ONE

Greek Lives and Roman Careers in the Classical *Vita* Tradition

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For later ages, Virgil's gradual ascent from humbler to grander genres was generally regarded as defining the ideal poetic career. Virgil himself did something to encourage the view that his three major works comprise a hierarchy of both styles and subjects and, at the same time, a unified whole.[1] This view quickly took root and bore fruit: almost from the moment of Virgil's death, poets appear to begin defining the shape of their own careers in imitation of or in distinction to a Virgilian norm. Many of the essays in this volume will explore the ramifications of this tradition. This essay will look for its source: What led Virgil and his followers to find in his oeuvre the trajectory of a well-defined career? This is a question that has never before been asked, probably because the idea of the career becomes, after Virgil, such a common element of poetic self-representation. But Virgil not only provides our chief paradigm of the ideal poetic career, he is in fact the first poet of classical antiquity who claimed or was acknowledged to have had a career in the usual sense of the word. Why did such a thing never happen before, and what new conditions made it possible?

To gain some purchase on these questions, we must consider a rather different idea, that of the poetic life, as represented in the Greek *vita* tradition and its Roman derivatives. It is now appreciated how much the *Vitae Vergilianae* owe to a genre that freely mingles reliable information with imaginative inference based on the poet's own work.[2] The continuities between the biographies of the Greek poets and those of Virgil are undeniable. What I will argue here, however, is that the most distinctive and influential aspect of the Virgilian lives, namely their emphasis on the rising generic trajectory of Virgil's career, is something that cannot be found in the Greek *vita* tradition, but that can be traced in the writings and the experience of earlier Latin poets working within a specifically Roman cultural milieu.

The *vita* tradition is useful to us not because it is historically reliable; in fact, it is anything but. As Mary Lefkowitz puts it, 'virtually all the material in the lives is fiction,' and 'only certain factual information is likely to have survived, and then usually because the poet himself provided it for a different purpose.'[3] But many of the fictions contained in an ancient poet's *vita* can be traced back to specific passages in his work. In Virgil's case, the lives confidently assert that the poet was dispossessed of his farm in the land redistributions that took place during the civil wars of the 40s BC but regained his property through the intervention of powerful patrons.[4] Few if any modern scholars accept this statement at face value, because it looks too much like an inference based on an allegorical reading of the first Eclogue, in which a shepherd named Tityrus first loses his holdings and then regains them by applying to a godlike young man generally assumed to be the future Augustus.[5]

The process of mining a poet's work for 'evidence' of this kind was standard practice on the part of the ancient biographer. In Virgil's case, we can see clearly what gave rise to the idea that the poetry is about the poet's career. Within the *Eclogues*, a self-reflexive voice that is shared among several characters, including the Eclogue poet, comments intermittently on the process of artistic initiation and growth through instruction and experience. At the end of Eclogue 5, for instance, Menalcas rewards Mopsus for a song by giving him a pipe that, as he puts it, taught him a pair of songs.[6] When he specifies the songs by quoting the *incipit* of each, they prove to be none other than the second and third Eclogues themselves. Thus Eclogue 5 looks back on two previous poems in the collection from the perspective of an accomplished poet contemplating his earlier work. Self-reflexion often takes on a generic character, as at the beginning of Eclogue 6, where Tityrus – here as in Eclogue 1 a putative stand-in for Virgil himself – reveals that he once essayed heroic epic, but was advised by Apollo to confine himself to the bucolic mode.[7] Contrariwise, in Eclogue 4 the narrator calls for a higher strain, one worthy of a consul.[8] And Eclogue 10, which presents itself as the Eclogue poet's final effort in bucolic verse, concludes with the image of a shepherd finishing the basket he has been weaving and rising from the shady spot in which he has been passing his time.[9] A metapoetic reading of this imagery suggests clearly that the narrator's rising involves an intention to quit the sheltered world of pastoral for some more elevated genre describing a more realistic world; and Virgil's subsequent work, the *Georgics*, answers this description nicely. Little wonder that the *vita* tradition – which does not shrink from recording a number of supernatural wonders that attended the poet's birth – was able to weave these and other gestures of poetic self-reflexion into a coherent and thoroughgoing image of the ideal poetic career.[10]

If we compare the ancient lives of Virgil with those of the Greek poets, we find that they are all part of a recognizable genre, one that possesses distinctive topoi and that is informed by the same methods of handling 'evidence.' One clear difference, however, stands out. According to this tradition, Greek poets did not have careers, but lives. The Greek *vita* betrays hardly a trace of any tendency to shape its narration of the poet's experience as a career. Because these lives base themselves in the first instance on the work of the poets themselves, one is forced to assume that the idea of a career, such as we do find *in nuce* within Virgil's oeuvre, played no significant part in the Greek poets' strategies of self-representation. Where their work survives *in extenso*, we can verify this assumption; and because the *vita* tradition tends to scour a poet's work in search of anything that might be used as biographical evidence, we may regard the absence of careerist thinking from the *vitae* as a strong indication that there were few if any careerist gestures in the lost works, either. The evidence of the *vita* tradition therefore suggests that the sources of what eventually became the ideal poetic career are to be found not in Greek, but in Roman literary culture.

To understand the pronounced differences that existed between Greek and Roman models for representing the poet's experience, we must consider two additional factors that shaped the *vita* tradition: ancient genre theory in general, and the respective social milieu within which Greek and Roman poetry was created and circulated. In genre, the decisive factor was the Hellenistic revision of classical genre theory, a revision that introduced a system of genres that was more flexible than the classical system. The Roman poets inherited the Hellenistic system and used it to develop innovative apologetic strategies in response to the specifically Roman social conditions within which they worked. Here the most important factor was a perceived need on the part of the poet to define his relationship with a particular patron. It is in the conjunction between Hellenistic genre theory and the social concerns of the Roman patron class that the idea of the poetic career is born.

Considerations of Genre

The first point to make is that Greek poets of the archaic and classical periods each worked primarily in a single genre. Alcaeus wrote lyric monodies for private symposia; Pindar wrote lyric victory songs for choruses to perform on public occasions; Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides wrote tragedies; Eupolis, Cratinus, and Aristophanes wrote comedies. There is certainly evidence that these and other poets worked in forms besides those for which they are chiefly known. Many poets, for instance, wrote epigrams; but it is Simonides who is especially known for his epigrams. Simonides also wrote victory songs, like those of Pindar; but Pindar, who may also have written epigrams, is remembered as pre-eminent in the victory song. In general, it is accurate to say that Greek poets before the Hellenistic period tended in fact to specialize in one genre, and that many cultural forces conspired to associate them almost exclusively with their respective specialties.

The *vita* tradition drew heavily on the poet's own words as the basis of its biographical portrait. But it did not regard the poet's own words with anything like a critical spirit. Consider the example of Archilochus, an iambic poet of the seventh century BC.[11] His work survives only in fragments, many of them quite brief; but even in their mutilated state, they convey a vivid and various impression of character. The *vita* tradition, however, remembers Archilochus rather one-dimensionally as a mean-spirited, foul-mouthed, oversexed coward, drunkard, and brawler. In doing so, it relies heavily on passages in which Archilochus presents himself as nursing a grudge, abusing an enemy, seducing a girl, fleeing from battle, guzzling wine, and so on. But the goal of the *vita* tradition is clearly not to represent Archilochus just as his poetry represents him. The tradition did not borrow even-handedly in an attempt to achieve a rounded portrait; caricature rather than character was the genre's stock-in-trade. Significantly, the *vita* tradition systematically ignores those passages of the poetry that we happen to possess that do not corroborate its argument that Archilochus was merely a violent, ill-tempered, vindictive, base-minded misanthrope. To quote Lefkowitz, 'only the most destructive aspects of his poetry survive in his biographies; there is no trace of the Archilochus who consoles his friend Pericles (fr. 13 W = 10 T), disdains riches (fr. 19 W = 22 T), or reveres the gods (fr. 26, 30 W = 30, 94 T).'[12] In this way, the *vita* tradition reveals itself as a mechanism not only for imagining the poet's biography on the basis of his work, but even for distorting the poet's self-representation in the interest of emphasizing only certain aspects of his supposed character, and thus obtaining a simpler and more consistent biography.

The reason for this distortion is to be sought in classical genre theory. Because Archilochus writes in the first person, it used to be thought that his chief value was as a reliable witness to lived experience in his times. Now, however, scholars are more likely to emphasize the conventional elements of apparently autobiographical passages and to situate them within a strategy of poetic self-representation dictated by the requirements of genre. According to this approach, Archilochus's apparently personal reflections are meant to tell us nothing about the poet's own character as an individual, but to establish his expertise in the genre of blame poetry, and thus to assure his audience that they are listening not to just anybody, but to a master of the form. Thus when Archilochus represents himself as caring nothing for a fine-looking general and as preferring one who is ugly, but successful (fr. 96 Tarditi = 114 West), he is not expressing a personal opinion so much as advertising the qualities of plain-spoken, effective pugnaciousness that his audience may expect to find in his own verse.

The generic and conventional aspects of poetic self-representation appear with great clarity when poets contrast themselves with one another. In his victory odes, Pindar was concerned to represent himself as a praise poet worthy to celebrate distinguished patrons. He did so partly by drawing distinctions between himself and Archilochus:

> God achieves his every aim exactly as he wills –
> god, who overtakes the eagle flying
> and passes by the dolphin
> skimming through the sea.
> And he curbs the man
> whose thoughts soar on high
> and gives to others ageless glory.
> But I must shun the crowding bite
> of bitter speech, for in the distance I have seen
> bilious Archilochos often in distress,
> swollen with harsh words of wrath.
> To prosper in accord with heaven's will,
> is wisdom's finest flower.[13]

Pindar's motive here is obviously not to characterize Archilochus fairly and completely. Rather, it is to use Archilochus as an archetype of the blame poet and thus as an antitype of the praise poet that he himself claims to be. The contrast that is drawn here involves Pindar and Archilochus as individuals to an insignificant degree in comparison with the contrasting generic forces that these names represent. It obviously will not do in such a context to dwell on Archilochus's capacity to comfort a friend, eschew wealth, or revere the gods. These, if anything, will be characteristics that Pindar will want to claim for himself. His Archilochus is merely a foil that serves to throw his own qualities – i.e., the qualities of a generic praise poet – into flattering relief. Such a passage tells us nothing about the actual personality of either man; rather it illustrates the antithetical relationship between the poetry of praise and the poetry of blame.[14]

Classical genre theory thus assumes that there exists a perfect congruity between a poet's character and his work. This theoretical position was sufficiently widespread and well appreciated that it might be deliberately taken to ridiculous extremes. According to Satyrus's *Life* of Euripides, Aristophanes said that the tragedian 'is like what he makes his characters say.'[15] In the *Thesmophoriazusae* of 411 BC, Aristophanes shows exactly what this means. The play stages a male anxiety-fantasy about what happens when women are allowed to congregate in large numbers without any men to observe them and combines parody of legal institutions with literary criticism. At the Thesmophoria, a festival in honour of Demeter and Persephone, a group of women plan to try Euripides for traducing women in his tragedies. Euripides enlists the services of a fellow tragedian, Agathon, in his defence. When Agathon enters for the first time, he uses the *mechane* (or, in Latin, *machina*), the stage device that occasionally brought on a *deus ex machina* at the end of the play to resolve an impossible situation.[16] Agathon is dressed, however, not as a god but as Cyrene, a heroine from one of his tragedies; and when he speaks, he does so in paratragic verses, alternating between the roles of actor and chorus.[17] After taking in this performance, Mnesilochus, a relative of Euripides and his *fidus Achates* in this play, wonders whether Agathon is a man or a woman.[18] At this point, Euripides asks Agathon to infiltrate the Thesmophoria and speak on his behalf; but Agathon demurs: 'I am too much like a woman, and they will think I have come to poach on their territory.'[19]

What drives all this action, of course, is the assumption that a poet's work is an accurate expression of his character. Not only Euripides, but all tragedians 'are like what they make their characters say.' Euripides stages the disgraceful actions of heroines like Medea and Phaedra:

therefore, he is a misogynist. Agathon's heroines are sympathetically drawn: therefore, he is effeminate himself. The modern critic recognizes here the workings of a generic convention, not reliable evidence for the biographer. Nevertheless, passages like these regularly became the raw material out of which ancient poet's lives were written: witness Satyrus's citation of Aristophanes, 'as if summoned as a witness for this very purpose,' on Euripides' character.[20]

Ancient literary theory provides the intellectual context for this tendency. In keeping with the idea that poetry is a mimetic art, and that *mimesis* is a natural capacity of all human beings, Plato takes it for granted that different individuals will work in the genres suited to their respective characters. In the *Republic*, he makes Socrates base an argument concerning the natural capacities of 'guardians' in his ideal state on what he apparently regards as a widespread belief that the same person could not write both tragedy and comedy, or indeed even act in both kinds of drama.[21] Aristotle actually explains the origin of genres with reference to the same belief:

> We have, then, an innate instinct for imitation and for tune and rhythm – for meters are obviously sections of rhythms – and starting with these instincts men very gradually developed them until they produced poetry out of their improvisations. Poetry then split into two kinds according to the poet's nature. For the more serious poets imitated the noble acts of noble men, while those of a less elevated nature imitated the acts of base men, at first writing satire just as the others at first wrote hymns and eulogies.[22]

These are the earliest explicit theoretical statements that we have connecting the poet's choice of genre with his character. In light of the apologetic and literary critical practices of poets from the archaic and classical periods, however, it seems clear that there is nothing innovative in Plato and Aristotle's ideas on this score. From the beginning of the poetic record down into the fourth century BC, a belief that the choice of genre was a perfect reflection of the poet's character was implicit in Greek culture.

If we return to the *vita* tradition, we find that it agrees with classical genre theory in every particular. Indeed, we must conclude that it agrees very closely not only with our earliest explicit theorists, but with the practice of poets themselves, in linking genre so closely to character. More than this, we must also admit that the *vita* tradition follows the lead of the poets themselves by focusing on what are regarded as the most generically relevant aspects of their respective oeuvres. There is more to Archilochus, as we have seen, than a low-minded proclivity to blame everyone and everything. In his overt programmatic statements, however, Archilochus does indeed focus on his capacity to revile his enemies – to present himself as the master of a particular genre.[23] Conversely, Pindar frequently uses blame in order to throw his praise into higher relief. He even in effect blames Archilochus for being a blame poet by way of asserting his own competence as a praise poet; and the result is that Pindar is remembered for praise, not for blame. The demands of genre cause all poets to exaggerate the dominant aspect of their work. In Aristophanes' parody of Euripides, style rather than genre is at issue, but the idea that style reflects character is still very much in evidence. In view of the fact that parody is Aristophanes' aim, of course, the criticism can hardly be taken at face value: the joke depends on taking a standard belief to ludicrous lengths. In short, it is clear that many forces which shaped the critical discourse about poets in Greek antiquity conspired to edit the character of a poet down to its bare essentials, and this was so because the discourse was informed by implicit belief in a simple, direct relationship between genre and character. Throughout archaic and classical Greek culture, a poet's life is his work, and both are functions of the character with which he is born and which remains unchanged until he dies. The *vita* tradition, too, is based on these same assumptions. It is constant in representing the poet's life as a clear and direct reflection of his work and in presenting the essential characteristics of both the life and the work as fixed and unchanging. Many key elements of the poet's life and experience are based on inferences drawn from the poet's own work and from what other poets, for their own generically mandated purposes, say about them. In this way Pindar becomes an authoritative source for the character of Archilochus, as does Aristophanes for Euripides. Thus do the Greek poets become, in the *vita* tradition, little more than allegories of the individual genres within which they worked, or of their own distinctive style within that genre.

So far we have been considering the lives of archaic and classical Greek poets, i.e., those who lived before the death of Alexander the Great in 322 BC, the traditional beginning of the Hellenistic period. This is not the place to rehearse the essential differences ushered in by the Greek cultural revolution of the third and second centuries. It is well known that poets during this period – especially in Alexandria and

Pergamum, where they had access to magnificent research centres assembled by dynasts anxious to advertise the patronage of Greek culture – combined their poet's calling with that of the scholar, the bibliophile, and the librarian. They became professional, something that archaic and classical poets either were not in fact, or liked to pretend they were not. In this atmosphere, the idea that one's poetry was perfectly commensurate with one's life gave way to an attitude that poetry is a vast field to be explored, one that presents the skilled practitioner with many and varied possibilities. This development has many facets, but the one that concerns us now is, again, that of genre. The Hellenistic poet, unlike his archaic or classical predecessors, did not restrict himself to a single genre. He might instead construct a new genre out of elements drawn from several others, as Theocritus did in creating the bucolic genre.[24] Or he might, like Callimachus, aim at omnicompetence by composing in virtually all known genres. In either case, the Hellenistic poet lost no sleep over the question of whether the same man could write both tragedy and comedy. Rather, the poet who was not at home in all the genres might be counted as no poet at all.

As for hierarchy, the Hellenistic poets inherited from their classical predecessors the idea that some genres were more 'exalted' than others. Homer's unique prestige ensured that epic enjoyed pride of place within any hierarchy. Pindar, in the passage discussed above, clearly implies that his victory songs are of a nobler sort than Archilochus's invectives. Fifth-century comedy regularly represented itself as the poor relation of contemporary tragedy. Examples of such relationships could easily be multiplied. Within genres, too, clear distinctions of style might be drawn. Aristophanes' *Frogs* places Aeschylus on a higher plain than Euripides because of the two tragedians' respective styles (as well as, of course, the innate personal characters which their literary differences are taken to reflect).[25] The idea that genres as well as styles might be ranked on a gradient from high to low was thus familiar to Hellenistic poets. The most important of these, however, applied the idea of generic hierarchy in a sophisticated, even paradoxical way. Poets associated with the Library of Alexandria, such as the aforementioned Theocritus and Callimachus, certainly did not aspire to write major epic poems. They may well have accepted the idea that Homer's epics were the ultimate literary achievement, but they definitely regarded frank and open imitation of Homer not as flattery, but as folly. Their strategy involved imitating Homer in the most indirect and inconspicuous ways possible.[26] In Theocritus's case, this meant inventing a new genre, the pastoral, that uses the epic metre almost exclusively (the closely related elegiac couplet also occurs) and constantly imitates Homeric language and motifs, but does so in order to delineate a world not of kings and heroes, but of shepherds and goatherds, where prestige is measured not in terms of victories and wealth, but of song. For Callimachus, imitating Homer meant not 'singing a song as great as the stream of Ocean' but 'drawing a trickle of water from the purest stream.'[27] Like Theocritus, Callimachus worked mainly in miniatures. His contribution to epic, the *Hecale*, was measured in hundreds, not thousands of lines; and its main character is not the hero Theseus, who appears briefly in the poem while en route from one to another of his labours, but an old woman, Hecale, who gives him shelter for a night.[28] The fabric of such a poem might (and did) weave together many strands of Homeric epic, especially its rarities: unusual diction, alternate readings, and other such scholarly treasures. In its general effect, however, this poetry disguises its debt to Homer from all but those whose scholarship is adequate to discern the intricacy of the relationship. Thus it would not be incorrect to say that for these poets, Homeric epic represented the summit of poetic achievement, and that accurate imitation of Homer was the mark of a master poetic craftsman. But to say that they conceived of anything like a gradual approach to epic grandeur by means of incremental steps through a variety of lesser genres would be to miss the point entirely. Even the humblest of their poems might be as Homeric or more so than their grandest, and even the most ambitious would ostentatiously wear its 'humility' with pride.

In Callimachus's case, we may have evidence about the way in which the poet represented his life's work. A papyrus of about AD 100 contains a Diegesis (or narrative summary) of Callimachus's major poetic works in the following order.[29] First comes the *Aetia*, a collection of elegiac narratives in four books; then the *Iambi*, thirteen poems on a variety of topics, including invectives (as the title would lead one to expect: the last poem, significantly, attacks those who believe a poet should confine himself to writing in a single genre!); miscellaneous lyrics, elegiacs, and other genres; the aforementioned *Hecale*, a miniature epic; and six *Hymns* to various divinities in epic or elegiac metre.[30] It is not certain that this list represents a complete edition by the poet of his life's work, but at least one consideration suggests that this is in fact the case. At the end of the *Aetia*, the poet indicates his intention to move on to a more pedestrian genre; and what follows in the Diegesis is the markedly 'lower' *Iambi*. The great editor of Callimachus, Rudolf Pfeiffer, suggested that these words indicate that the order of the Diegesis does indeed correspond to Callimachus's own arrangement of his works.[31] The suggestion cannot be proven without more evidence. Here I simply note that we have no reason to think that Callimachus represented his life's work either in chronological or reverse-chronological terms or in terms of a gradual progression through a hierarchy of genres; and that at the end of the *Aetia*, we may in fact have the opposite of both these schemes, i.e., an achronological movement from a higher genre to a lower. This is exactly the converse, I note en passant, of what Virgil will give us at the end of the *Eclogues*.

Roman Poetry and Society

The Hellenistic poet was an avowed professional, and part of his professionalism involved the exploration of several genres. Here, it would seem, are the essential ingredients of an actual poetic career, as opposed to a poetic life. But in fact we have no real suggestion that Hellenistic poets did fashion their experience in terms of careers; and their biographies maintain the same perspective familiar from the lives of earlier poets.[32] It was only when Hellenistic literary culture was transplanted to Roman soil that poets felt the decisive stimulus to fashion their experience in terms of a career. This stimulus was the product of three forces, which I shall consider in the following order:

1 The position of the poet in Roman society
2 The dynamics of *patrocinium* and *clientela*
3 The habits of self-fashioning observed by the patron class

1. The position of the poet in Roman society contrasts sharply with anything that we find in archaic or classical Greece or in the Hellenistic world. In the Greek world, the poet is a respected member of society, a citizen, and sometimes a leader of his polis, often of propertied or even aristocratic family. Even in the professionalized culture of the Hellenistic court, the poet was not simply an employee or dependent of his patron, but, at Alexandria for instance, a priest in the Museum, which was not merely a cultural centre but an actual temple of the Muses, to which the famous Library was an appendage. In Rome, the situation is far different. Rome's first poets were slaves, freedmen, and foreigners. More than a century passed before a member of the upper class, Gaius Lucilius, made literature his main pursuit.[33] After another century, even so great a poet as Horace reflected on the stigma that followed him in his youth because he was himself the son of a former slave.[34] Poetry, then, was generally produced in the context of highly unequal social relations between poets and their patrons.

2. The dynamics of *patrocinium* and *clientela* imposed a rigid hierarchy and a definite system of obligations on Roman social relations. Although poets of the late Republican and early Imperial periods addressed patrons not from the position of a client but from that of a friend (*amicus*), the obligations of *amicitia* in situations where the friends were not social equals were, in effect, equally clear. Generally speaking, a poem was something that a social inferior might offer a social superior in return for considerations of various kinds and magnitudes.[35]

3. The habits of self-fashioning observed by the patron class were informed by a strict careerist ideology. The life of the Roman aristocrat was dominated by competition for prestige in the eyes of his peers. This competition expressed itself in terms of wealth, military accomplishment, and, particularly, in the accumulation of political offices. Eligibility for these offices, or *honores*, came in a strict sequence, the *cursus honorum*, which was defined by law and very seldom violated.[36]

Within this system, poets and poetry played a very clear and not unimportant role. The rise of literature as an institution coincides with the middle period of the Roman Republic (roughly, from 287 to 133 BC). It was during this period that the oligarchic system of competition for honours within a closed circle of eligible men seems to have functioned in a manner conducive to domestic stability. In this milieu, literature began to be cultivated in the context of service to the state and of enhancement of the aristocratic career. It is thus not surprising to find the poets gradually fashioning for themselves careers modelled on those of their aristocratic patrons.

The beginning of this process involves a Greek freedman named Lucius Livius Andronicus.[37] Born at Tarentum in about 272 BC, Livius first comes to the historian's notice in 240 when he presents (significantly?) both a comedy and a tragedy at a public festival. His next datable achievement occurs over thirty years later in 207 during the second consulate of his patron, Marcus Livius Salinator. On this occasion the poet produced a *partheneion* or hymn for a chorus of girls, sung in this case to Juno in response to a moment of crisis in the Second Punic War. The success of the hymn was such that the poet was voted public honours and inducted into a professional 'college' of poets and actors (*collegium scribarum histrionumque*), which was installed at this time in the Temple of Minerva on the Aventine. The *partheneion* is lost and the dramatic works, which include some thirteen titles, are in fragmentary tatters.[38] Nevertheless, the information that we have about Livius usefully illustrates the early stage in the development of the Roman literary career. His poetry is valued for its service to the state, and its reception is to be seen in the context of reciprocal benefit exchanged between patron and client. Livius's poetry received a hearing because it was sponsored by a consul, and its favourable reception redounded to his patron's credit as well as his own. Moreover, his generic versatility, which contrasts with the practice of archaic and classical Greek poets, all of whom confined their work almost entirely to a single genre, places him firmly within a Hellenistic intellectual and aesthetic milieu.

For Livius Andronicus, and even more for those who followed him, the circumstances of dramatic production implicate poets directly and routinely in the careerism of the patron class. The reason for this is that one of the first duties of a young man embarked on the *cursus honorum* was to stage public entertainments at four of the main religious festivals in the Roman civil calendar.[39] This duty was entrusted chiefly to those who held the office of aedile, the least of the three major magistracies, but one that secured for its holder membership in the Senate. The aediles acted as impressarios at these festivals, staging races, exhibitions of exotic animals, blood sports, and other diversions. These games were important to the career of a young politician: staging them impressively was not only expected, but it was one of the principal ways by which he might ingratiate himself with the voters who, he hoped, would later elect him to the next office of the *cursus*, that of praetor. After Livius's debut in 240, dramatic productions became an important part of these occasions, with the result that the interdependence of poets and their politically ambitious patrons came to be institutionalized. Thus Livius sets the pattern for Roman poets during most of the Republican period. Most of those about whom we have information were foreign-born freedmen, and most worked in several genres, focusing chiefly on the stage.

In spite of these facts, however, Livius is best remembered for quite another fragmentary work: an *Odusia*, which is a Latin translation of Homer's *Odyssey*. Why he produced this work is unclear. We are informed that Livius worked as a *grammaticus* in the home of his patron, and the translation may have been in the first instance a teaching text, something that Livius would have used to train his young charges in Latin (and, perhaps, to facilitate their reading of Homeric Greek as well).[40] This would probably mean that he produced it fairly early in his career. Whether or not this is so, there is nothing in the record to suggest that either he or anyone else viewed this epic as the high point of his career. That honour would seem to belong to the *partheneion*, a poem that performed a specific service to the state, reflected honour upon its patron, and won for the poet official recognition of the community's esteem, and that reflected better than the *Odusia* Livius's lifetime of serving the state by producing dramas for official state festivals. How then did writing an epic come to be not the sort of thing one might do to facilitate one's work as tutor to the children of an important patron, but rather the pinnacle of a Roman poet's literary career?

The answer to this question – an important part of it, anyway – is provided by the career of Quintus Ennius (239–169 BC). Like most poets of his day, Ennius was versatile – more versatile, in fact, than almost any other Latin poet, before or since. Ennius was prolific in tragedy, in satire, in didactic, epigram, and other genres.[41] His generic versatility finds a parallel in his linguistic facility: a native of Tarentum, he was fluent in Greek and Oscan as well as Latin, and he described himself as a philologist as well as a poet.[42] Like Livius, Ennius relied on the sponsorship of the patron class. In 204 BC he was brought to Rome – under what circumstances we do not know – by Marcus Porcius Cato, the future censor. During the subsequent fifteen years he established his reputation as a tragedian, and he continued to be active in tragedy until late in life. Between 189 and 187, however, he accompanied the proconsul Marcus Fulvius Nobilior on his military campaigns in Greece. Apparently, Ennius's role was to serve as a kind of staff poet, gathering material for subsequent celebration of his patron's accomplishments. The tour of duty culminated in the Battle of Ambracia, and upon his return to Rome, Ennius staged a tragedy in honour of this victory – over the objections, by the way, of Cato, Ennius's former patron. Such an event illustrates clearly that poets like Ennius were not disinterestedly answering a collective need for plays fuelled by the official calendar of public entertainments, but were capable of taking a direct part in the ambitions and rivalries of their patrons.

It was Ennius himself, I believe, who set in motion (whether deliberately or not) the process of fashioning a poetic career on the model of the military and political careers of his patrons. This I infer from the example of his epic poem, the *Annals*, which was the last and grandest work of the poet's life. We have seen in the case of the tragedies that the poet's field of endeavour is virtually coextensive with that of his patron: the poet celebrates in verse the accomplishments of the patron in the battlefield, or (as in the case of Livius's *partheneion*) serves as his patron's lieutenant, offering in his name a poem that will heal the community in time of distress. Ennius's epic takes this process a step further. In the first place, its title, *Annals*, usurps the name of the *Annales Maximi*, the official state records kept by the pontifex maximus.[43] Like them, it purported to record the entire history of Rome from the beginning. Like them, it presented itself as a continuous record down to the present day. Originally, Ennius's plan was to compose an annalistic poem in fifteen books, probably concluding with Fulvius Nobilior's success in the Battle of Ambracia and his consequent establishment in Rome of a new cult imported from the site of his victory, a cult of Hercules of the Muses.[44] This conclusion and this cult seem designed to celebrate in parallel the career of the patron and that of the poet. Hercules is a perpetual type of heroic achievement in the vocabulary of military panegyric, while the Muses self-evidently represent poetic accomplishments. Just as Fulvius literally brought back in triumph vanquished peoples and plundered wealth – including, not incidentally, the cult-statues of Hercules and the Muses – so Ennius figuratively brought the Greek Muses back to Rome in his poetic triumph. Earlier poets, starting with Livius, had called the Muses 'Camenae' after a group of native Italic nymphs.[45] They had composed in a native Italic verse-form, the Saturnian, so-called because it was supposed to be as old as the Golden Age, when Saturn ruled in Italy. Ennius associated this form with *fauni*, a kind of Italic wood-spirit, and with *vates*, a word that means something like 'soothsayers.' Ennius rejected all of these precedents, invoking not Italic Camenae but Greek Muses, composing ? in dactyllic hexameters, the same epic verse used by all Greek epicists since Homer, and introducing into Latin the Greek loan-word *poeta*, 'maker,' a word that emphasizes craft rather than involuntary, inspired utterance.[46] Thus, Ennius could claim a victory over the Greeks in the cultural realm very similar to what his patron had achieved on the battlefield.

Ennius's career, which begins on the stage, expands to include additional genres, and culminates in an expansive and triumphant epic, marks an important step on the way toward full articulation of the ideal poetic career. But the shape of this career is contained within and in some sense obscured by the more spectacular claims that Ennius makes about his life. In a sense, Ennius's career is merely an instantiation of abiding qualities that inform not only his life, but his experience in several lives.

At the beginning of the *Annals*, Ennius relates a dream in which he discovers why he is suited to write such a poem. In this dream, he is visited by the shade of Homer, who delivers himself of a Pythagorean discourse in order to explain that the soul that had once inhabited Homer's body now resides in that of Ennius: the Roman poet is, in fact, Homer reborn.[47] It is this metaphysical 'reality' that qualifies Ennius to become the epic poet of the Roman state, just as he had earlier, in the guise of Homer, been the epic poet of all the Greeks. On this view, then, it is apparent that epic was not a genre towards which Ennius had to make his way after honing his skills on lesser genres. Rather, it is the genre to which he was born – indeed, for which he was destined from before his birth. And this beginning looks forward to the poem's end. According to Ennius's original plan, the culmination of the epic, as noted above, is the victory of his patron in the Battle of Ambracia, which is celebrated in Book 15. But this plan was later adapted when Ennius in his old age extended the poem to eighteen books, stopping, so far as we can tell, only with his death.[48] The extremely fragmentary condition of the *Annals* of course makes detailed analysis impossible, but it seems reasonable to infer that the original, patron-centred climax of the epic was later trumped by a plan that identified the end of the poem with that of the poet's life.

Neither the dream nor any other passage in Ennius's poetry explains the relationship between the epic and previous work in tragedy, satire, and other genres. If we seek to understand this relationship – and here we can do no more than speculate – we must rely on the widespread belief that Homeric epic is the source of all other poetic genres. The Herodotean life of Homer quotes examples of Homeric epigram. A collection of hymns has come down to us under his name. In antiquity, Aristotle regarded Homer as the first poet of both tragedy and comedy.[49] Ancient critics and rhetoricians, too, drawing inferences from the fact that virtually all Greek poets draw upon Homeric language, imagery, and plot, saw Homer as the source of all other genres. It probably makes sense to think of Ennius's generic diversity in this light as well, with one exception. If the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are the springs from which all other genres flow, Ennius's epic is instead the great river into which empty the various tributaries of his earlier career.

Ennius, then, marks an important stage in the prehistory of the Virgilian *rota*. In the *Annals*, his achievements in the field of poetry are implicitly compared to the martial deeds of his patron. The epic itself, as the poet's final and grandest accomplishment, clearly takes on the character of a chef d'oeuvre. What mainly prevents our viewing it as a fully developed instance of the career motif is its obvious congruity with the main contours of the Greek *vita* tradition. The *Annals* certainly appears to us as the culmination of a career; but in its overt apologetic statements and in its ultimate design, it unmistakably presents itself as an expression and as an emblem of the poet's life.

Poetic and Public Careers at Rome, 169–19 BC

A century and a half separate the completion of the *Annals* from the publication of the unfinished *Aeneid*. In some ways, little seems to have changed during that time in the social function of Roman poetry. Virgil, like Ennius, was a provincial who made his career at Rome. Both poets worked in various genres before producing a masterpiece of heroic epic. Both these epics mix myth and history; both explicitly rival Homer. Both praise the military achievements of a powerful patron. But these similarities, while real and important, should not be allowed to mask the fact that the role of the poet changed considerably during the years that saw the Roman Republic give way to Empire. The changes that occurred can be understood through the different forms of relationship that existed between poetic and public careers during this period.

One important development that starts during the second century is that men of great social and political prominence begin writing verse. By 100 BC, the former consul Q. Lutatius Catullus had produced elegant erotic epigrams in the style of Callimachus.[50] Some years later Marcus Tullius Cicero produced a body of poetry, much of it now lost, that seemed both thematically up to date and technically accomplished.[51] On the whole, of course, men like these treated poetry as a leisure-time pursuit rather than as a career. Cicero's brother Quintus, while on military service under Julius Caesar in Gaul, in one infamous period of sixteen days became the author of four tragedies.[52] It is no wonder that Brooks Otis exclaims over 'the ease, the flippant ease with which [Cicero] contemplated and undertook such projects.'[53] But one cannot blame them too much. To run the entire *cursus honorum* and attain the consulate required an almost single-minded devotion to the political and military activities on which a successful public career was founded. It seems at first glance a paradox that a consular man like Catullus should portray himself in his poetry as a heartsick lover, sighing over a pretty young boy who was hardly aware of his admirer's existence. The sense of paradox largely disappears, however, once we realize that this poetry was written purely for recreational purposes. Its raison d'être was to provide relief from the ubiquitous pressures of a political career. It therefore contains not a single hint of those careerist pressures from which it was meant to offer momentary escape. The surviving fragments of this poetry are on the whole admirable, but we should not assume that their relatively high quality is at all representative, or judge too harshly those passages that seem to fall short of professional standards. Men like Catullus, however accomplished some of them may have been, were dabblers, writing poetry for recreation, not for the ages. The proof of this statement lies in the fact that when they wanted a serious poem for a serious purpose, they turned to professionals; this means that, like most of their aristocratic forebears, they engaged with Greek or provincial Italian poets who were their decided social inferiors. Cicero himself, the foremost man of letters of his day, was first and foremost a career politician. His greatest pride was to have streaked through the *cursus honorum* and to have become the first man of his family to attain not only the senate, but the consulate as well. To celebrate the momentousness of this event, he tried in vain to enlist a professional poet in the composition of an epic on the subject. Failing, he fell back on his own resources and composed an epic on his own consulate – a poem which posterity has not treated kindly, and which survives in part only because Cicero himself quotes from it at length in one of his prose works.

Not every member of the patron class was a mere dabbler, however. The satirist Gaius Lucilius (d. 102 BC) represents an important departure in Latin poetry.[54] Unlike Livius Andronicus, Ennius, Plautus, or any previous Roman poet, Lucilius was a gentleman. Not that he was absolutely the first member of his class to try his hand at poetry (though before Lucilius we have only a few names and titles). The point is that he was the first member of the patron class whose contribution to Latin literature stands comparison with that of any professional. Later poets and critics, most notably Horace, credited him as the founder of a new genre (despite the fact that Ennius, as we have seen, previously wrote satire). What is especially important, however, even revolutionary about Lucilius is that there is no place in his satires for a patron. He was born to a senatorial family, and might have had a senatorial career. Instead, he chose to remain an equestrian and to live as an independent man of letters. When the politically powerful appear in Lucilius's satires, they appear as the poet's social equals, and often in unflattering guises. One famous passage parodies the Roman Senate by invoking the conventions of the epic council of the gods, a typical scene in Homer which Ennius or some other epic poet might have turned – perhaps bathetically – to the serious purposes of institutional panegyric. Lucilius deflates both the pretensions of the epic genre and those of Rome's most august deliberative body. In other passages he writes mainly about his own activities and opinions, including great and small events: an account of a journey to Sicily, of the poet's culinary preferences, the skewering of a pretentious social climber, something on Lucilius's own love life. In one passage he gives us what looks very much like a personal motto, but one to which later satirists also subscribed: 'I get my poetry right from the heart!'[55]

Here the satirist stands in sharp contrast to the poet who fashioned his career as a progression through ever more exalted genres in the service of powerful patrons. Indeed, there seems to be no place in his poetry for even the idea of a career. Nevertheless he marks a crucial stage in the development of the literary career at Rome. Before Lucilius, the poet's career was mainly a function of the patron's. This situation reflected the poet's social position, which was always inferior to and dependent on that of the patron. But Lucilius was of the patron class. By choosing poetry as his occupation, he implicitly rejected the standard career path for men of his class. The effect of this rejection was to establish that poetry might be a viable career choice for a man of position, an alternative to the official *cursus honorum* – even as a kind of anti-career.

In this sense, Lucilius was an important precursor to poets like Catullus. As a member of the provincial aristocracy, Catullus writes frequently about his own experiences and those of his friends as they take their first steps in public life. He does so, however, mainly to express his boredom and exasperation with that life in comparison with one of cultivated leisure.[56] He mentions the great politicians of his age – Caesar, Pompeius, Cicero, and others – often enough, but usually in order to dismiss or ridicule them.[57] His main subjects, those for which he is read and remembered – preeminently, of course, his affair with Lesbia – not only are unconnected to the concerns of public life, they are diametrically opposed to them.

Catullus is taken as representative of the Neoteric movement, but he is the only poet associated with it whose work survives in more than the merest scraps. From what we can tell, Gaius Licinius Calvus and Gaius Helvius Cinna, friends of Catullus about whose work his praise is fulsome and enthusiastic, wrote poetry that much resembled Catullus's own. On the other hand, they seem not to have shared his apparent disdain for public life: Calvus was a noted orator who actually held elective office, while Cinna went at least as far with his public career as did Catullus. Others of Catullus's circle, such as Gaius Asinius Pollio, enjoyed distinction both in letters and in politics. One should also remember that Cornelius Gallus, long thought to be a crucial link between the poets of Catullus's generation and those of Virgil's, was remembered as the founder of the Latin love elegy even as he suffered *damnatio memoriae* for his military adventurism in Egypt under Augustus. If these men share Catullus's literary principles, they may resemble Cicero more closely in their combination of a literary with a political career. The Catullan paradigm, however, remains important. It is Catullus, whatever we may conclude about his contemporaries, who adopts and extends the Lucilian idea that poetry itself might be a sufficiently challenging and rewarding career for a member of the governing class. Like Lucilius, Catullus writes poetry in preference to pursuing the political *cursus*. Unlike Lucilius, he writes in a variety of forms and genres – but, like Callimachus (one of his most important stylistic models), he does nothing to define his career as progressing over time through a hierarchy of genres. To the extent that Catullus viewed poetry as his career, it is a career that he fashioned to be as different as possible from the *cursus honorum* to which so many young men of his class submitted themselves.

By the end of the Republic, then, Roman poets had defined a spectrum of relationships between the literary and the political career. In all cases, the career of the patron class is the standard of reference against which the literary career defines itself or is judged. The two careers might be complicitous in working for the same ends, as in the case of Livius Andronicus and Marcus Livius Salinator. There might be an additional element of competition, as emerges when Ennius caps his patron Fulvius Nobilior by writing a new ending for his *Annals*, in effect making the conclusion of Roman history not Fulvius's triumph but Ennius's death. The two careers might be complementary, as in the case of most men of the patron class who wrote poetry in their leisure time and had the good taste not to write in praise of their own achievements. Finally, the literary career might be an alternative to the political, as in Lucilius, or even antithetical to it, as it was for Catullus. Against this background, we can see more clearly that Virgil's ideal career did not appear suddenly *ex nihilo*, nor are the statements of his contemporaries and immediate followers to be understood as reactions to the Virgilian pattern alone. When Horace cites Lucilius as a literary model, he marks his own choice of poetry as an alternative to the political career that he might have had.[58] When he compares his refusal to write epic with Maecenas's refusal to embark on the *cursus honorum* that would elevate him from the equestrian to the senatorial order, he develops the parallelism betwen the two paths. When Propertius trumpets his preference for the life of love to that of the soldier, he has Catullus on his mind as much as Virgil. And Ovid, whose intricate involvement with Virgilian precedent demands separate treatment, makes frequent use of these and other patterns.

More might be said about many of the points raised in this essay. I hope, however, to have shown that the idea of the literary career took shape in Rome under the specific influence of the careerist ideology of the patron class.

Notes

Translations cited in this paper are my own unless otherwise noted. On basic matters of Greek and Roman literary history not specifically addressed herein, the reader may wish to consult Easterling.

1 For literature on the Virgilian *rota* or 'wheel' and for a sensitive critical reading of Virgil's oeuvre as a putative whole, see Theodorakopoulos. For a detailed assessment of our sources on Virgil's life, see Horsfall 1–25.

2 The basic study of the Greek *vita* tradition is Lefkowitz.

3 Lefkowitz viii. Lefkowitz's emphasis on the fictiveness of the *vita* tradition has been challenged by some: see, for example, Alan Cameron, *Callimachus*.

4 The details vary in different lives: see the passages cited by Brungoli-Stok 285 s.vv. 'Vergilii agri veteranis distributi' and 'Lis de Vergilii agris.'

5 The inference is drawn by Servius *Ecl.* 1.42.

6 *Ecl.* 5.81–90.

7 *Ecl.* 6.1–5. On Tityrus as Vergil's occasional alter ego, see the conveniently flexible principle articulated by Servius ad *Ecl.* 1.1: 'we should assume that Vergil [speaks] in the character of Tityrus in this passage as well, but not everywhere: only where the sense requires it' (my translation).

8 *Ecl.* 4.1–3.

9 *Ecl.* 10.1, 70–7.

10 For the wonders that attended Vergil's birth see Brugnoli-Stok 283 s.vv. 'Vergilii mater praegnans eiusque somnia' and 'Praesagia in nativitate Vergilii.'

11 Critical editions West; Tarditi.

12 Lefkowitz 25.

13 Pythian 2.49–56, tr. Nisetich.

14 On this passage and on archaic genre theory in general, Nagy is fundamental.

15 Hunt 152, 176–7 (#1176, fr. 39.9.4–32).

16 *Thesmophoriazusae* 95–6.

17 *Thesmophoriazusae* 100–29.

18 *Thesmophoriazusae* 130–45.

19 *Thesmophoriazusae* 202–5.

20 See note 15 above.

21 Plato, *Republic* (394e-395b). At the end of the *Symposium* (223b–d), Socrates is reported to have argued that it was in fact possible for the same man to write both tragedy and comedy. But in view of the fact that he is portrayed there as, in effect, dueling with unarmed men (since his interlocutors, drunk and sleep-deprived, are unequal to the demands of rigorous dialectic), it seems likely that the argument was intended as a joke at his friends' expense.

22 Aristotle, *Poetics* 1448b.

23 In his *Epodes*, for instance, Archilochus revels in his ability to turn his enemies into laughing stocks: see fr. 168 West = 162 Tarditi 172 West = 163 Tarditi.

24 On Theocritus's invention of the pastoral genre, see Halperin.

25 On the beginnings of stylistic criticism, see O'Sullivan.

26 On the allusive character of Alexandrian poetry, see Farrell 13–17, with further references.

27 I summarize the end of Callimachus's *Hymn to Apollo*; see Williams 85–97.

28 Edition and commentary: Hollis.

29 The Diegesis is most conveniently consulted in Pfeiffer.

30 Callimachus was also an accomplished epigrammatist (Pfeiffer 2: 80–99), but the Diegesis does not mention this genre.

31 Pfeiffer 2: xxxvi.

32 Lefkowitz 117–35.

33 Conte 112–17.

34 Horace, *Satires* 1.6.45–52; Oliensis 30–5.

35 On literary friendship between poets and their patrons, see White.

36 On the *cursus honorum*, see Brennan.

37 The name indicates that he was originally the slave and later the freedman of a Lucius Livius, who is unknown to us. As far as we know, he remained under the patronage of the Livii for his entire life, and was closely associated with M. Livius Salinator in particular (see below).

38 In one of the most frustrating passages of classical literature, the historian Livy informs us that he had access to a copy of the *Partheneion*, but that he refused to transcribe it because of its stylistic inferiority (27.37). For a critical edition of Livius's *Odusia*, see Morel, Buechner, and Blänsdorf; for the dramatic works, Ribbeck; for a Latin/English text, Warmington 2: 1–43.

39 For the development of the Roman theatre in its social context, see Beacham 1–26.

40 On Livius as a grammaticus see Suetonius, *De grammaticis* 1.

41 Critical edition: Vahlen; Latin/English text: Warmington 1: 1–465. For the tragedies, see Jocelyn; for the *Annals*, Skutsch.

42 Trilingualism: Aulus Gellius, *NA* 17.17.1. Philology: *Annals*, fr. 208 Skutsch.

43 Skutsch 6–7.

44 Skutsch 6, 553.

45 Livius fr. 1 Morel, Buechner, and Blänsdorf = Warmington 2: 24–5; Naevius fr. 64 Morel, Buechner, and Blänsdorf = Warmington 2: 154–5.

46 For the context and discussion of the relevant particulars, see Skutsch 366–78.

47 See Skutsch 147–67, with further references.

48 On the contents of books 16–18 see Skutsch 563–5.

49 *Poetics* 1448b.

50 Morel, Buechner, and Blänsdorf 95–6.

51 Plutarch (*Life of Cicero* 2) even states that Cicero expected to be remembered as the first poet of his day, as well as the first orator. He may indeed have made significant contributions to metrical technique and enriched the poetic vocabulary, but the verdict of posterity has not been kind.

52 Cicero *ad Quintum fratrem* 3.5.7. The two titles given (*Electra*, *Troades*) suggest that these efforts were translations or adaptations of classic Greek dramas.

53 Otis 25.

54 Critical editions: Marx and Krenkel; Latin/English text: Warmington: vol. 3.

55 *Ex praecordiis / ecfero uersum* (fr. 590–1 Marx = 626–7 Krenkel).

56 See, for example, poems 10, 28.

57 See, for example, poems 29, 57, 93.

58 On this topic see Lyne.

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