ecl.* 9.7-10; Servius *ad Buc.* 9.1 and 9.16.

Apollo, the god of poetry, advises the shepherd-poet Tityrus to confine himself to pastoral poetry, metapoetically figuring different types of poetry as different methods of herdsmanship. In Calpurnius, the altogether more prosaic personification of *Paupertas* invokes the same figure in a more abbreviated form, warning Corydon not to seek to rise above *teres uersus* (152) by commanding him to reject poetry altogether in favour of pastoral tasks: *ouilia cura*, ‘mind your sheep’.³³

After invoking (Virgil’s) Tityrus’ poetic struggles on an intertextual level, Corydon returns to discussion of (Calpurnius’) Tityrus, again recapitulating the Virgilian *recusatio*. Corydon expresses his desire to move on to greater genres, in the same way that (he says) Tityrus was permitted to move on from the *ouilia* of bucolic poetry to agricultural subjects and finally to epic (4.160-3):

tum mihi talis eris, qualis qui dulce sonantem
 Tityron e siluis dominam deduxit in urbem
 ostenditque deos et 'spreto' dixit 'ouili
 Tityre, rura prius, sed post cantabimus arma'.

‘Then you would be to me just the sort of man as the one who brought sweet-singing Tityrus down from the woods to the queen of cities, and showed him the gods, and said, “We will first spurn the sheepfold, Tityrus, and sing first the fields, then war-weapons.”’

It is only at this point that the identification of Tityrus becomes explicit. ‘Tityrus’ is of course, on some level, Virgil: Corydon’s inverted *recusatio* at 4.162-3 abandons the transferable generality of the previous accumulation of Virgilian tropes of metapoetic self-reference – which hint at, but does not decisively pin down, biographical allegory – and maps Virgil’s own specific career trajectory onto that of Tityrus. The *rura* are not a typical element of poetic *recusatio*: the contrast between the rejected and recommended genres is usually binary, epic or large-scale poetry deferred in favour of the small-scale. Virgil’s tripartite career was already becoming canonical in his own lifetime, as shown in Propertius 2.34; soon after his death, Ovid was able to summarise his works with the single line *Tityrus et segetes Aeneiaque arma legentur* (‘Tityrus and the crops and the arms of Aeneas will be read’, *Am.* 1.15.25), riffing on the first lines of each of Virgil’s works in order.³⁴ The sequence *ouilia, rura, arma* uniquely recalls Virgil, rather than a character entirely internal to Calpurnius’ pastoral fiction.

³³ A note of one-upmanship, perhaps, in Calpurnius’ comparative *saepius* against Virgil’s single event.

³⁴ On Virgil’s tripartite career, note also *VSD* 36 *cecini pascua rura duces* (pseudepigraphic epitaph); *VSD* 42 *egressus siluis... gratum opus agricolis... at nunc horrentia Martis | arma uirumque cano* (pseudepigraphic proem to the *Aeneid*); Martial 8.55 (*oues... Italiam... arma*); Nemesianus *Ecl.* 2.82-4 *cantamus auena | qua diui cecinere prius, qua dulce locutus | Tityrus e siluis dominam peruenit in urbem*. On the shape of Virgil’s career and its reception, cf. Theodorakopoulos 2007, Volk 2002, Hardie and Moore 2010 (especially the editors’ introduction and the chapters by Putnam, Laird and Krevans).

Calpurnius shapes Tityrus as an allegorical cipher for Virgil, on a different model of allegorical representation from that found in Theocritean or Virgilian pastoral, and different again from Propertius in 2.34. This identification has knock-on effects for interpreting the poem as a whole: it prompts the reader to be alert to other possibilities for biographical allegory within the poems, particularly focusing on the protagonist Corydon. The correspondence between Tityrus-Virgil and his compare-and-contrast parallel Corydon-Calpurnius sparks a number of lines of interpretation, primarily relating to Calpurnius' task of writing post-Virgilian pastoral. Poem 4's depiction of Tityrus emphasises ideas of reception, with elements both of admiration or veneration and of uneasy, emulative competition in Corydon's approach to his predecessor (not to strike too Bloomian a note about it). On the one hand, Tityrus' preeminence validates Corydon's ambitions, and amplifies Corydon's status by elevating him to Tityrus' heir, or near enough, in the genealogy of 4.58-63. On the other, Tityrus' success in his career is attributed to his extraordinary, near-divine talent: he is not just Orphic (66-7) but a *uates sacer* (65) or *deus* (70) in his own right.³⁵ Can a mere follower achieve such greatness? Corydon's narrative in Calp. 1, 4 and 7 betrays a certain anxiety regarding his secondariness or belatedness: his poetic silence when confronted with the 'found poetry' of Faunus' inscribed prophecy in Calp. 1, for example, or his presentation of the emperor's political and architectural works as surpassing his own poetic works, leaving him speechless and spellbound (*defixus et ore patenti*, 7.37; *stupefactum*, 40), in the final poem.³⁶ Corydon (and other characters) may assert that new wonders usurp old, but the direction of his narrative leaves the question rather more open.³⁷ These dynamics – this push-and-pull of admiration and anxiety – easily translate to Calpurnius' relationship with Virgil, outside the allegorised situation internal to the poems: Calpurnius' pastoral explicitly discusses its author's anxieties and ambitions relating to its post-Virgilian status.

³⁵ Cf. Lovatt 2007 on the use of *uates* and Orphic imagery in Statius.

³⁶ Hints of the equation of poetry and politics already at 7.16-18: Corydon says that the sights in Rome (*quae spectauimus urbe*, 18) surpass even the greatest success in poetic competitions (*omnia Lucanae... pecuaria siluae*, 17, a reward for poetic triumph). Note, too, that Corydon frames his description as a *poetic* effort: the self-reflection *quid tibi nunc referam* signalling poetic invention (35; cf. Cat. 64.116 *sed quid ego... commemorem*, Virgil *Ecl.* 6.74 *quid loquar*, *G.* 1.104 *quid dicam*; cf. Peirano 2009:193 n.33), expressions of poetic incapability and *recusationes* in the face of catalogues (35-6, 79-84; cf. Gowers 2005), didactic autopsy (*uidi[mus]* at 23, 57, 60) and reliability (*mihi crede*, *Lycota*, | *si qua fides*, 55-6), etc. On the description of the arena in Calp. 7 as a poetic space or entity, cf. Green 2009 and compare Virgil's metapoetic temple in *G.* 3.

³⁷ Corydon: *ueteres fagos noua quam spectacula mauis* | *cernere* (5-6); interlocutor: *certe* | *uilia sunt nobis, quaecumque prioribus annis* | *uidimus, et sordet quicquid spectauimus olim* (44-6). Perhaps Micon's advice in poem 5 strikes the middle balance, describing Calpurnius' pastoral poetics as a whole: *ne pigeat ramos siccis miscere recentes* | *et sucos adhibere nouos* (5.106-7)...

Constructing pastoral characters

This approach is not accepted by all critics. Carole Newlands writes of poem 4, ‘Calpurnius should not be identified with Corydon, just as Vergil (*pace* Calpurnius) should not be identified with Tityrus.’³⁸ In the sense that the interpretation of biographical allegory constitutes an unreliable and flawed hermeneutic, Newlands is of course correct: if identifying Calpurnius with Corydon leads us to assert that Calpurnius’ historical career, poetic outlook, and financial uncertainty map directly onto Corydon’s, to supplement our patchy knowledge of Calpurnius with speculative biography borrowed from Corydon and to psychoanalyse Calpurnius based on Corydon’s depiction, then the two absolutely should not be identified with one another. In the same way, it is untenable for us to read Tityrus in Virgil’s *Eclogues* as a consistent and complete allegory for Virgil – with the additional reason that Virgil’s multiple Tityri (protagonist of *Ecl.* 1, authorial pseudonym of 6, and silent servile herdsman of 3, 5, 8 and 9) obscure and complicate such a reading.

But Newlands’ argument here glosses over what is (in my eyes) an important element of Calpurnius’ pastoral poetics, and of an important facet of Virgil’s ancient reception. Her parenthetical ‘*pace* Calpurnius’ raises more questions than it answers. Even if neither Calpurnius’ Corydon nor Virgil’s Tityrus can be identified unambiguously with their authors, by modern standards, the fact that Calpurnius represents Tityrus in his *own* work as an avatar for Virgil nevertheless tells us something about the way Calpurnius read Virgil, and the way he envisages his poetry’s relationship to Virgil’s. Calpurnius’ representation of Virgil as Tityrus does not necessarily indicate that he *believed* Virgil to have done the same (*pace* Newlands);³⁹ rather, it forms part of a creative and tendentious commentary by Calpurnius on Virgil’s pastoral poetry, his techniques of allegory, and his authorial persona and career.

So, then, to what extent does Calpurnius seem to attribute this biographical reading to Virgil, not only identifying Tityrus as Virgil but claiming that Virgil both intended and encouraged such an identification in his own works? This is a poetic text, not a commentary: unlike Servius, who seems to state both that biographical allegory can be read in the *Eclogues*⁴⁰ and that Virgil has constructed an allegorical text,⁴¹ Calpurnius does not signpost his reading of Virgil with such explicit statements. Nonetheless, other related aspects of Calpurnius’ poetry more broadly illuminate, or offer some guidance in approaching, this question. I shall explore just one of these in detail: Calpurnius’ depiction of Corydon and Tityrus throughout his

³⁸ Newlands 1987:288.

³⁹ Cf. Slater 1994:71: ‘Tityrus here is Vergil, though we ought not without further reflection accept that this is proof that Calpurnius read the personal character of Vergil into the figure of Tityrus in the latter’s *Eclogues*’.

⁴⁰ *ad Buc.* 1.1: *et hoc loco Tityri sub persona Vergilium debemus accipere; non tamen ubique, sed tantum ubi exigit ratio*; cf. *ad Buc.* 2.1, 3.20.

⁴¹ *ad Buc.* 1.27: *sicut nunc Vergilius sub persona Tityri dicit*.

collection, not just poem 4, with particular attention to how his approach to their characterisation draws on and relates to earlier pastoral poets’.

Calpurnius’ choice of Virgilian names (Tityrus: *Ecl.* 1, 3, 5, 6, 8 9; Corydon: 2, 5, 7), or even Theocritean ones (Tityrus: *Id.* 3, 7; Corydon: 4, 5), is not predetermined by the pastoral genre: over a third of the names he uses are not inherited from either.⁴² The fact that both names are drawn from Theocritus and Virgil is of interest in itself, as is the fact that both are given significantly more prominence in the latter than the former.⁴³ Calpurnius’ choice of Tityrus to represent Virgil is explicitly motivated by Virgil’s intimations of biographical allegory regarding Tityrus in *Ecl.* 6, as discussed above. Tityrus is also the first word of the *Eclogues*, the first character named (compare *frater Corydon* at Calp. 1.8), and the first of Virgil’s singing shepherds (*Ecl.* 1.2 *musam meditaris*, 1.5 *resonare doces... siluas*).

The choice of Corydon as authorial avatar is rather more opaque. Recall that Corydon is used alongside Tityrus as a stand-in for Virgil by Propertius (2.34.73); here the authorial significance is transferred to Calpurnius.⁴⁴ Why? As I discuss below, Corydon’s combination of *rusticitas* and poetic prowess makes him a fitting choice to represent an (at least supposedly) up-and-coming author in search of further patronage: his appearances in *Ecl.* 2 and 7 indicate both humble rustic roots and ambitious talent. On a formal level, too, Corydon is suitable. Magnelli speculates that Calpurnius’ choice of ‘Corydon’ is a method of identifying himself as Virgil’s successor, since Corydon is the second major speaker in the *Eclogues* and Tityrus the first: ‘did Calpurnius... intend to lead his audience to a chronological reading of such a sequence, Tityrus-Virgil at the beginning of Latin pastoral tradition and Corydon-Calpurnius, his heir and follower, in the second place?’⁴⁵ I would add that Meliboeus’ position in Virgil’s *Eclogues* between Tityrus and Corydon – as well as the fact that he is depicted *en route* to the city, and associated with matters of *patria*⁴⁶ – fits well with his depiction in Calpurnius as Corydon’s patron and intercessor among the upper echelons of imperial Roman politics and poetics.

⁴² I count 33 pastoral (non-deity, non-contemporary) names. 13 appear first in Calpurnius: Ornytus, Leuce, Ladon, Crocale, Astacus, Dorylas, Callirhoe, Canthus, Astylus, Nyctilus, Petale, Acanthis, Lycotas. 7 are inherited from Virgil alone: Meliboeus, Iollas, Phyllis, Mopsus, Mnasyllus, Alcon, Stimic(h)on. 12 appear in both Theocritean and Virgilian pastoral: Corydon, Thyrsis, Daphnis, Alpheisiboeus, Lycidas, Alcippe, Tityrus, Menalcas, Amaryllis, Amyntas, Micon, Aegon. One, Idas, appears only in Theocritus. Hutchinson (2013:308) comments that some of Calpurnius’ new names mimic Theocritus’ (Lycotas < Lycopas, Mopsus < Morsus, Crocale < Crocyllus), and reminds us that ‘the Roman poets were not driven to other resources by a paucity of names in the Theocritean corpus: there are plenty they do not use’: innovation is pointed. For Virgil’s names in the *Eclogues*, cf. Lipka 2001:171-93: roughly half his names come from Theocritus.

⁴³ In Theocritus, Corydon appears in the particularly ‘rustic’ *Idd.* 4 and 5, and speaks in the former. Gow notes ‘the reduction of the poetical element’, the ‘lower plane’ and the ‘liveliness and verisimilitude’ of *Idd.* 4 and 5 (1950b:76). Tityrus appears as a non-speaking, lowly herdsman in *Idd.* 3 and 7.

⁴⁴ Servius begins his comment on *Ecl.* 2.1 with *Corydonis in persona Vergilius intellegitur*, before offering a vast multiplicity of alternative allegorical identifications, mostly political. Martial 8.55 has Corydon represent Virgil, again on the grounds of his relationship with Alexis/Alexander.

⁴⁵ Magnelli 2006:472.

⁴⁶ Cf. Patterson 1987:2.

Beyond this, though, what is interesting is that Calpurnius mimics not only Virgil's most prominent treatments of these characters but also their self-contradictions and incoherencies in the *Eclogues*.⁴⁷ By this I mean the old chestnut of pastoral names and identities: the question of how far recurring names within the *Idylls*, *Eclogues* and other collections denote the 'same' characters, and what implications this has for 'the poems' unity as a book [and] the possible unity of its fictional world'.⁴⁸ Both Theocritus and Virgil leave the question undecidable: homonymous characters can seem to have continuity across different poems (e.g. Virgil's Menalcas, who is in both *Ecl.* 5 and 9 an eminent poet who seems to exist somewhat outside the pastoral fiction);⁴⁹ they can sometimes be such blank slates that it is possible to consider them single individuals (e.g. Amaryllis, Phyllis); or they can bear mutually exclusive characteristics in different poems. In Theocritus, for example, the Menalcas of *Id.* 8 herds sheep but the Menalcas of *Id.* 9 herds cows; the Daphnis ventriloquized by Thyrsis in *Id.* 1 has little in common with the Daphnis who speaks in his own right in *Id.* 6. Virgil continues these methods of self-contradiction: his Daphnis, for example, is a minor pastoral character (2.26, 3.12, 7.1-7, 9.46-50), and a quasi-divine singer whose death is sung by Mopsus and Menalcas in *Ecl.* 5, and the object of the enchantments performed by the woman ventriloquized by Alphisiboeus in *Ecl.* 8.64-109.

The question of whether to try to reconcile these differences, reading the characters as single individuals in a consistent and stable fictional 'world', or to allow each name to indicate separate characters, has puzzled readers from Theocritus' contemporaries and followers right up to present-day scholars. Marco Fantuzzi has argued that Theocritus' earliest creative imitators recognised and imitated a certain 'lability' of character;⁵⁰ the scholiasts, by contrast, preferred to 'fill in the gaps' of each character's lacunose narrative and assert their coherence as single individuals across multiple poems.⁵¹ Similarly, modern Virgilian scholars are split. Some perceive ontological unity, asserting that we should extrapolate from the Phyllises and Amyntases of the collection and read all individual characters under single names despite inconsistencies, and hence perceive a coherent fictional realm.⁵² Thomas Hubbard argues that Virgil creates single 'dramatic characters' inhabiting 'one continuous poem', whose

⁴⁷ The consistency of characters is relevant to their suitability for allegory: cf. Whitman 1987:2-7, and note Cicero and Quintilian defining allegory as a *continued* series of metaphors (Cicero *Orat.* 27.94: *cum fluxerunt continuae plures translationes*, Quintilian 9.2.46 *allegoriam facit continua metaphora*).

⁴⁸ Kania 2016:24. On this question generally: Rumpf 1999/2008, Payne 2007:151-2, Kania 2016:24-33. Perutelli 1999:42-4 surveys critical responses.

⁴⁹ I am thinking of Menalcas' quotation of *Ecl.* 2 and 3 at 5.86-7 and his friendship with Varus and knowledge of Mantua and Cremona in the 30s BCE in *Ecl.* 9.26-9.

⁵⁰ Fantuzzi 1998:61-2.

⁵¹ Scholiasts: cf. Payne 2007:151-2. 'Filling in the gaps': cf. Iserian hermeneutics and reader-response theory, e.g. Iser 1971:1-45, Eco 1979: 47-66, 214-17, Peirano 2012:1-35. I discuss this at greater length in the Introduction (pages 11-14).

⁵² Hahn 1944, Flintoff 1976, Kania 2016.

inconsistencies are due to their simultaneous non-narrative use as literary tropes.⁵³ A more radical position is taken by those who see a lack of dramatic continuity – let alone plot or narrative – which reduces the characters to voiceless fragmented echoes and leaves the names merely citations of other appearances.⁵⁴

Calpurnius seems familiar with this problem of pastoral *nomina*. His treatment of Corydon and Tityrus both reflects this familiarity and offers some insights into the nature of his reception of Virgilian pastoral.⁵⁵ In his construction of these two characters, he variously replicates, resolves and problematises the shifting characterisations found in Virgil. Virgil's Corydon and Tityrus are both marked by inconsistency: Corydon is at once the self-deprecating *rusticus* of *Ecl.* 2 (*rusticus es, Corydon, 2.56*) who cannot win back his beloved Alexis through his unpolished song (*haec incondita, 2.4*; cf. Servius *ad loc.: id est [...] agrestia*), and the consummate singer of *Ecl.* 7, who wins the poetic contest and is praised extravagantly: *ex illo Corydon Corydon est tempore nobis* ('from this time forward, Corydon is the one and only Corydon for us', 7.70).⁵⁶ Tityrus is not only the protagonist of *Ecl.* 1 – the aging shepherd who has secured his lands by entreaty to the city's *iuuenis* – but also the rebuked poet of *Ecl.* 6. He is also the man-of-all-work who receives orders at 3.20, 3.96, 5.12, and 9.23 – who is, like the Corydon of *Ecl.* 2, a proverbially bad singer (*sit Tityrus Orpheus, 8.55*). With both characters, Virgil has introduced or deepened these inconsistencies himself: in Theocritus Corydon is merely a rustic or inept singer,⁵⁷ and Tityrus a humble manservant (*Id.* 3.1-6) only once mentioned as singing (7.72).

Calpurnius's Corydon appears to be an effort to combine these disparate traits of Virgil's Corydon into one cohesive entity. He is self-consciously *rusticus* – *mea rusticitas* (4.14-15), *o utinam nobis non rustica uestis inesset!* ('if only I had not been wearing peasant clothing!', 7.79) – and, as mentioned above, anxious about his poetry. At the same time, he is praised as an accomplished singer, despite his *rusticitas* (4.147-50, Meliboeus' assessment):

rustica credebam nemorales carmina uobis
concessisse deos et obesis auribus apta;
uerum, quae paribus modo concinuistis auenis
tam liquidum, tam dulce cadunt...

⁵³ Hubbard 1998 (cf., e.g., p.48: the use of Tityrus in *Ecl.* 1 'can only be meant as a trope for the relationship of literary succession between Theocritean bucolic and Vergilian pastoral'; p. 118: Tityrus is to be considered a 'dramatic character'). Kania is right to criticise Hubbard for not offering 'any rationale for choosing from the various semantic modes he applies' (2016:28).

⁵⁴ Papanghelis 2006, Breed 2006a, Krevans 1984.

⁵⁵ Compare Virgil's likely familiarity with multiple commentaries on Theocritus, as well as post-Theocritean pastoral: Farrell 2016:398.

⁵⁶ An attempt to fix identity: what makes Corydon 'Corydon'?

⁵⁷ *Id.* 5.6: τί δ' οὐκέτι σὺν Κορύδωνι | ἀρκεῖ τοι καλάμας αὐλὸν ποπύσδεν ἔχοντι? Cf. *Ecl.* 2.34: *nec te paeniteat calamo triuisse labellum.*

‘I used to think they were merely rustic songs which the sylvan deities had bestowed upon you [i.e. Corydon], songs fit for over-stuffed ears. But what you have just sung on your double pipes has so clear, so sweet a cadence...’

Calpurnius’ Corydon even has the same love for Alexis that unites Virgil’s two Corydon-characters, emphasised at Calp. 4.75: *si quando laudat Alexin*.

Corydon’s new cohesiveness is the key element that enables allegorical reading in Calpurnius’ Corydon-sequence. The reader can be confident that the Corydon of poem 1 is the same as that of poems 4 and 7, and that the name denotes a single individual with characteristic traits that remain the same throughout the poems, even though he develops and changes as the narrative progresses: his interest in poetic composition and performance, his desire to make himself known to the emperor, his growing disdain for pastoral environs. This narrative cohesiveness is emphasised and paralleled on an intertextual level, as Calpurnius draws together the disparate strands of Virgil’s characterisation of Corydon into a single new character.

When it comes to Tityrus, however, Calpurnius pointedly maintains the two distinct characters by that name found in Virgil. As the masterful poet of Calp. 4, who successfully leaves the pastoral world for that of the city (*e silvis dominam... in urbem*, 4.161), Tityrus appears as a combined reflection both of the ambitious singer of Virgil’s *Ecl.* 6 and of the protagonist of *Ecl.* 1 who successfully travels to the city.⁵⁸ But there is another Tityrus in Calpurnius: the herdsman issued with orders by Iollas in poem 3.⁵⁹ Iollas’ and Lycidas’ poetic efforts are bookended by Tityrus’ pastoral tasks. At 3.19-21, he is commanded to bring back Iollas’ lost heifer, echoing Lycidas’ search for his lost girlfriend Phyllis:

Tityrus, quas dixit, salices pete solus et illinc,
si tamen inuenies, deprensam uerbere multo
huc age;⁶⁰ sed fractum referas hastile memento.⁶¹

‘Tityrus, go to those willows he spoke of, on your own, and, if you find the heifer, catch her and beat her and drive her away from there to here. But don’t forget to bring back your broken crook.’

Lycidas refers in passing to Tityrus’ role as guard on the farm (3.73-4):

⁵⁸ Against this, note that Virgil’s Tityrus *returns* to pastoral in *Ecl.* 1, whereas Calpurnius’ does not; and Virgil’s Tityrus of *Ecl.* 6 has his poetic ambitions checked by Apollo, rather than actually proceeding to epic. Calpurnius’ Tityrus is, again, somewhat incoherent as a character unless associated both with Virgil’s Tityrus and with Virgil himself.

⁵⁹ Note the reversal of hierarchy from Calp. 4.59-63, where Tityrus is Iollas’ senior.

⁶⁰ The violence recommended to Tityrus here gives the lie to Lycidas’ protestations of future gentleness towards his abused ex-girlfriend: *quod si dura times etiam nunc uerbera, Phylli, | tradimus ecce manus* (3.70-1).

⁶¹ Is the *fractum hastile* reminiscent of the metapoetic *pedum* passed from Mopsus to Menalcas at *Ecl.* 5.88, or the *λαγώβολον* given by Lycidas to Simichidas at *Id.* 7.128-9? For *fractum*, cf. *ueteres, iam fracta cacumina, fagos* (*Ecl.* 9.9), with *ueteres fagos* at Calp. 7.5.

ut mala nocturni religavit bracchia Mopsi
Tityrus et furem medio suspendit ouili.

‘... Just as Tityrus once bound those damned arms of Mopsus, out at night to cause trouble, and strung the thief up in his sheepfold.’

And Iollas closes the poem by remarking on Tityrus’ completion of his task (3.97-8):

nam bonus a! dextrum fecit mihi Tityrus omen,
qui redit inuenta non irritus ecce iuuenca.

‘For good Tityrus has brought me an omen – aha! a favourable one! Look, he comes back successful, and has found my heifer. ‘Diverso è, naturalmente, il Titiro della quarta egloga,’ comments Maria Assunta Vinchesi (2014 *ad* 3.19). The Tityrus of poem 3 – silent, servile – echoes not the grander character of Virgil’s *Ecl.* 1 and 6, but the lowly servant of Theocritus *Id.* 3.1-6 and Virgil *Ecl.* 3, 5, 8 and 9. Indeed, Virgil bookends *Ecl.* 3 with Tityrus performing similar tasks to that of Calpurnius in his third poem: Tityrus must first *coge pecus* (‘drive the flock’, *Ecl.* 3.20), then at the end *reice capellas* (‘send back the goats’, 3.96, cf. *redit... iuuenca*, ‘bring back the heifer’, Calp. 3.98). That Iollas’ and Lycidas’ poetic activity in Calp. 3 takes place only once Tityrus has been assigned to more prosaic tasks also recalls two other appearances of Virgil’s Tityrus: at 5.12 Menalcas tells Mopsus *incipere pascentis seruabit Tityrus haedos* (‘Begin; Tityrus will watch the grazing kids’), and at 9.23-5 Moeris hands on his pastoral duties to Tityrus while he goes to woo Amaryllis, saying *Tityrus, dum redeo... pasce capellas* (‘Tityrus, until I return, graze the goats’).⁶² Perhaps it is significant not only that this ‘minor’ Tityrus appears in all three pastoral poets’ third poems, but that in both Virgil and Calpurnius the ‘major’ Tityrus’ appearance is immediately preceded by a poem involving the ‘minor’: *Ecl.* 5 and 6, and Calpurnius 3 and 4.⁶³

Yet even this interpretation is not quite exactly right. Calpurnius separates these two Tityri that he perceives in Virgil, yes – but at the same time he muddies the waters. Two details: first, the silence and absence of the ‘major’ Tityrus from the text, despite his vaunted poetic skill, assimilates him somewhat to the silent ‘minor’ Tityri of earlier pastoral, who are always spoken to or spoken about (but never speak). Indeed, unlike Virgil’s absent Menalcas of *Ecl.* 9, whom he resembles, Calpurnius’ Tityrus doesn’t even have his voice preserved in other characters’ quotations of his work (*Ecl.* 9.23-5, 27-9). Tobias Myers comments on Theocritus, ‘we know

⁶² Note the quotation of Theocritus *Id.* 3.1-6 at Virgil *Ecl.* 9.23-5. Servius is alert to the tension between attribution to Menalcas and actual translation from Theocritus, and the potential here for allegory: he remarks that 9.23 is translated *uerbum ad uerbum* but that it also contains *Vergilii negotium – nam allegoricos imperat suis, ut rem tueantur, nec tamen audeant contra Arrii praeceptum uenire (ad Buc. 9.23).*

⁶³ Theocritus probably didn’t order his poems as a book, but Virgil seems to have imitated a perceived order, and Calpurnius’ structure refracts and partially imitates Virgil.

little about the character Tityrus: he is “offstage” when the goatherd of 3 calls to him in an eerie apostrophe [...] “The effect is to suggest not his presence within a fictional space he shares with the speaker but an imaginary address in which the speaker continues to talk aloud, but to himself.” [Tityrus], or a character of the same name, also appears as part of Lycidas’ musical fantasy at 7.72-3, where he is framed as a singer within a song within a song, and the wistful tone of Lycidas’ words only increases our sense of distance from this mysterious character.⁶⁴ All this could just as well apply to the Tityrus of Calp. 4 – an uneasy characterisation to be shared with his ‘minor’ homonymous counterparts.

Second: recall the derisive mention of Tityrus in Virgil at *Ecl.* 8.55, the *adunata* list concluding, incredulously, *sit Tityrus Orpheus*. I discussed in Chapter 4 how Propertius’ *Tityrus ipse canat* (2.34.72) is almost a synonym for Virgil’s motto, and particularly ironic when applied to Virgil himself. Calpurnius goes one step further than Propertius in his description of the ‘major’ Tityrus in poem 4, when he describes Tityrus explicitly as Orpheus: *blandae cui saepe canenti | allusere ferae, cui substitit aduena quercus* (‘often, when he sang, wild beasts frolicked around him, and the oak came close and stopped there’, 66-7). Is this an attempt at resolving the problem of the doubled Tityri? – should we fill in the narrative and imagine that the unlikely singer, the ‘minor’ Tityrus of poem 3, has somehow grown to surpass his previous role and become the ‘major’, ironically answering Damon’s taunt from the *Eclogues*? Or is Calpurnius’ disjunctive Tityrus to remain unsolvable, preserving the same inconsistencies that make his portrayal in Virgil so tricky to pin down?

Coda: Calpurnius’ allegorical poetics

With these questions in mind, let us revisit the main question I proposed to pursue: are we to take Calpurnius’ particular technique of biographical allegory as something he sees in Virgil and replicates in his own poetry, or is this a place where he instead departs from ‘typical pastoral practice’? In a sense this is a matter of perspective. All Calpurnius’ various approaches, not only to biographical allegory but to the *nomina* and characters inherited from Virgilian pastoral, echo aspects of the *Eclogues*. Calpurnius exaggerates each element, overloading it with perceived Virgilian traits, but – inevitably – by so doing in fact de-Virgilianises it.

This is clearly seen in the case of the pastoral *nomina*: where homonymous characters can be reconciled, Calpurnius produces a properly unified character; but where irreconcilable characteristics seem to indicate separate characters, Calpurnius sharpens their separation, though subtly blurred edges still nod towards their Virgilian origin. Calpurnius’ Corydon is a

⁶⁴ Myers 2016:29-30, quoting Payne 2007:61.

polemical reading of Virgil's, as if in response to a previous misreading. Highlighting the most prominent constants between Virgil's two Corydons (i.e. *formosus Alexis* and Corydon as a self-reflective singer), Calpurnius demonstrates that it is possible to conceptualise a character capable of both rustic singing (4.73-5) and formidable and successful poetry (76-7, 148-51) within the same poem.⁶⁵ His Tityri of poems 3 and 4 are, as Vinchesi asserts, 'diversi' – but the slight overlap between them reminds Calpurnius' audience of their treatment in the *Eclogues*. Calpurnius' approach to pastoral *nomina* reveals not only the close attention he pays to the niceties of Virgilian pastoral, but also the strange phenomenon whereby this high level of detail in imitation itself gives rise to something very un-Virgilian.

Similarly, Calpurnius' particular brand of biographical allegory is very different from Virgil's fragmented gestures towards partial autobiography: it has one-to-one correspondence between character and author, it runs across multiple poems, it lacks ambiguous characters such as Gallus or Pollio (who assume pastoral guises but retain their real-world identities and name). But at the same time, it is marked by careful attention to Virgilian poetics, and a reluctance to introduce elements absent from the *Eclogues*. I have discussed how Calpurnius' system of allegory, in the case of both Tityrus and Corydon, is created by polemical rereading and reuse of Virgil's allegorical gestures; to this we can add the surprising detail that Calpurnius' use of allegory is confined almost entirely to what we more readily identify as 'metapoetics'.⁶⁶ The 'truth' that Calpurnius' allegory purports to reveal beneath the surface-level meaning of both his poems and Virgil's *Eclogues* relates only to the authors' ways of writing, their chosen and desired genres, their education and development as poets. To borrow terminology from modern metaphor theory, the authors' poetics are the tenor and pastoral actions the vehicle. Literary filiation is encoded in one person inheriting another's pipes, and the movement from one genre to another is expressed by geographical movement between countryside and city. Calpurnius is wholly uninterested in allegorical readings *without* poetics as a primary focus, such as those relating to Virgil's amatory pursuits (Propertius 2.34.70, Martial 8.55, Servius *ad Buc.* 2.1, 3.20, cf. *VSD* 9-10);⁶⁷ he does not even mention the allegorical interpretation of the *Eclogues* most prominent in ancient and modern scholarship alike, the theory that in *Ecl.* 1 and 9 Virgil allegorises his own personal experiences in the land confiscations of the 30s BCE.⁶⁸ Calpurnius'

⁶⁵ Note that it is Meliboeus who praises Corydon in both *Ecl.* 7 (*ex illo Corydon Corydon est tempore nobis*) and Calp. 4.

⁶⁶ The term *allegoria* applies both to what we could call 'metapoetics' and 'allegory': note, for example, Servius *ad Buc.* 10.71, commenting on metapoetic significance: *GRACILI FISCELLAM TEXIT HIBISCO ac si diceret: nisi hac re occupatus, minime canerem. allegoricos autem significat se composuisse hunc libellum tenuissimo stilo.*

⁶⁷ While these often *relate* to poetics – e.g. the Plotia Hieria story resting on the equation of a stolen goat with a plagiarised tragedy (Servius *ad Buc.* 3.20: *quam rem dicit Vergilius per allegoriam, nam tragoediae praemium caper fuerat*) – this is not their primary focus.

⁶⁸ Cf., e.g., Martial 8.55.7-8, *VSD* 19 (*ad Bucolica transiit, maxime ut Asinium Pollionem, Alfenum Varum et Cornelium Gallum celebraret, quia in distributione agrorum... indemnem se praestitissent*), Servius *ad Buc.* 1 and 9 *passim* (incl. 1 *praef.*: *per allegoriam agat gratias Augusto uel aliis nobilibus, quorum fauore amissum agrum recepit*), Berne scholia *ad* 7.57, and many others. Cf. Starr 1995.

allegorical readings rest on what can be inferred from Virgil's poetry alone, rather than from external knowledge of his (non-poetic) biography.

So far, so Virgilian. But Calpurnius' system of biographical allegory departs from anything found in the *Eclogues* in one crucial element. Calpurnius has access to a retrospective knowledge of Virgil's actual poetic career, as opposed to the potential, deferred, abandoned, or implied careers indicated within his poetry – knowledge that Virgil, of course, did not have at the time when he wrote the *Eclogues*. Calpurnius' conception of pastoral – and, specifically, of what aspects of biography can be encoded in pastoral allegory – rests on a necessarily *post-Virgilian* perspective of both Virgil and the *Eclogues*. For Calpurnius, Virgil's poetic roads-not-taken – the *reges et proelia* Tityrus had begun to sing (*Ecl.* 6.3),⁶⁹ the Caesarian epic Virgil promises (and in part enacts) in *G.* 3.1-48, and so forth – correspond to the precise course of his actual career. The *ouilia-rura-arma* progression that Virgil undertook becomes retrospectively embedded in the *Eclogues*, and thus accessible to Calpurnius' pastoral characters.⁷⁰

Henderson comments that 'aspiration to transcend pastoral is *characteristic* of pastoral'; Virgil 'always already stamps every line of [the *Eclogues*], and all bucolic in his shadow, as the start of an ascent'.⁷¹ He phrases this from a transhistorical or objective viewpoint, but I would specify further: *Calpurnius* reads the *Eclogues* in this way, and incorporates this dynamic into his redefined and reworked – but always supposedly 'Virgilian' – pastoral.⁷² Calpurnius' particular mode of biographical allegory depends on an *already biographical* reading of the *Eclogues*; and in the character Tityrus, he incorporates an allegorised, post-*Aeneid* Virgil into his replay, or remix, of the *Eclogues*.⁷³

⁶⁹ Cf. *VSD* 19: before turning to the *Eclogues*, say the *Vitae*, Virgil had attempted to write on *res Romanae* (= *reges et proelia*).

⁷⁰ Perhaps we can see Corydon's thwarted ambitions as predetermined by this tension between Virgil's actual career and the journeys actually depicted in the *Eclogues*: like Virgil, Corydon wishes to leave pastoral behind and undertake grander genres, but like Tityrus, he must return to the countryside after his sojourn in the city...

⁷¹ Henderson 2013:182 (his emphasis), anticipated in *ibid.* 1998.

⁷² Calpurnius' incorporation of other genres, especially georgic/ didactic (e.g. poems 2 and 5; cf. Magnelli 2006:475), is perhaps driven by this same idea of pastoral as already containing the seeds of Virgil's later career.

⁷³ In my discussion of Propertius in Chapter 4 I commented on the strange temporality of commentary or scholarship: the ubiquitous 'scholarly present tense', the sense that Virgil *has* written and *is* writing simultaneously (page 123). The coexistence of Corydon (at the bottom of the Virgilian career ladder) and Tityrus (at the top), within a poetic space supposedly at the bottom but containing within itself all other rungs, produces a similar effect.

EPILOGUE

Not all audiences yearn for all authors in the same ways. During the years in which I wrote this thesis, the case of the Italian novelist Elena Ferrante has provided perhaps the clearest example of the complexities of authorial presence, biography and identity, and of audience responses to absent authors. Famously pseudonymous, ‘Elena Ferrante’ has been ferociously protective of her privacy since her earliest publications; despite the media stir over her works, especially the ambitious quartet of ‘Neapolitan novels’, she avoids the publicity circuit of contemporary literary celebrity, and only her publishers know her true identity. In the rare interviews she grants, she characterises this anonymity as a basic material precondition for literary production: it gives her space and time to devote herself to her writing, rather than become distracted by signings, readings, talk-shows or award ceremonies.¹ But she also champions anonymity as a fundamental literary element of her books, too, one which forces her readers to devote themselves wholly to the text. ‘The true reader,’ she writes in a much-quoted interview, ‘searches not for the brittle face of the author in flesh and blood ... but the naked physiognomy that remains in every effective word’.²

Ferrante’s readers have largely reacted to this unusual opacity with a pronounced desire for authorial *presence*, despite Ferrante’s own inclinations towards a (metaphorical) authorial death.³ In my Introduction I quoted one reader’s expression of desperate curiosity, not just about Ferrante’s writing methods but the most intimate details of her personality and life: ‘I want to know how Ferrante’s house is decorated. What does she wear when she writes? Who looked after her children? Does she drink? Does she smoke?’⁴ In Ferrante’s contemporary reception can be seen the great resurgence of biographical allegory: for many of her readers, Ferrante *must* be a woman, who grew up in poverty in Naples, whose Classical education and talent at writing established her in cosmopolitan literary circles, who has daughters, who has skirted the periphery of Italian Marxist feminism without fully committing to activism. How could she be otherwise? Beside the ‘autobiography’ of the Neapolitan novels – which sketch out, in the first-person voice of the character ‘Elena’ (or ‘Lenù’), this exact life path – her works are collectively a vast project of conveying a woman’s interiority and physicality, from the minutiae of the physical sensations of menstruation to the worldview inculcated by growing up a poor working-class girl in 1950s Naples.⁵ It seems impossible, to certain readers, that any author who has not

¹ E.g. Orr 2016.

² Reprinted in Ferrante 2016.

³ Ironically, Ferrante’s readers’ disregard for her extratextual prescriptions for how to read her works is in itself a good example of Barthesian authorial death.

⁴ Stoeffel 2014.

⁵ Indeed, columnists and journalists have found that the best way to provoke Ferrante’s readers is to propose that ‘Ferrante’ is in fact a man writing under an assumed female name. Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) is the

experienced these things personally could write about them at all, especially not with such a note of realism as that struck in Ferrante's works.

Crucially, Ferrante's readers find in her works not just the (auto)biographical details to associate with her own identity, but a thematic concern with identity, absence, self-destruction, disappearance, and the formation and boundaries of identity, especially authorial. In the Neapolitan novels Lenù obsessively tries and fails to work out where her creativity starts and the influence of her 'brilliant friend' Lila ends. Lenù's own novel meets with social censure for being too autobiographical.⁶ Lila suffers a recurring condition where her consciousness and sense of self expands, shrinks, becomes porous and unstable. The novels are framed by Lila's actual disappearance off the face of the earth: she goes missing, erasing herself even from the photographs in which she once appeared. And the first chapters of the first novel depict an event that becomes a primal scene for the novels' narrative, when Lenù and Lila together deliberately lose each other's dolls – treasured objects of their childhood affection, and uncanny avatars of their own selves. Despite Ferrante's comments to the contrary, anonymity seems to be not just a paratextual condition, but one continually negotiated and dramatised within the texts themselves. For at least some of Ferrante's readers, this very link between the text and its contents paradoxically justifies biographical strategies of interpretation: if Ferrante and her characters share this preoccupation with anonymity and fluid identity, so too might other elements of their lives be intertwined.

It is perhaps surprising, then, that when the journalist Claudio Gatti staged a dramatic revelation, in October 2016, of his identification of the 'real' author behind the mask of 'Elena Ferrante',⁷ it was met with near-universal condemnation. His exposure of her possible identity was characterised as an assault, even a rape; readers asserted Ferrante's right to anonymity and disappearance, and many declared that, even if they found Gatti's identification plausible or persuasive, they would avoid naming the proposed author themselves, out of respect for her own self-representation.⁸ In the case of Ferrante, no matter how strong the readerly yearning for full knowledge of and acquaintance with the author herself, this seems to be restricted to the confines of literature alone, to the experience of reading and responding to her novels. Gatti's real-life investigation of authorship violates the rules of the game, the terms of the contract between author, text and reader. Ferrante's readers fulfil their desire for the author's

classic on anonymity as a gendered strategy or condition; since then, the expectation has grown for women's writing to be confessional and autobiographical. For classicists, the debate over Ferrante's real gender resembles that over Sulpicia's: cf., e.g., Hinds 1987, Holzberg 1999, Milnor 2002, Fulkerson 2017. (Classicists, especially those interested in authorship and anonymity, are drawn to Ferrante like moths to a flame: see, e.g., Geue 2016, Graziosi 2016).

⁶ Geue 2016 calls this 'a manifesto for anonymity' within the novel.

⁷ Gatti 2016. His article appeared simultaneously, in different languages, in *The New York Review of Books*, *Il Sole*, *Mediapart* and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.

⁸ Cf., e.g., Geue 2016, Winterson 2016.

presence *through reading her texts*;⁹ the pleasure of it comes from the interplay between their own creativity and the novels' teasing authorial ambiguities. And their passionate defence of her against Gatti's 'attack' attests to the strength of fellow-feeling between author and reader aroused by these collaborative strategies of authorship and interpretation.

Virgil is not, of course, Ferrante, nor are his ancient audiences to be mapped directly onto Ferrante's modern readers. But this controversy of authorship does provide a fascinating parallel for some of the more paradoxical elements of Virgil's ancient biographical reception. I have argued throughout this thesis that it is in part Virgil's own authorial elusiveness – his determined project of removing himself from his own poems, of leaving labyrinthine clues to his authorial nature that lead in circles and to dead ends – that prompts his readers' author-focused interpretative strategies. Their representations of him as an author, built up from metaphorical readings of scraps from his own poems, are overtly fictional, even as they toy with asserting their historical reliability. They are also fundamentally mischievous, exposing the faultlines of their biographical readings even as they create and sustain them. The resistance of Ferrante's readers to the exposure of their author's actual identity perhaps sheds light on one reason why such clearly inaccurate, in some cases absurd depictions of Virgil took root so strongly (and so quickly)¹⁰ in the biographical tradition. In the case of these texts with elusive authors, especially ones which prompt strong personal attachment and self-recognition on the part of their readers,¹¹ the absence of a fully fleshed-out historical author – with all their messy complexity, their inconvenient tastes, their distasteful political views and personal histories – can be a distinct advantage. The Virgil who is read out of his texts by each reader has more to do with that reader's interpretation of his works than with his actual, historical existence; if one reader needs a pro-Augustan Virgil and another a political dissident, if one needs a model for their own literary efforts and another a Bloomian father-figure to rebel against and overcome, the absence of an over-familiar historical Virgil provides the necessary space and freedom. The circularity for which the ancient biographies have been so disparaged – Virgil's life developed from his poetry, then reapplied as a constraint for interpreting that same poetry – can be reimagined, not as stale remnants of clumsy scholarship, but as traces of an energetic, witty and self-consciously playful hermeneutics of authorship.

⁹ My analysis here is decidedly Barthesian in tone: see his *A Lover's Discourse* (2002) for an extended mediation on how yearning, and the expression of that yearning, can be the object of desire in itself, in literature as much as (or more than) in love.

¹⁰ Viz. Propertius, writing during Virgil's lifetime, when the author himself was still presumably accessible to at least Propertius and his closest circle of acquaintances.

¹¹ This of course works differently for Ferrante and Virgil – but the use of Virgil in the ancient classroom seems to have prompted just as much emotional reading and personal self-recognition on the part of his readers. This is exemplified by the famous story of Augustine weeping more for Dido than for his own soul (*Conf.* 1.20-1).

TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

For Latin texts quoted substantially throughout this thesis I have used the following editions. Fragmentary texts and scholia are cited according to the editions listed under ‘abbreviations and short citations’; other quotations are from the standard *OCT* editions. Translations are my own, unless marked otherwise.

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