CHAPTER 7

*Re-inventing Virgil's Wheel: the poet and his work from Dante to Petrarch**

Andrew Laird

The Italian word for 'career', *carriera*, had become associated with a working life or employment from the mid-1600s, long before its English equivalent acquired the same sense in the early nineteenth century.[1] In fact the first attested use of *carriera* in this way was in association with the profession of literature. In the preface to his *Trattato dell'arte e dello stile del dialogo* (1662), the historian and poet Pietro Sforza Pallavicino expressed his thanks to the Bishop of Fermo for encouraging his 'childhood in the career of letters' (*la mia puerizia nella carriera delle lettere*).[2]

Carriera, like the Latin *via carraria* from which it derives, originally denoted a 'carriage road' or track for a wheeled vehicle (*carrus*).[3] The meaning turns out to have a felicitous bearing on the idea of the literary career which is unlikely to be coincidence: in the middle ages, the most influential literary career of all was visualized as a wheel – the *rota Vergilii* or *rota Vergiliana* ('the Wheel of Virgil'.)[4] An arrangement of the poet's works and their respective themes and styles in a circular diagram seems to have developed from the use of *rota* as synecdoche for the Classical image of the Muses' chariot, an image mediated by the schoolmasters of late antiquity.[5] And when Virgil conceives his poetic *cursus* as a military

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[1] Battaglia 1961–2003, vol. II, sv. *carriera*, § 8. ('fig. *indirizzo dato alla propria vita, studio, professione*') citing Pallavicino 1662 and Frugoni 1960. Battisti and Alessio 1950–7, vol. I, 781 concurs with the seventeenth-century origin of the figurative use, as does Cortelazzo and Zolli 1979, which also cites the first use by Pallavicino.

[2] Pallavicino 1662: 3. Cardinal Pietro Sforza Pallavicino (1607–67) published an apologetical history of the Council of Trent. His literary works include a poem in octaves, *I Fasti cristiani* (1636), and a tragedy, *Ermenegildo* (1644).

[3] Compare Cheney 2002a: 8 and Hardie and Moore's Introduction to this volume, on uses of the word 'career'.

[4] On the *rota*, see Laugesen 1962; Hardie and Moore, Introduction, and Putnam above, Ch. 1, in this volume.

[5] Bajoni 1997 is an ingenious demonstration of this, adducing testimonia from Sidonius Apollinaris and Ausonius, with a range of earlier Classical sources.

triumph at the opening of *Georgics* Book 3, he envisages himself as a victor, crowned with palms, who will set a hundred chariots in motion.[6]

That passage has been taken to hint at a future epic, but Virgil gives no more explicit indication of his poetic programme from one work to the next.[7] Taken as a whole his compositions really only indicate a *de facto* progression from the bucolic to didactic poetry, and then from didactic to epic. However, the four hexameter verses which were long transmitted as the poet's own introduction to the *Aeneid* place the epic as the last in a planned sequence of his compositions.[8] On the basis of those verses alone, medieval readers might readily assume, as had Virgil's ancient biographers, that the high poetic genre of epic represented the culmination of his achievement.

What follows can only provide a very selective account of the emulation of Virgil's ascending course in Dante and Petrarch.[9] The focus will be on their works in Latin, so that most attention will be devoted to Petrarch, as his Latin writings – especially those in verse – engage far more frequently and intensively with the Roman poet than those of Dante. However, the first part of this discussion (I) will summarize the significance that Virgil acquires in Dante's work, with some reference to the vernacular *Commedia*. That short treatment will put into relief the rather different character of Petrarch's reception.[10] A brief account of the way Petrarch's Latin poetic works accumulate to display a trajectory which is explicitly Virgilian (II) will be followed by a more extensive examination (III) of passages from the *Africa* and two epistles from *Familiares* Book 24. A complex and competitive interaction with the poet of the *Aeneid* is exhibited in Petrarch's epic, whilst imitation is directly explored through the *persona* he adopts in his letters to Homer and Virgil. As well as recognition of the notion of *persona*, a distinction between the rationalized author and the historical author will be important for the conclusion (IV).[11]

[6] Virg. *Geo.* 3.17–18; see Hardie 1993b: 100–1.

[7] Passages commonly viewed as connecting Virgil's works are *Georgics* 3.1–48, *Georgics* 4.559–66 (in relation to *Eclogue* 1.1), *Aeneid* 1.742–6 (in relation to *Eclogue* 6.64 and *Georgics* 1.1–6).

[8] See Putnam above, Ch. 1 in this volume, and Horsfall 2000a: 24 and 300 on these verses. Laird 2003 considers their significance for later performance and reception of the *Aeneid*.

[9] Good orientations on Virgil and Dante are Comparetti 1997, Consoli 1984, C. Hardie 1984, Highet 1976: 70–80, Villa 2009, Whitfield 1969, Zabughin 1921: i.3–21; for Virgil in Petrarch see Billanovich 1947, Feo 1988, Highet 1949a: 81–8, Nolhac 1907, Zabughin 1921: i.21–38.

[10] Petrarch's handling of Virgil can prompt some conclusions about his relation to Dante, even though Dante's role as a model or foil for Petrarch's career cannot be pursued directly here: see e.g. Feo 1973, Baranski and McLaughlin 2007.

[11] The rationalized author is constructed by the reader from the text (whether the reader imagines him as present in the text, or as the mastermind behind it) and cannot possess any of the attributes of an historical author – except, conventionally, his or her name. Any details of the

In *trecento* Italy, an environment in which the Roman practices of the triumph and of crowning poets with laurel were being enthusiastically revived, the attempt to re-enact Virgil's role took literary homage into broader social and political domains. Petrarch's coronation in Rome in 1341 represents at once acclaim for his individual success and the confirmation of continuity with Italy's Roman past.[12] Thus the appropriations of Virgil in both Dante and Petrarch are normally approached from a historical and biographical perspective.[13] However, the aim of the following discussion is to show how author-oriented criticism can advance specifically literary interpretation of Dante and Petrarch in relation to Virgil – without appeals to intentionalist models of poetic communication and without giving centre stage to biographical questions.[14]

I

The greatest writer of the middle ages was far more of an originator than an imitator. Dante's works in Latin and Italian, in prose and verse, combine Christian thought with the influence of writers from Classical antiquity. Given the thematic and disciplinary range of his oeuvre, it is unsurprising that the author whom Dante invokes most in his works is Aristotle. But Virgil's prominence is striking: leaving aside his role as companion to the dramatized figure of Dante in the *Commedia*, the number of citations or echoes of his work (mostly, though not entirely, from the *Aeneid*) is almost equal to that of all the references to Ovid, Lucan, Statius, Cicero and Boethius put together.[15] Although the popular myths of Virgil as a

historical author, including his other works, are usually discounted for the purposes of categorically *literary* interpretation because they will be extraneous to the text from which the rationalized author derives. Thus the text of *The Catcher in the Rye* has a named narrator (*persona*), Holden Caulfield, and an author (the rationalized author) whom the reader perceives to be ultimately responsible for generating Holden, for concocting the fictional events Holden experiences and for staging the manner in which Holden relates them. For convenience, this author who is constructed from the text is referred to as 'J. D. Salinger'. The reclusive writer of that name who lived in New Hampshire is quite different (the historical author). For further discussion of issues raised by these distinctions, see Laird 1999: 71–4, 211–13.

[12] Dante refused the honour of coronation because he was in exile (n. 20 below). The significance of the laurel crown for Petrarch is explored in Usher 2009. A text of the *Collatio laureationis* or 'Coronation Oration' is in Godi 1988; English translation in Wilkins 1955: 300–13.

[13] Holmes 1980: 1 remarks: 'Dante's ideas evolved in response to important experiences ... His thought was in a constant state of evolution which is why a biographical approach to it is essential.' Similar approaches are naturally applied to Petrarch, e.g. Dotti 1987.

[14] This is not, of course, to deny that biographical information is important for an historical understanding of the thought of Dante and Petrarch and no pretence is made that it can be ignored insofar as the *historical* authors are involved in what follows (n. 11 above).

[15] Highet 1976: 79 summarizes the statistics collected in Moore 1896 for the main Classical sources in all of Dante's works.

sorcerer still current in Dante's time are disregarded, the presentation of the poet in his work is still very different from that provided by Petrarch and other later Italian humanists.[16] In particular Dante lays emphasis on *Eclogue* 4 as a prophecy of the birth of Christ and on the allegorical or 'polysemous' quality of Virgil's expression.[17]

Two passages in his Latin writings in which Dante claims for himself something like his ancient predecessor's ability and achievement will be reviewed here. First, in a chapter (2.4) of the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* (written between 1302 and 1305) which warns amateurs against casually attempting vernacular poetry on the weighty subjects of salvation, love and virtue, Dante moves towards what appears to be a coy characterization of his own accomplishment:

Caveat ergo quilibet et discernat ea que dicimus et quando hec tria pure cantare intendit, vel que ad ea directe ac pure secuntur, prius Elicone potatus, tensis fidibus ad supremum, secure plectrum tum movere incipiat. Sed cautionem atque discretionem hanc accipere, sicut decet, hic opus et labor est, quoniam nunquam sine strenuitate ingenii et artis assiduitate scientiarumque habitu fieri potest. Et hii sunt quos Poeta Eneidorum sexto Dei dilectos et ab ardente virtute sublimatos ad ethera deorumque filios vocat, quanquam figurate loquatur. Et ideo confutetur illorum stultitia qui, arte scientiaque immunes, de solo ingenio confidentes, ad summa summe canenda prorumpunt; et a tanta presumptuositate desistant, et si anseres natura vel desidia sunt, nolint astripetam aquilam imitari.

Caution and discrimination in what I am talking about are required and let anyone who intends to sing of the three great subjects [*salus*, *amor*, *virtus*] purely and simply, or things which directly and purely bear on them, let him first drink of Helicon and then, after finely tuning the strings, confidently begin to use the plectrum. But exercizing proper caution and discernment, this is the work and toil, since it cannot be done without strenuous exercise of talent (*ingenium*), constant practice of the art, and habitual mastery of the sciences. It is those [so inclined] whom the poet of the sixth book of the *Aeneid* calls 'beloved of God' and 'exalted by fiery virtue to the heavens' and 'the sons of the gods', although he is speaking figuratively. And so for those untouched by art and science relying on their native talent alone who burst forth to sing of high subjects in a high manner, let their stupidity stand confuted and let them cease from such

[16] Whitfield 1969: 94–5 remarks 'Boccaccio, so often hailed as the initiator of the Renaissance, is more medieval than Dante. For Dante ... gives no heed at any point to the childish legend which had grown up around Virgil the Magician' (the story told by Boccaccio that Virgil freed Naples of a plague of flies and mosquitoes).

[17] This observation does not solely rely on Dante's Latin letter to Can Grande (edited in Toynbee 1920: 166–211), the authenticity of which is much debated: see e.g. Cecchini 1995. Fulgentius' mediation of an allegorizing Virgil is crucial to the *Commedia*: Maresca 1981, Laird 2001. Virgil first appears in *Convivio* 4.4–5 where he is praised in the context of a celebration of Rome's imperial mission.

presumption: if they are geese by nature or by indolence, they should not wish to imitate the starwards flight of the eagle.

Echoes of Virgil perfuse this part of the treatise on the Italian vernacular.[18] The phrase *hic opus et labor est* ('this is the work and toil') recalls the Sibyl's warning to Aeneas about the difficulty of ascending from Avernus to the world above (*Aeneid* 6.129); through her very next words (6.129–31), Dante tells us, Virgil is 'speaking figuratively' about poets. The contrast between the goose and eagle which closes this chapter of the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* also has its source in Virgil: in *Eclogue* 9.35–7, Lycidas considered his poetry inferior to that of Varius and Cinna and described himself as a goose honking among shrill swans. Dante's proud deprecation of the geese, his substitution of the eagle for the swans, and his supposition that he, like Virgil, can make these discriminations suggest that he regards his own status as comparable.

The second passage is from the first of the two Latin *Eclogues* which Dante composed in response to a letter in Latin hexameters he received in 1319 from Giovanni del Virgilio, a professor at Bologna. Giovanni praised the *Commedia* (which he has read as far as the *Purgatorio*) but gently reproached its author for writing in Italian, urging him to compose an epic in Latin on a martial theme. As a follower of Virgil (*vocalis verna Maronis*), Giovanni would be happy to crown Dante with garlands before the cheering students of Bologna.[19] Dante's reply took the form of a bucolic poem in which the *persona* of Tityrus, often identified with Virgil, turned down this request.[20] But to placate Giovanni who was cast as the absent Mopsus, Tityrus pledged to send him ten vessels of milk from his favourite ewe. This is widely agreed to stand for ten cantos of the recently finished *Paradiso* but in such a pastoral context the ten *Eclogues* are doubtless in play as well. A likely implication is that the vernacular *Commedia* represented a bold fusion of Virgil's bucolic and heroic modes. Dante's experiments in pastoral are a form of *recusatio* – to refrain from composing a Virgilian epic, but they ended up contributing to a major trend. Petrarch and Boccaccio both produced pastoral poetry in Latin, and later Renaissance authors followed suit. If writing Latin bucolic came to be a benchmark for those aspiring to a Virgilian curriculum, Dante had a part in this.

[18] For the conjunction of Helicon with *movere* compare *Aeneid* 7.641, 9.163 (also Dante, *Purgatorio* 29.40).

[19] The texts of this correspondence are in Bolisani and Valgimigli 1963.

[20] Tityrus indicates (41–9) that he would prefer to be crowned by the river Arno in Florence – from where Dante was exiled. Compare *Paradiso* 25.1–9.

Among many other things, Virgil's role in the *Commedia* as a guide through Hell and Purgatory indicates that his poetry in Latin contributed to Dante's capacity to describe and present in Italian a vision of eternity. What the *Commedia* reveals about Dante's actual perception of his creative course in relation to that of his ancient Roman predecessor has to be a matter of conjecture. Too much can be made of the dramatized Dante's courteous declaration to Virgil in *Inferno* 1.86–7: 'You are alone the one from whom I took the fine style [*lo bello stile*] that has brought me honour' – this is odd given that he writes in a different style, a different metre and a different language. Conversely in *Purgatorio*, it is the character of Virgil who says when taking his leave:

> 'Tratto t'ho qui con ingegno e con arte;
> lo tuo piacere omai prendi per duce
> ...
> Non aspettar mio dir più né mio cenno;
> libero, dritto e sano è tuo arbitrio,
> e fallo fora non fare a suo senno:
> per ch'io te sovra te corono e mitrio.'
>
> *Purg.* 27.130–1, 139–42

'I have brought you here with poetic talent and with skill. Take henceforth your pleasure as your guide ... No longer expect word or sign from me. Free, upright and whole is your will, and it would be an error not to act on its bidding; therefore over yourself I crown and mitre you.'

The poet is thus staged as formally disowning any status he may have had as a model.

But another important association between Dante and Virgil rests on the latter's reputation as a Christian *avant la lettre* or at least as an unconscious witness to the faith.[21] The significance of the apparent prediction of the birth of Christ by the Sibyl in *Eclogue* 4 was reinforced by her function as seer in the underworld of *Aeneid* Book 6 – and the whole of the *Aeneid* is concerned with the fulfilment of the great prophecy of the establishment of Rome which would have so much consequence for the Christian era. Consequently, throughout the *Commedia* Dante draws connections between pagan antiquity and the *Weltanschauung* of his own epoch and his own self-portrayal: thus the imperial Roman poet Statius is portrayed as a Christian converted by his reading of Virgil in *Purgatorio*, and in Dante's celebrated account of his encounter with Homer, Horace, Ovid and Lucan in *Inferno* 4, those Classical poets, along with Virgil, welcome

[21] Augustine, *Epistula ad Volusianum* 137.12: see further Comparetti 1997: 96–103.

the Tuscan vernacular author as a sixth member of their 'fair school', *la bella scola*.[22] The *Commedia* also contains a number of prophecies of its own, notably of the birth of a saviour of Italy in the first canto of *Inferno* (1.100–11) which resonates with Jupiter's foretelling of the foundation of a Roman *imperium* 'without end' in the first book of the *Aeneid*.[23]

Dante's *De Monarchia* had affirmed that an empire uniting humanity was God's will, and this idea of empire is endorsed in many parts of the *Commedia*: in *Inferno* 34.61–7 Dante and Virgil witness Satan as he devours Caesar's assassins Brutus and Cassius, along with Judas Iscariot.[24] Finally the choice of title for the *Commedia* indicates that the work's conception is designed to match the *Aeneid* rather than merely imitate it. At *Inferno* 20.113, Virgil refers to his epic as *l'alta mia tragedia*. By calling his own work a 'comedy' Dante is aligning it with Virgil's tragedy, a complement to it, if not an actual rival.[25]

The author of the *Commedia* (far more than in other texts such as the *De Monarchia* and the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*) emulates the position of Virgil in history and eschatology, and not merely in poetry. This form of appropriation goes beyond purely literary competition: any attempt to construct a 'literary life' for Dante through his works has to accommodate apprehension of political, religious and scientific sources as well as poetic models.[26] And those poetic models – Virgil is very much a case in point – cannot be conceived as exclusively literary either.[27]

[22] Statius appears in *Purgatorio* 21; in *Purgatorio* 22.64–73 he explains how the fourth *Eclogue* led him towards Christianity. Highet 1976: 70–80 provides an excellent accounts of Dante's relation to pagan antiquity, and Curtius 1953: 17–30 of its context and origins in the 'Latin Middle Ages'.

[23] Hollander and Russo 2003 discover significant numerological connections between Dantean and Virgilian prophecies. *Purgatorio* 33 is connected to the momentous historical prediction that an unidentified figure will come to bring peace and unity to a troubled Italy: Holmes 1980: 93–4.

[24] See *Convivio* 4.4–5 (n. 17 above).

[25] See Highet 1949a: 70–1. Although medieval *comicus* and *tragicus* did not correspond respectively to our own idea of comedy and tragedy, comedy was a lower genre than tragedy, as Dante recognizes in *De Vulgari Eloquentia*. Horace, *Ars Poetica* 93–4 *tamen et uocem comoedia tollit* 'yet comedy elevates its tone', provided some authorization for regarding comedy as on a par with tragedy: the passage, quoted at the beginning of the Epistle to Can Grande, was known to Dante, whether or not he was author of the letter (n. 17 above). Villa 2009: 143–7 examines Dante's understanding of comedy in connection with other ancient sources including Virgil. The relation between Virgil and tragedy in antiquity, with ramifications for later periods, is addressed in Pöschl 1978 and Hardie 1997b.

[26] Cheney 2002a: 6 bears on this: 'Such holistic commentary [sc. 'on the total *oeuvre* of an author from beginning to end'] differs from other overview accounts by emphasizing the category of the literary (rather than, say, the biographical, which often includes the non-literary) ... we can define career criticism as a form of commentary that looks holistically at the literary dimension of a writer's life, especially as that life is grounded in his or her works.' The formalist response to this would be that the *category* of the literary naturally excludes the biographical anyway; but the 'literary dimension of a writer's life grounded in his works' can be nothing other than a form of biography.

[27] Curtius 1953: 207–8, 221–7.

II

Petrarch, like Dante, is more celebrated for his poetry in Italian than for his prose and verse in Latin, though he set far greater store by the latter. His work too conjoins pagan and Christian influences, but draws from a wider range of Classical texts – and in more detail. In a Latin letter he wrote at the end his life (*Seniles* 16.1), Petrarch recounts that his father burned all his books, except those by Virgil and Cicero, in order to punish him for reading Classical literature instead of law. The pervasiveness of both Classical authors in his work does justice to that story.[28] But while the Dante of the *Commedia* could portray himself being welcomed into the *scola* of the Classical poets, Petrarch tends to emphasize his sense of distance or even exclusion from their company.[29]

As well as being the object of Petrarch's scholarly attention (demonstrated by his extensive annotations on the Ambrosian manuscript from 1338 onwards), Virgil was also involved with his self-presentation.[30] The *Bucolicum Carmen* and *Africa* are conceived along the lines of the *Eclogues* and the *Aeneid* respectively, but Petrarch's own place in literary history is a concern in both those texts.[31] In the tenth eclogue of the *Bucolicum Carmen*, after the death of the laurel at 376–7 (representing both Laura, the mistress of the *Canzoniere*, and Classical poetry), the future of Classical learning and literature is entrusted to Silvanus (who stands for Petrarch himself); the ninth book of the *Africa* has *Franciscus* – that is Francesco Petrarch – hailed as Ennius' long-awaited successor by none other than Homer.[32]

In the last letter of the *Seniles*, known as *Epistola Posteritati* ('Letter to Posterity') probably written in the year before his death in 1374, Petrarch

[28] An earlier letter (*Familiares* 22.10) had affirmed that Cicero and Virgil meant more to him than any living man. As well as the influence of the *Tusculan Disputations* on the *De Remediis utriusque Fortunae*, Cicero's correspondence is the obvious inspiration for Petrarch's 477 prose letters collected in the *Familiares* and the *Seniles*. The burning of the books is a literary conceit with many obvious precedents in Classical literature: compare *Familiares* 24.11.62–3 quoted below. For later variants of the conceit see Krevans below, Ch. 10 in this volume.

[29] Greene 1982: 28–32, cited in an essential chapter on *imitatio* in Petrarch: McLaughlin 1995: 22–48.

[30] Petrarch's *postille* on the Ambrosian Virgil are edited in Baglio, Nebuloni Testa and Petoletti 2006. W. J. Kennedy 2002 treats Petrarch's self-presentation in relation to Virgil; a chapter entitled 'The life as work of art' in Mann 1984: 87–104 is a good general account.

[31] Fielding 2006 is a recent exploration of Virgil's influence on the *Bucolicum Carmen*. Fraenkel 1927: 487: 'in grossen Stücken ein erstaunliches Denkmal für die Zeugungskraft des *virgilischen Epos*' (my emphasis). Virgil's pervasive influence on the *Africa* is now well established after Nolhac 1907: Hardie 1993a: 295–302, Kallendorf 1989, Seagraves 1976 and Foster 1979.

[32] Freccero 1986 examines the role of laurel in Petrarch's self-creation in the *Canzoniere* and other texts.

offers a narrative of his life which follows a Virgilian path.[33] Dates and factual details are effaced in favour of a more idealistic 'autobiography': the writer's visit to Rome recalls Aeneas' movement from Carthage to Italy, but most significantly mention of the *Bucolicum Carmen* in this text precedes that of the *Africa* in order to give the impression that the latter, like Virgil's *Aeneid*, represents the culmination of a life's work – when in fact Petrarch had embarked upon his unfinished epic in 1338–1342, some four or five years before his endeavour in pastoral.

This sustained and systematic emulation, fashioned over the course of some decades, should not be summarized as crudely as it has been here.[34] But what makes Petrarch's appropriation of Virgil distinct from Dante's is clear enough. Apart from the imitation (or parody) of Virgil in his *Eclogues*, Dante uses the *Aeneid* as an impetus for the independent experiment of the *Commedia*. On the other hand Petrarch's detailed knowledge of Virgil's entire oeuvre facilitates far more direct imitation of him in Latin. The latter form of reception has something in common with the aspirations of Virgil's successors in imperial Rome: the bucolic poet Calpurnius Siculus, the didactic poet of the *Aetna* and epic poets such as Lucan, Statius and Silius, as well as those who masqueraded as Virgil himself by producing poems like the *Culex* which rapidly acquired the status of juvenilia in narratives of the poet's creative development.[35] For ancient imitators trained in *prosôpopoeia*, the impersonation of their model relied on close study or proficient memorization of the authentic Virgilian corpus.[36] A testimony from Propertius shows that Romans in Virgil's lifetime could perceive a progression in his works – or at least an increase in their importance – from the *Eclogues* and *Georgics* to the *Aeneid*.[37] But perhaps post-Classical vernacular poets such as Cervantes and Spenser discerned, and responded to, a progression because the pattern of the Virgilian career was made so evident in Petrarch's Latin works.

[33] Kennedy 2002 discusses *Epistola Posteritati*, noting at 146: 'The poet's programmatic statements in the *Africa*, *Bucolicum carmen*, the "Coronation oration", and the "Letter to Posterity" project an idealized course conformable generally with the Virgilian *rota*.'

[34] Kennedy 2002 treats the complexities, ambivalences and contradictions. Kallendorf 1989: ch. 2 and R. F. Thomas 2001: 157–8, 164 treat Petrarch from the perspective of Virgilian reception.

[35] Suetonius, *Vita Lucani*; Statius, *Silvae* 1, *praefatio*.

[36] Quintilian explains *prosôpopoeia* in *Institutio Oratoria* 3.49–54, saying it is invaluable for future poets and historians. Cicero's posturing as both Appius Claudius Caecus and Clodius, respectively rebuking and encouraging Clodia's vices in the *Pro Caelio* 33, is specified as an example.

[37] Prop. 2.34.61–80. The responses of other Roman poets, including Ovid, to Virgil's career are considered elsewhere in this volume but there is not one Latin poet from antiquity who sought faithfully to re-enact it.

For that reason alone it is worth looking at the manner of Petrarch's appropriation of Virgil in some specific texts.[38] Consideration of the *Africa* itself is especially important: this ambitious undertaking epitomizes the intersection between the climax of Virgil's career and his own. But all the texts reviewed below – from the *Familiares* as well as the *Africa* – throw some important light on Petrarch's poetic practices and authorial identity in relation to his model.

III

Themes and structures from the *Aeneid* abound in the *Africa*.[39] There is an obvious debt to Virgil's narrative of Aeneas and Dido, for example, in the fifth book in which Massinissa, the Numidian chief allied to Scipio, decides against his better judgement to marry the beautiful Sophonisba, the captive wife of Syphax, an ally of the Carthaginians.[40] Other parts of the *Aeneid* are also recalled in the same book of the *Africa*: 5.59–63, part of the long description (5.18–78) of Sophonisba's beauty, compares her to Venus asking Jupiter to help Aeneas: an episode narrated in *Aeneid* 1.227–96. Massinissa's enumeration of women in the underworld at *Africa* 5.657–63 is informed by Virgil's *katabasis*, as are the details of the dead Turnus who is aggrieved that Lavinia had been snatched away from him (*Africa* 6.64), and of Lilybaeum as the location of the tomb of Anchises (*Africa* 6.694–5).[41]

But wherever one might expect references to the story of the *Aeneid* to prompt an overt or positive acknowledgement of its poet, that expectation is confounded. An episode in *Africa* Book 3 shows how its epic narrator can even disparage Virgil. The embassy of Laelius to forge an alliance

[38] The other reason is to avoid replicating the important discussion of Petrarch's career in relation to Virgil provided by Kennedy 2002.

[39] Virgil's influence in the *Africa* is less discernible in terms of lexical echoing, although Foster 1979: 295 observes that 'key words from Vergilian passages in the same metrical *sedes* ... form a substructure'. In addition to the nineteen instances Foster collects, see *Africa* 5.746–58 as a recollection of Dido's curse in *Aen.* 4.612–29; *Africa* 8.45–6 and *Georgics* 4.184–5 (with *Aen.* 8.184); *Africa* 7.362–4 and *Aen.* 1.286–8; *Africa* 7.489–99 and *Aen.* 7.632–40. Kallendorf 1989: 54 (compare 181 n. 5) remarks on the recreation of Virgilian verse in Petrarch's *Africa*: 'Petrarca's hexameters are surprisingly free of postclassical words and constructions when we consider how little serious work had been done before in those areas; indeed the notes to his Ambrosian Virgil and the body of annotations to the *Africa* identified by Fera [1980] show how hard Petrarca worked at purifying his diction and metrics.' Compare Petrarch, *Fam.* 23.19.3. The most comprehensive study of the Petrarchan hexameter runs to 515 pages: Ruiz Arzalluz 1991.

[40] *Africa* 5.240–76: cf. *Aeneid* 4.169–73, 189–94; *Africa* 5.257–73: cf. *Aeneid* 4.460–70; *Africa* 5.242–4: cf. *Aeneid* 4.288–91; *Africa* 5.245: cf. *Aeneid* 8.526.

[41] The grouping of underworld heroines is in *Aen.* 6.445–61; the burial place of Anchises is given in *Aen.* 3.705–15.

with Syphax against Carthage involves a feast in which Laelius' company is entertained by a Numidian bard who sings of the accomplishments of Hercules, Dido and Hannibal.[42] The bard's portrayal of Dido in this embedded poem culminates in an aside which is implicitly directed against Virgil:

> Post regina Tyro fugiens his finibus ampla
> Menia construxit magnam Carthaginis urbem.
> Ex re nomen ei est. Mox aspernata propinqui 420
> Coniugium regis, cum publica vota suorum
> Urgerent, veteris non immemor illa mariti,
> Morte pudicitiam redimit. Sic urbis origo
> Oppetiit regina ferox. Iniuria quanta
> Huic fiat, si forte aliquis – quod credere non est – 425
> Ingenio confisus erit, qui carmine sacrum
> Nomen ad illicitos ludens traducat amores!
>
> *Africa* 3.418–27

Later a queen fleeing from Tyre constructed huge walls in this territory, the great city of Carthage: from this fact it derived its name.[43] Soon after, she spurned marriage with a neighbouring king, although her people's wishes pressed for this, but she, never forgetting her former husband, redeemed her chastity through death. And so the fierce queen, the founder of the city, met her end. How much wrong would be done to her, if someone by chance – impossible to believe – relying on his talent for poetry were to play at sullying her sacred name with illicit passions!

The name of the queen is not given, although 'Dido' is later mentioned by Syphax in 4.5. Virgil is not named either: the bard performing in 206 BC could not know of him. In his other writings, Petrarch drew from ancient sources to highlight Dido's chastity and the fact that she lived three centuries after Aeneas.[44] Here in the *Africa*, Dido is a moral *exemplum* to be

[42] The embedded poem is obviously based on Iopas' recitation in *Aeneid* 1.740–7, just as the situation in which it is recited follows the precedent of the Trojans' encounter with Dido in *Aeneid* 1. The introduction of Dido into this reported poem is also significant. The bard's account of Hercules which immediately preceded the passage quoted here ended at 3.417 with *Sic nocuit mundo vivens moriensque Medusa* 'So, alive and dead, Medusa did harm to the world.' In *Aeneid* 1.496–7 Dido's first entrance, where (as here) she is described as *regina*, directly follows the retrospective representation of Penthesilea's death in the temple pictures of *Aeneid* 1.490–3 discussed in Conte 1986: 194–5.

[43] The derivation of Carthage from the Phoenician 'Kereth-Hadeshoth', 'new city' was known to Roman authors and hence to Petrarch: the third-century AD grammarian C. Julius Solinus notes (40): *istam urbem Cathardam Elissa dixit, quod Phoenicum ore exprimit Civitatem Novam* 'Dido called this city *Catharda* which means 'New City' in the tongue of the Phoenicians'. Compare Servius on *Aen*. 1.12 and 4.683.

[44] Petrarch's best-known defence of the historical Dido is the invective against the ignorant populace (*'l vulgo ignorante*) in the vernacular *Trionfi*: *Triumphus Cupidinis* 153–9. According to

complemented by the account of Lucretia's suicide in Laelius' survey of Roman achievements that follows. The implicit charge against Virgil in verses 425–7 (that he traduced Dido's reputation) is complemented and supported by Laelius who is asked by Syphax to tell of the origins and leaders of his own people. Like Aeneas in Dido's court, Laelius prefaces his words by saying this is too much to recount late at night:[45]

> Nunc quantum nocturna patet sermonibus hora,
> Principia expediam. Teucrorum a sanguine longe
> Gentis origo venit, victrix quem Grecia bello
> Dicitur ad patrios muros sparsisse bilustri:
> Et fortasse aliquis iam tanti criminis ultor 495
> Natus in Italia est. Sed nunc ad cepta revertor.
> Naufragio ex tanto vixque et tot milibus unus
> Integer enavit sine crimine. Namque ubi Troiae
> Matris adhuc Frigio fumabat litore bustum
> Iamque cinis facilem incipiens glomerare favillam, 500
> Inclitus et claris multum spectatus in armis
> Dux Anchisiades, cui non via prona salutis
> Viribus aut propriis aut urbibus esset amicis,
> Destituit patriam lacrimans caramque cubilis
> Consortem, et passus terra casusque tremendos 505
> Erroresque vagos et mille pericula ponti,
> Impiger Ausonias tandem tamen attigit oras:
> Isque, ubi belligerum Latii sensere coloni
> Troiugenam, externoque viro Lavinia pactos
> Reddidit amplexus, sacro pia flumine membra 510
> Deseruit moriens. Puer hunc excepit Iulus
> Succedens illumque alii.
>
> *Africa* 3.491–512

Now I will set forth the major points for as long as the hour of the night has room for talk. The root of our people comes from far away, from Trojan blood, which conquering Greece is said to have shed by our ancestral walls, in a ten-year war. And perhaps someone to avenge so great a crime has already been born in Italy. But now I return to the subject I began. From such a great shipwreck

Servius on *Aen*. 4.682 and 5.4, Varro had recorded it was Dido's sister Anna who killed herself for love of Aeneas. The only full account of Dido–Elissa prior to Virgil is in Justinus' epitome of Trogus, 18.4–6. Warner 2005 observes that Petrarch actually presents Massinissa in the mould of Dido, as he nurtures 'the wound burning through all his marrow' (*vulnus inardescens totis errare medullis*: *Africa* 5.70; compare *Aeneid* 4.66–7: *est mollis flamma medullas / interea et tacitum vivit sub pectore vulnus*). However in *Seniles* 4.5 Aeneas' meeting with Dido is incorporated into Petrarch's allegorical reading of the *Aeneid* as a triumph over lust. Warner 2005: 20–51 considers the significance of this for an interpretation of the *Africa* as a poem of spiritual struggle.

[45] *Africa* 3.475–90.

involving so many thousands, scarcely one emerged intact and without harm. For when the pyre of Mother Troy was still smoking on the Phrygian shore and ash was already beginning to form over the embers, a glorious leader, the son of Anchises, much tested in famous deeds of war, once he saw no ready route to safety in his own resources or in friendly cities, tearfully left his native land and the dear woman who shared his bed. He underwent fearful trials on land, long wanderings and a thousand perils at sea. Undaunted he at last reached the shores of Ausonia. Once the Latian tribes experienced for themselves this war hero born in Troy, and once Lavinia had bestowed the embraces contracted with a foreign husband, he died leaving his pious limbs in the sacred river. His child Iulus took his place, and others succeeded him.

The constraints of chronology which prevent Laelius from knowing of Virgil facilitate a strategic occlusion of Petrarch's clear model. This has become increasingly evident as Laelius' narration gets underway.[46] Aeneas, who was completely absent from the Numidian poet's account of Dido, is the central figure here, but he is identified only by his patronym – Anchisiades. It is as if the actual name of Aeneas (never mentioned in the *Africa*) would draw too much attention to the fact that this embedded narrative is effectively an epitome of the *Aeneid*. But closer examination shows that these verses, even though their organization owes much to Virgil's poem, do not yield a particularly precise summary of it. Dido is absent. Aeneas' Trojan wife and his Latin wife Lavinia are given an emphasis which is disproportionate in comparison with the Virgilian version of events. No gods are involved, there are no prophecies, and there is no *katabasis*. What Laelius relates has a naturalistic, historical quality.

Only at the end of the story is there a supernatural element: the death of the Trojan hero is presented as a kind of transmigration, as he leaves his *membra* (limbs, physical body) in the 'sacred river'. This particular suggestion of Aeneas' divinity comes not from Virgil, but draws from Livy's mention of the event as it is amplified by Ovid, in *Metamorphoses* 14.598–604 where Venus intervenes to achieve her son's deification.[47] Petrarch's use of this episode as the conclusion to the '*Aeneid*' of Laelius significantly prefigures – and may well have determined – the complexion of Maffeo Vegio's close to his thirteenth book of the *Aeneid* (1428) in which Venus secures her son's immortality with the help of Numicius, after her supplication to Jupiter and the assent of Juno.[48]

In Book 2, the shade of the Elder Scipio outlines to his son the course of events in future times, assuring him that he will be celebrated by Petrarch who, though he is not named, is identified as a 'second Ennius' (*Ennius alter* 2.443). There is no place for Virgil in this sketch of future literary history: the original Ennius is to be honoured for bringing the rough Muses to Latium in the first place; his successor, who is Petrarch, for delaying them as they flee. Again in Book 9, on the return voyage to Rome Ennius recounts to Scipio how he conversed with Homer in a dream. In the vision which followed, Ennius saw a young man sitting in a secluded valley (*clausa valle* = Vaucluse, Petrarch's retreat near Avignon), pondering something of great importance. Homer explains to Ennius who this person will become:

> Hic ego – nam longe clausa sub valle sedentem
> Aspexi iuvenem – : 'Dux, o carissime, quisnam est,
> Quem video teneras inter consistere lauros
> et viridante comas meditantem incingere ramo?
> Nescio quid, nisi fallor, enim sub pectore versat
> Egregiumque altumque nimis.' Non falleris' inquit:
> 'Agnosco iuvenem sera de gente nepotum,
> Quem regio Italie, quemve ultima proferet etas …
> Ille diu profugas revocabit carmine Musas
> Tempus in extremum, veteresque Elicone Sorores
> Restituet, vario quamvis agitante tumultu;
> Francisco cui nomen erit; qui grandia facta,
> Vidisti que cunta oculis, ceu corpus in unum
> Colliget: Hispanas acies Libieque labores
> Scipiadamque tuum: titulus poematis illi
> AFRICA.'
>
> *Africa* 9.216–23, 229–36

Then, catching sight of a young man sitting far off in a secluded valley, I said 'O dearest guide, who is it I see resting among the tender laurels and planning

[46] There is multiple reference to Virgil in this passage. At 3.495–6 *Fortasse aliquis iam tanti criminis ultor / Natus in Italia est* 'And perhaps someone avenging so great an atrocity has already been born in Italy' alludes to the Virgilian Dido's hope that someone will avenge her, similarly expressed in *Aeneid* 4.625 (*exoriare* ***aliquis*** *nostris ex ossibus* ***ultor***). But on the historical plane, Laelius appears to be hinting at Mummius Achaicus, whose career he presents as revenge for the fall of Troy. Laelius' *Fortasse aliquis* also recalls the *forte aliquis* used by the Numidian performer for the 'someone' who might one day use poetry to link Dido with 'illicit passions' earlier at 3.425. The connection between Mummius and Virgil might involve a kind of romantic irony: Petrarch after all identifies his own epic endeavour with the achievements of Scipio himself in *Africa* 1.53–5: *Ipse ego non nostri referam modo temporis acta, / Marte sed Ausonio sceleratos funditus Afro / Eruere est animus nimiasque retundere vires*; compare *Africa* 9.233–6.

[47] Livy 1.2.6 *situs est, quemcumque eum dici ius fasque est, super Numicum flumen: Iovem indigetem appellant* 'he is buried, whatever it is right and authorised for him to be called, by the river Numicus: they call him Jupiter *Indiges*'.

[48] Vegio, *Supplementum* 593–630; text and translation in Putnam and Hankins 2004.

to bind his hair with green shoots? Unless I am mistaken he is pondering in his heart something remarkably special and noble.' 'You are not mistaken,' he said. 'I recognise the young man from a late line of your descendants whom the kingdom of Italy and its last age will bring forth ... With his poetry he will call back the long-exiled Muses to his late age, and he will restore the ancient Sisters from Helicon, though disturbed by all kinds of uproar. His name will be Francesco and he will collect all the great deeds you have seen with your own eyes as if into one body: the battles in Spain, the trials of Libya and your very own Scipio. The title of his poem will be *Africa*.'

Petrarch, through Homer's words, embedded in Ennius' account of his vision to Scipio, goes so far as to mention himself and his poem by name.[49] There is no mention of Virgil even here, when the debt to him could not be more obvious. The scenario however recalls Virgil's role in inducting Dante into the *bella scola* of ancient poets in *Inferno* 4.88 as well as Virgil's own work: Ennius' questions, Homer's responses, and the apparition of a youth still unborn are reminiscent of the exchange between Aeneas and Anchises presenting the Marcelli at the close of *Aeneid* Book 6.[50] And what is more, the very opening of Ennius' dream in the *Africa* has an obvious precedent in Virgil's account of Aeneas' dream of Hector (*Aeneid* 2.268).

Thus the poet of the *Africa* draws extensively from Virgil, but avoids referring to him at all costs – and even disparages him by innuendo. That curious stance cannot be reconciled with the importance the historical Petrarch attached to his renowned predecessor's life and work without this fundamental realization: the speaker or narratorial *persona* of the *Africa* (who strives to eliminate all thematic reference to Virgil) is the creation, not the *porte-parole* or mouthpiece, of its rationalized author, whose presence is betrayed by the imitation of Virgil.

A distinction between Petrarch as rationalized author and his constructed *persona* is just as important for making sense of Petrarch's epistle to Homer (*Familiares* 24.12). Virgil is characterized in this letter as some who 'was in very many respects [Homer's] imitator': *in pluribus imitator tuus fuit*.[51] That observation leads to the elaboration of a conception of imitation:

Iam vero de imitatione quid dicam? Debuisti praesagire, dum tam alte alis animi te sublatum cerneres, numquam tibi defuturos imitatores. Gaudendum vero talem te cui multi similes fieri velint, sed non multi possint. Quid ni autem gaudeas tu primi semper certus loci, cum ego ultimus hominum gaudeam, nec gaudere sat est, glorier quoque tanti me nunc fieri, ut sit aliquis, si tamen est aliquis, qui imitari optet ac fingere, illud magis gavisurus tales imitatores fore qui me superent? (*Ad Familiares* 24.12)

Now indeed what am I to say about imitation? You, Homer, must have foreseen, as long as you beheld yourself raised so high on the wings of your talent, that you would never lack imitators. It is really a matter for rejoicing that you are such as many wish to resemble, but not many are able. So why should you not rejoice, always assured of first place, when even I, the last of men rejoice, and, more than rejoice, I also glory in the fact that I am now held in such account, that there is someone – if indeed there is someone – who wishes to imitate and model himself on me, with all the more cause for joy in that my imitators will be such as to surpass me.

The writer compliments Homer for inspiring so many literary imitators and imagines he may be able to do the same, expressing the hope that his imitators' work might surpass his own. Petrarch's lack of reference here to his recurrent imitation of Virgil is one reason to be wary of taking these comments at face value. The entertaining implication is clear enough: Virgil may not outdo Homer who can always be sure of his supremacy, but, if imitators can surpass their models, there is room for Petrarch to outperform the poet of the *Aeneid*.

Familiares Book 24 also contains epistles to Cicero, Seneca, Varro, Quintilian, Livy, Pollio, Horace and Virgil.[52] Although these letters exhibit considerable erudition, such a correspondence with long-dead luminaries is evidently playful: the letter to Homer should not be read as a veridical source for the way Petrarch regards his own work and its legacy. But by again exhibiting a distinction between Petrarch's constructed *persona* (here the dramatized figure who addresses Homer) and Petrarch the author (who is responsible for the ironies in that address), this text can enhance our understanding of his imitation of Virgil from another perspective. If Petrarch created an evidently distinctive *persona* for his own epic and for his other Latin poems, then it is likely that he discerned – or simply presupposed – that Virgil had engaged in a similar practice. Such an understanding of Virgil would naturally entail a disinclination to regard first-person

[49] Ennius' dream of Homer is in the *Annales* 1 ii–x Skutsch 2005. Usher 2005 examines the implication of Petrarch's avowed succession to Homer and Ennius for Boccaccio.

[50] The sense and diction of *Africa* 9.229–31 here recall *Aen*. 6.855–9: *aspice, ut insignis spoliis Marcellus opimis / ingreditur uictorque uiros supereminet omnis. / hic rem Romanam magno turbante tumultu / sistet eques.*

[51] Ancient accusations against Virgil of theft from Homer inform Petrarch's discussions here. Donatus' life of Virgil (45) mentions an eight-volume collection of these thefts compiled by Quintus Octavius Avitus. The nature of Virgil's plagiarism is debated at length by the interlocutors of Macrobius' *Saturnalia*. Laird 2002 reads Petrarch's cameo in *Africa* 9 as following a metapoetic tradition in Classical epic.

[52] Hinds 2004 considers the significance of the presentations of Cicero and Virgil in *Ad Familiares* 24 for Petrarch's literary activity.

affirmations or programmatic statements made in his poetry (such as the proem of the third book of the *Georgics* or the coda to the fourth) as literal forms of autobiographical testimony – Petrarch's propensity for allegorizing Virgil would certainly be consistent with that position.[53] That position would actually render the course of imitation more viable for Petrarch and his successors: no one could be Virgil himself, but it was possible to fashion a comparable *persona* as a stylistic vehicle. That in turn would render it feasible to embark on a programme of emulating Virgil through a succession of works. The Latin bucolic and epic of Iacopo Sannazaro and the didactic and heroic poetry of Girolamo Vida from the sixteenth century illustrate some ways in which this could be achieved.

Even though Petrarch may not overtly discriminate between author and *persona*, an equally important distinction – between the figure of an author on the one hand and his work on the other – is made directly in relation to Virgil in *Familiares* 24.11.[54] The letter lays emphasis on the fact that its addressee, the historical author, is dead. This is accented from the very beginning which recalls the epitaph Virgil reputedly composed for himself:

> Eloquii splendor, latine spes altera lingue,
> Clare Maro, tanta quem felix *Mantua* prole
> Romanum *genuisse* decus per secula gaudet.
> *Fam.* 24.11.3–5

Luminary of eloquence and [with Cicero] another hope of the Latin tongue, famous Maro, fortunate Mantua rejoices in bringing forth so great a son as you, a glory of Rome through the ages.

The last three words of Virgil's lapidary distich had encapsulated the three stages of his poetic career:

> Mantua me genuit, Calabri rapuere, tenet nunc
> Parthenope; cecini pascua rura duces.[55]

Mantua brought me forth, Calabria snatched me away, now Parthenope holds me: I sang of pastures, farms, leaders.

Petrarch's verse epistle goes so far as to envisage Virgil in the underworld that he himself described in *Aeneid* 6 and *Georgics* 4.[56] The engagement

[53] In addition to the allegorical interpretations on the Ambrosian manuscript Petrarch explicates the hidden meaning of the *Aeneid* in *Senilis* 4.5.

[54] The title (constituting verses 1–2) is *Ad Publium Virgilium Maronem heroycum poetam et latinorum principem poetam* 'To Publius Virgilius Maro, heroic poet and principal poet of the Latins'.

[55] See Horsfall 2000a: 21 for bibliography on the transmission and early circulation of this epitaph.

[56] This is not the first time that a Christian writer has inserted Virgil in the hell he Virgil himself created: see Laird 2001 on Fulgentius and Ermenrich of Ellwangen. The 'circle' (*circulus*) is a clear evocation of Dante's *Inferno* – as Usher 2000 has remarked – but thereafter Virgil's own imagery is used to ring some funereal changes on the Classical apparatus of poetic inspiration.

with *Aeneid* 6 is developed in detail: Petrarch asks Virgil whether Aeneas, 'sent out through the ivory gate', the exit of false visions from the world below in *Aeneid* 6, is now there to receive him. While the purpose of Aeneas' jouney to the realm of the dead had been to seek wisdom about future historical events, Virgil will now need to rely upon a messenger from the world of the living to discover what has occurred since his demise (30–4):

> Tu, mundo siqua silenti
> Umbra recens nostra veniet tibi forsan ab ora,
> Quis tria cara tibi loca nunc totidemque libellos
> Exitus excipiat, nostris simul accipe verbis.

And for your part, if any shade fresh from our own shore should by chance come to you in your silent world, learn from my words what has become of the three places dear to you and of your little books, the same number.

There could be more particular correspondences between the three *opera* or 'little books' (*libelli*) that constitute the life's work of Virgil and the locations whose fortunes Petrarch goes on to explain: Virgil hints that he composed the *Eclogues* in Parthenope (*Georgics* 4.564); he envisages wearing a poet's palms to honour Mantua (*Georgics* 3), and he fanfares the foundation of Rome as the programme of his epic (*Aeneid* 1.5–7, 33). Petrarch's news of these locations affirms his own personal association with all of them. The possibility that this association might bear on the relation of his literary production to Virgil's is confirmed by what he says about Mantua (42–50):

> Hic tibi composui que perlegis, otia nactus
> Ruris amica tui, quonam vagus avia calle
> Fusca sequi, quibus in pratis errare soleres,
> Assidue mecum volvens, quam fluminis oram,
> Que curvi secreta lacus, quas arboris umbras,
> Quas nemorum latebras collisque sedilia parvi
> Ambieris, cuius fessus seu cespitis herbam
> Presseris accubitu, seu ripam fontis ameni;
> Atque ea presentem michi te spectacula reddunt.

Here I have composed for you what you are reading, and have found the friendly repose of your own countryside, the path on which you used to roam the unfrequented shades, the meadows in which you used to wander. Continuously I wonder which shore of the river, which recesses of the curving lake, which shady trees, which hidden parts of woods, which banks on a small hill you frequented,

what grassy lawn you rested on when tired, or what bank of a pleasant stream. These sights make you present to me.

The meadows, groves, hills, and banks are at the same time poetic *topoi*. Petrarch's speculations about Virgil's haunts as a location for his own composition suggests that following in Virgil's footsteps is a precondition for his own literary endeavours.

The distinction between Virgil's poetic corpus and Virgil the historical author is most clearly expressed at the end of the letter (53–67):

> melioribus aurem
> Ergo adhibe et rerum successus disce tuarum:
> Tityrus ut tenuem senior iam perflat avenam, 55
> Quadrifido cultu tuus ut resplendet agellus,
> Ut tuus Eneas vivit totumque per orbem
> Et placet et canitur, tanto quem ad sidera nisu
> Tollere conanti mors obstitit invida magnis
> Principiis; miserum Eneam iam summa premebant 60
> Fata manu iamque ore tuo damnatus abibat,
> Arsurumque iterum pietas Augusta secundis
> Eripuit flammis, quem non morientis amici
> Deiecti movere animi, meritoque supremas
> Contempsisse preces evo laudabitur omni. 65
> Eternum, dilecte, vale nostrosque rogatus
> Meonium Ascreumque senes salvere iubeto.

So turn your ear to better tidings and learn of the success of your endeavours: how old Tityrus still blows on a slender oaten pipe, how your small farm is resplendent through fourfold cultivation, how your Aeneas lives, gives pleasure and is sung all over the world, he whom you were attempting so strenuously to elevate to the stars when envious death obstructed your great undertaking. Already the last fate weighed on poor Aeneas, and he was already on his way out, condemned by your mouth, when the piety of Augustus snatched him from a second conflagration, when he was on the point of burning again. The dejected thoughts of a dying friend did not move Augustus and he will be rightly praised by every age for having defied your last request. Farewell for ever, beloved one, and, at my request, greet our elders, Homer and Hesiod.

The final farewell comes very abruptly after a rebuke to Virgil for asking the *Aeneid* to be burnt when he was dying and depressed: in Christian teaching a 'dejected soul' commanded reproach more than sympathy – something encountered by any reader of Dante's *Inferno*.[57] And the praise lavished upon Augustus for preserving the work seems almost to match

[57] Compare e.g. Thomas Aquinas, *In Psalmos*, Ps.36, num. 23: *Iste ergo sciens se separatum a Deo per peccatum, reputat se miserum; et ex hoc dicitur animus ejus dejectus.*

the credit due to the poet for composing it. Whilst immortality is attributed to the characters Aeneas and Tityrus, and even to Virgil's smallholding, the mortality of the poet who created these entities continues to be heavily emphasized: Petrarch's other letters to other ancient authors do not draw such attention to the fact that their recipients are dead.

The imitation of Virgil accomplished in this epistle is of vital metaliterary significance in that it provides a practical demonstration of the categorical division between the dead poet on the one hand, forever confined to remote antiquity or Avernus, and the Virgil 'present' to Petrarch through his work on the other. Virgil's poetry is now the property of Petrarch's epoch, subject to reinterpretation in the light of insights from Christian theology, the passage of time, contemporary events, and literary history. And it is again through a crafted *persona* of his own that Petrarch clarifies the distinction between Virgil the historical author and the Virgilian corpus that is now prone to appropriation, imitation and recreation – in the manner of this very epistle.

IV

Biographical approaches to both Dante and Petrarch in relation to their work continue to be fruitful. However, the selection of texts surveyed above shows that heavy emphasis on biography is not an absolutely necessary prerequisite to appreciate the significance of the Virgilian career for either Dante or Petrarch. And the intricacies of their engagement with Virgil highlight the problems – identified in antiquity – that the postulation of an author's personal will can raise for literary interpretation.[58] Signs of human intention and agency can of course be seen in the responses to Virgil provided by Dante and Petrarch, but those human touches are in the end only discernible in texts. To confuse a *persona* or rationalized author with the historical author, or to read a literary programme

[58] The problem of authorial control is raised in Plato, *Phaedrus* 275, and, with varying degrees of explicitness in Roman poetry (e.g. Catullus 42, Horace, *Satires* 1.10.92, Ovid, *Tristia* 1.7, Propertius 3.23). The 'intentional fallacy' was addressed by Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946 long before Barthes 1977 (1967), which preceded and provoked Foucault 1998 (1969); compare Cheney 2002: 21. Aristotelian criticism, mostly mediated to Dante and Petrarch by Horace, and medieval literary theory are rarely given to intentionalism: Servius' *intentio Virgilii* refers to the meaning of Virgil as a rationalized author. Petrarch's actual practice in appropriating Virgil nicely illustrates Barthes's observation that 'the text is a tissue of citations … [its writer's] only power is to combine the different kinds of writing, to oppose some by others', while the words Dante has Virgil speak in *Inferno* 26.73–4 could have a metapoetic implication bearing on authorial control: *Lascia parlare a me, ch' i'ho concetto / ciò che tu vuoi* 'Allow me to speak, for I have conceived what you want.'

in a literary work as autobiographical testimony is rather like mistaking a fictional character for a real individual.

The respect in which 'career criticism' makes an important contribution to literary interpretation is in relaxing the formalist tenet that only a single text (and not a collection of texts) can be subjected to literary analysis. That tenet has always been justified on the basis that 'if we amend the rationalized author's image with the help of the historical author we destroy the text': the perceived threat is that interpretation of a literary text will be distorted or constricted by the consideration of an historical author or of his other works.[59] But it can be countered that an explicit reference to the *Eclogues* in Virgil's *Georgics* (4.565–6) is as demonstrably attributable to Virgil the *rationalized* author of the *Georgics* as it is to Virgil the historical author. Thus bringing the *Eclogues* to bear on interpretation, even stylistic interpretation of the *Georgics*, is perfectly justified.

To ascribe all the compositions by Virgil to the same rationalized author is audacious in that it is tantamount to regarding his entire oeuvre as a single text.[60] But this may not be unwarranted where Virgil's medieval reception is concerned: generic boundaries and texts were configured differently in a time before printing became widespread and Virgil's poems were presented together in the manuscripts.[61] Moreover, Virgilian 'paratexts', like the spurious introduction to the *Aeneid* or the apocryphal epitaph quoted above, along with other material, notably Fulgentius' *Virgilianae Continentiae* (which was frequently copied and later printed in the form of a preface to the poet's corpus), might all contribute to a sense that Virgil's *Eclogues*, *Georgics* and *Aeneid* constitute a unity. The depiction on the *rota Virgiliana*, for mnemotechnical purposes, of each of Virgil's poems as a third part of a whole circle, three in one, could be a reflection of this.[62]

However, Dante and Petrarch show ample recognition of the generic distinctions between Virgil's works: as we have seen, Dante hints that his *Commedia* offers an adventurous fusion of them, whilst Petrarch imitates

[59] Riffaterre 1983: 5. The argument against explaining one work in the light of others by the same historical author, from a formalist point of view, is that to do so presupposes stylistic identity between different works – an impossibility if style is taken to be the unique quality of a work, tantamount to the text itself.

[60] Theodorakopoulos 1997 offers a reading of the 'book of Virgil' as a single text.

[61] Reynolds 1983: 433–6.

[62] Carruthers 2008: 251–2: 'Virgil's Wheel was clearly a mnemonic diagram that his [John of Garland's] students held; it is likely that it could be physically manipulated, as its concentric circles suggest. The figure of the rhetorical "rota Virgili" may provide the connection between the Latin word *rota*, "wheel," and the English phrase "by rote".'

bucolic and epic in separate projects. But both authors can present their own individual compositions as parts of a whole: Dante's *La vita nuova* (which shows no Virgilian influence) embedded thirty-one of his Italian poems in a prose narrative, in order to recount his relationship with Beatrice; Petrarch organized his vernacular sonnets into the series of the *Canzoniere* which became as influential as the sonnets themselves.[63] The *rota Virgiliana* served as a tool for rhetoricians and poets who sought to remember and replicate the three Virgilian styles, at the same time as it conveyed a consistent identity underlying the poet's works. But the circular form of the wheel could not linearise the *Eclogues*, *Georgics* and *Aeneid* into a temporal sequence. And it is certainly the case that Petrarch did not follow the diachronic trajectory of his Roman precursor, as he only started composing his own pastoral poetry after he had embarked on his heroic epic. However, the hints, such as we find in the *Epistola Posteritati*, that the *Africa* succeeded the *Bucolicum Carmen* – compounded with the disciplined memorization of Virgil's corpus – may have helped to spin the Virgilian literary career into motion as a vehicle for Petrarch's successors.

[63] Carrai 2009.

CLASSICAL LITERARY CAREERS AND THEIR RECEPTION

EDITED BY

PHILIP HARDIE
Trinity College, Cambridge

and

HELEN MOORE
Corpus Christi College, Oxford

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