EMPIRICAL AND THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO LITERARY GENRE

Critics who intend to deal with poetic genres would do well to abandon the false dilemma of empiricism versus theory. It might seem that they could accomplish this by practicing good empiricism and healthy theory; but it is obvious that two one-sided and extreme positions cannot be ennobled simply by adding a positive adjective to them. Instead, we should perhaps think of good criticism as Aristotle thought of *aretê*, as a summit rising between two symmetric vices, one due to excess and the other due to insufficiency. Now, just as one cannot produce courage by wedding a good cowardice to a good rashness—that is, by ennobling two vices and thereby algebraically canceling them out—so too good criticism does not spring from the correction of a methodological near- or far-sightedness by merely enlarging or restricting the visual field. When good criticism succeeds, it does so by discrediting both the kind of empiricism whose attention is directed obsessively to naturalistically understood details (that is, to naked data, to evidence presumed to speak for itself) and the kind of theory which is nebulous and abstract, which loses sight of how a text is put together and of its fine and specific texture. Hence, good empiricism is neither directed at single "lived realities" nor does it compare with one another fragments of *Realia* and of poetic texts, adding if necessary a wider horizon of interpretation as a simple corrective. Vice versa, and complementarily, healthy theory does not search for a recipe for poetic composition which simply needs to be "filled" with empirical contents. Thus the dispute between one-sided empiricism as contrasted with theory, and one-sided theory as contrasted with empiricism, is one, in Aristotelian terms, between two low-level notions, both far removed from the "summit" of *aretê*. To put this in other terms, flaws of method are made manifest by actual critical research—when it fails.

My own position is beset with many difficulties. For example, my stubborn refusal to believe in genres as handbooks of poetic composition ends up forcing me to deny myself a critical position I would have every interest in having as an ally, given that I too wish to indulge in the vice of believing in the usefulness of genre in the interpretation of texts. What makes matters worse is that, as must be clear by now, my ideas do *not* represent an attempt to mediate between these two hostile camps. I admit at once that my position is a response

to my dissatisfaction at constantly trying to perfect an imperfect instrument which nevertheless allows me to go ahead in my work. Hence I am unhappy with my own results, but I am also dissatisfied with the way in which many classicists continue to study (and also, fail to study) literary genre:[1] this is a general impression, but the field I shall be considering today is itself a large one—that of classical Roman poetry.

Given that much of what I shall be saying is problematic and controversial, I would like to begin by establishing at least one point. In my view, at least one function gives meaning to the critical concept of genre and makes its study useful: that is, the function of associating elements of content and of form, putting them into relation and correspondence with one another. Only if the category of genre succeeds in establishing a non-arbitrary and non-impressionistic connection between these two levels, does it seem to me useful and also, if I may say so, reasonable. A category of genre based exclusively upon formal features is clearly unacceptable: what scholar, for example, would be willing to consider all poetry written in the Aeolic dialect as a single genre? Such a connection would be not only merely formal, but contingent and superficial. But it is just as dangerous (and it is more common in recent studies) to think of genre as a typology founded exclusively upon typical contents: *topoi*, recurrent themes and motifs, situations. A classification by contents runs the danger of never indicating the boundary between the general

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1   The paper by L.E. Rossi, "I generi letterari e le loro leggi scritte e non scritte nelle letterature classiche," *BICS* 18 (1971) 69-94, which is important on many counts, has the great merit of having reopened the discussion on genres. The need to renew that debate arose from the fact that the Positivist sleep in Germany had made genres an "obvious" category—a static, mechanical interpretative modulus—while, in the following generation, in Italy, the Crocian school had unwisely excluded genres from critical consideration. In line with Rossi's paper, even if with a few significant differences, there has been the contribution by M. Fantuzzi, "La contaminazione dei generi letterari nella letteratura greca ellenistica: rifiuto del sistema o evoluzione di un sistema?," *Lingua e Stile* 15 (1980) 433-450. A valuable recent paper by T.G. Rosenmeyer, "Ancient Literary Genres: A Mirage?," *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* 34 (1985) 74-84, especially 81 f. (with useful bibliography) argues that the ancients tended to think less in terms of genres than in those of the imitation of specific poetic precedents. Rosenmeyer is undoubtedly right, but it must be pointed out that, if imitation is to be successful, it necessarily involves a degree of *generalisation*, in the sense that the imitative process requires the poet who is imitating to set up a relationship whereby an acknowledged textual model becomes a generally applicable matrix for the production of new texts. I trust Dr. Horsfall will forgive me a brief excursion into jargon if I say that the special relationship between a recognized model and its successful imitation makes possible a "transfer of competence." The capable imitator does not engage in an act of literary theft, but reaches the point where he is able to "write in the manner of" his predecessor (for example, in the way a great epic poet had written). To be able to do this, he chooses certain distinctive features of the exemplary text, identifies them as being typical of and essential to the poetic quality of the text as a whole, and then makes them part of a new (personal) matrix that he himself becomes able to apply.

and the particular: if for example we agree to call "a dying man's last words" a genre, there is no reason to stop there, and we could just as well accept such genres as "the poet meets Cupid at night" or "the poet is transformed into a swan." To argue in this way is to fail to set a clear boundary between the genre as *generative matrix* on the one hand (more on this below) and the individual classification of single texts on the other, for it is to lose sight of the connection between structures of content and structures of expression. Genre thereby becomes downgraded to a (fixed) recipe, to a mechanical handbook of production, and ceases to be an optional strategy of literary composition.

There have always been scholars who are skeptical about the interpretative usefulness of literary genres and have preferred to argue in terms of "real life" and literature, in terms of lived experience, of Realia, to be set against the distinctive individuality of single texts. For these empirically minded critics, there are only naked facts on the one hand and literature on the other: the middle is populated by such unserviceable abstractions as, precisely, "genre." Often these stubborn empiricists start out from a justified polemic, reacting against the kind of historicism which regards the pedigree of a notion as a sufficient explanation of its meaning and tells us about genres in terms of the birth, life, and death of organisms. If my foreigner's ear does not mislead me, your very word *genre* is somewhat vaguer, less assertive and triumphant than its German equivalent *Gattung*: evidently in this case, too, the fundamentally empirical Anglo-American tradition feels a certain reluctance to adopt such weighty, demanding abstractions.

But the empirical attitude, too, is open to serious objections, with regard both to its treatment of literature and to its presuppositions about real life. The naturalistic illusion, the *naturalistic fallacy*, tends to believe that there are such things as naked facts, by contrast with literary elaboration and with culture: but the facts that interest us always, so to speak, have clothes on. It is the bizarre habit of a certain kind of historicism (which seems to provide the framework for a certain kind of scholarship) to forget that history is a process and hence to immobilize it in the form of a series of isolated facts directly affecting the poet's consciousness (conceived as a wax tablet upon which events impress themselves). The old vice of naturalistic reductionism imagines that real historical events are naturalistically present, evident in themselves, that they can be separated from the system of interpretation, from the very way in which they are experienced; and it forgets, too, that in general neither history nor any consciousness of experience whatsoever can exist without having

already passed through the historical forms of linguistic and perceptual codes and cultural codes.

Facts acquire meaning only in connection with one another. A genre is not made up by "stuffing" it with isolated fragments of content, but by a total system of reciprocal, structured relations: the single element must enter into a constellation with others if it is to be transvalued and redefined until it too is able to connote, by itself, the presence of a whole genre. Ovid, for example, is a poet who is very interested in the relative nature of genres and in the possibility of using certain elements derived from different codes. He is fascinated by coincidences and overlapping images. Consider a word like *arma*: within a certain constellation, this announces an epic theme, and the very word can even be considered an unambiguous symbol, a connotative signpost pointing to the genre of epic poetry. Thus the first love-story of the *Metamorphoses*, that of Daphne, is introduced by a prologue which stages an emblematic dispute between Apollo and Cupid:[2] to whom does a military weapon like the bow properly belong, i.e. within whose competence does it lie? of which literary genre is it the sign? The dispute arises from the fact that, as Ovid notes, Cupid too has *arma*, which are a distinctive feature of the elegiac code: Ovid can hinge his discourse upon this coincidence and let it pivot from epic to elegy.[3] Or consider Mercury's magical *virga*. As a divine attribute, this is an element of epic; on the other hand, we all know that the *virga* is used by shepherds too, including the shepherds of the bucolic genre. One scene of the *Metamorphoses* is typically epic: the father of the gods charges Mercury with a mission to be performed on earth. But the monstrous Argus he will have to deal with there is a guardian of herds. At once the scene is transformed from epic to bucolic, and Mercury starts to speak in a bucolic style. Yet he still has his *virga* with him—it has simply changed function (now it is the stick with which the shepherd directs the flock), and its polyvalence

2   It has been observed that Ovid returns here to the dilemma which he had "staged" in the proem of the *Amores:* there Cupid had dissuaded the poet intent upon singing *arma . . . violentaque bella* and imposed upon him the elegiac rhythm by simply stealing a metrical foot; the episode continued with a dispute about spheres of competence and ended with an arrow well aimed by Cupid (a love-affair). Cf. W.S.M. Nicoll, "Cupid, Apollo and Daphne (Ov., *Met.* 1.452ff.)," *CQ* 30 (1980) 174ff.; cf. also E.J. Kenney, "Introduction" to *Ovid. Metamorphoses*, trans. A.D. Melville (Oxford-New York 1986), pp. xvii-xviii.

3   At the very moment he drags Apollo out of the epic world to carry him into the world of elegy (just as in the proem of the *Amores* the poet himself was carried from epic into elegy), Cupid significantly takes on the language and gestures of the epic hero: hence the proclamation of a challenge (*Met.* 1.463-65), the "formula of transition to action" *dixit et . . .*, the description of the warrior-archer's gestures and weapons, finally (this is the custom in epic) the description of how the missile reaches its target: *laesit Apollineas traiecta per ossa medullas (ibid.* 473).

underlines even more the change of code and of world. The task of changing the whole structure in this way is assigned to a difference in the constellation of the signifying elements: before this "metamorphosis," Mercury is depicted as the epic messenger with winged sandals, petasus and magic wand; in his new guise, the only element which has remained, the *virga*—in metamorphosis one element which is present both before and after—becomes the signal of the cardinal element is present both before and after—becomes the signal of the world of shepherds by entering into relation with the other characterizing elements, such as she-goats and shepherds' pipes.[4] Behind the unchanging objects and words emerges the power of the relations and systems of signs which are literary genres.

It is a fact, for example, that the lyric poets drink a lot and the elegiac ones much less. Wine helps the lyric poet to sing and to compose poetry, while in general the elegiac poets seem to regard wine at most as a kind of antidote for unhappy love, and they speak emphatically about drinking pure water.[5] The elegist Propertius who comes home tipsy one evening is a swallow that does not make a summer. Our ways of reacting to this simple fact can be very diverse: to begin with, we might think of it as merely a reflection of biographical, historically authentic preferences—a possibility we should not exclude, as I suspect that Horace was a true connoisseur of wines. On the other hand, it has been convincingly demonstrated that poetic alcoholism is a special case and belongs to a controversy in poetic theory: as you know, Callimachus had ascribed his own initiation as a poet to the water of the "holy spring,"[6] while Alcaeus (at least to judge from the fragments) talks about hardly anything except wine.[7] In short, drinking water and drinking wine had also become symbols of two different poetics. Both activities entertain metaphoric or metonymic relations with the literary genre they designate, but at the same time (a very important point) they *enter into a systematic relationship* with

4   *Met.* 1.674ff.: *illic tegumenque removit / et posuit pennas, tantummodo virga retenta est: / hac agit ut pastor per devia rura capellas. / dum venit, adductas et structis cantat avenis.*
5   Cf. e.g. Prop. 3.1.3 *puro de fonte*; 3.1.6 *quamve bibistis aquam?*; 3.3.5 *admoram fontibus ora*; 3.3.51f. *lymphisque a fonte petitis / ora Philitea nostra rigavit aqua.* Useful comparative material and numerous bibliographic indications can be found collected in the commentary of P. Fedeli on the passages cited.
6   This is the source of later epigrammatists' polemical image of the Callimachean poet as *hydropotes*: cf most recently P.E. Knox, "Wine, Water, and Callimachean Polemics," *HSCP* 89 (1985) 107-19.
7   In a well-known, amusing passage in *The Deipnosophists* (10. 430a-d) Athenaeus, who has, in fact, preserved many of these fragments, makes one of his characters say that Alcaeus appears to be such a *philopotes* that he "drinks wine in all seasons and circumstances: . . . in winter, . . . in summer, . . . in spring, . . . in misfortune, . . . in happy times" (cf. also *ibid.* 429a , 436f).

their own opposite, and produce meaning in this way as well. In other words, speaking emphatically about the drinking of water is meaningful precisely because the effects of wine have been recommended and extolled. Speaking more generally, a phenomenon can become meaningful only on condition that it enters into a system, so setting up a relationship with something that is not already a cultural or literary sign.

Now it might be objected that what I am proposing really amounts merely to a new version of the familiar dichotomy between experience and literature, between empiricists and conventionalists, perhaps with an implicit preference for art over life; but in fact my point is quite different. For there is no reason to believe that the "system" (let us call it this) which I have outlined functions only in literature. "Real life" too is structured by cultural images and models, by symbolic choices, by communicative and perceptual codes: in real life too—in that of the Romans, for example—drinking wine is certainly an everyday activity motivated by familiar gastronomic qualities, but at the same time it can also act as a directed signal, understandable within a complex system of references such as water, blood, luxury, Dionysus, the symposium, the consumption of Greek products, virility, death, etc.; each of these elements then enters into a constellation with its opposites and contraries, corollaries, connotations, etc. Hence poetry does not work on "primary" realities, naked, isolated objects for collection, but instead deals with a cultural (or, if you prefer, culturalized) reality, one which is semiotic, already marked by conventions and tensions. That is why the biographical approach does not do justice to reality.

So much for reality, for "real life." But matters are no better with regard to literature. As Jasper Griffin has well observed,[8] the fact that there were many young Werthers in Europe around 1800 and Don Juans around 1820 has to do with the success of these works, and with their influence upon reality, rather than with their realism. Literature acts on cultural models which act on "real life" and transform it. Is Roman elegy the description of a world or the blueprint for a world? Our understanding of it benefits from the adoption of the second view.[9]

8   *Latin Poets and Roman Life* (London 1985) 3.
9   This point can be developed further, extending J. Griffin's observations and, like him, speaking in terms of examples. Don Quixote decides to set out for adventure because he has read handbooks of chivalry; in his readings he has admired the deeds of the famous knight-errant Amadis of Gaul and now he wants to imitate the model represented in chivalric literature. This model is the "mediator" of the form of life which Don Quixote wants to act out. Between the reality to be experienced and the subject of this experience intervenes the mediation of the

What is the place of genres in this view? I have already suggested that genres are matrices of works, to be conceived not as recipes but as strategies: they act in texts not *ante rem* or *post rem* but *in re*. They are like strategies, procedures whose own functioning can only be completed by the response of an addressee whom the very form of the text renders precise and recognizable. If poetry is conceived more as the blueprint for a world than as mimesis, then, as we shall see more clearly below, it is hard to do without genres.

Here too we must deal with the effects of a "realistic" approach which tries to create a short-circuit between individual texts and naked biographical realities. One influential Horatian scholar, discussing an *Epode* dedicated to the sexual desire of a woman who is no longer young and beautiful, not only sets about reconstructing the typology of this character in the social reality of late Republican Rome but even goes so far as to postulate an autobiographical importance for her: "Horace shows that he has endured the lust of one or two of these ladies" (one or two? well, well!) "(one or two depending on whether or not the lady in Epode 12 is identified with the one in Epode 8)."[10] The same critic declares that he is inclined to believe that we are dealing here with the poet's real experience: was Horace supposed to give the impression that it was false? But is it really the critic's job to feel on his palate the "bitter taste of life," perhaps by so arranging his own senses as to recapture the reek of a libidinous old lady (or even of two: the number, alas, as you have seen, is destined to remain uncertain even for those who wish to bring the unflattering catalogue up to date), or is it not rather his task to explain the text better as a literary work? What is gained by wondering about the biographical reality of these encounters? Perhaps it would be better to ask why in the *Epodes* Horace continually meets caricatures of eager lovers and of old grandmothers but in the *Odes,* as far as we can tell, almost only delicate blondes, ripe young maidens available for existential speculation: a fortunate twist of fate? If readers do not understand that they have changed "worlds" (as a first step towards understanding the individual poems), it will be dangerous for them to

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literary model as a "form of experience," a model of the perception and elaboration of reality itself. Amadis (it will be objected) is a fictional character; of course, but the author of the fiction, the story, is not Don Quixote: the mediator is imaginary, the mediation is not. And, to take another example, it will once again be literature that "produces," so to speak, Madame Bovary's form of experience and determines her desire: the heroine's imagination is completely full of literary examples encountered in the course of reading popular romances and the passionate love stories of the scandal sheets, which constitute the "mediators" between real life and ideal life, between reality and the model according to which reality is perceived.

10   A. La Penna, *Orazio e la morale mondana europea*, introd. to *Orazio: Tutte le opere*, Firenze 1968, p. XXIf.

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wonder about the spiritual and sexual development of Horace as a historical individual.

What usually bothers those who do not like to work with genres is their schematic and reductive character, their apparent over-simplification: if our purpose is to explain realities as complex as poetic texts, why should we wish to pass through such simplified "lattices?" But genre, as I am trying to describe it here, is not so much a problem for us as for *them*, the authors. Even if we admit the substantial difference between ancient culture and our own, we must still agree that literature functions according to a model of communication which is fairly universal and recurrent. The scheme offered by genre is a means of projection—projection as a way of making oneself understood: it is the poet's instrument of expression before it becomes our instrument of investigation. The programmatic nature inherent in the codification of a genre calls for *literary competence* in anyone who sets about writing a new text, and thus it determines not only the place of certain written works within the genre, but also that of those works which can still be written: a place of expectation, a road which is waiting to be traveled. Let us recall, then, that genre is not only our descriptive grid, inferred from our empirical research; it is also an expectation inscribed within the experience of the authors themselves.

Examined closely, the whole development of literary production from Catullus to Ovid can be considered as a process of the construction of genres, that is, of a literary system articulated in single areas, each of which determines its identity by comparison with the others. By signaling the boundaries of its own specific language, each form also delimits the language of the contiguous forms by differentiation. We are accustomed to think of this literature, behind which stands the experience of Alexandria, as being characterized by a congenital *poikilia* which ought to make the category of the literary genre highly problematic as an instrument of interpretation. And yet, even though the Latin poets derive their poetics from Alexandrian models, they themselves work in substantially the opposite direction.[11] In all the poetic departments of Alexandrian derivation or inspiration, the Latin poets, starting out from a reality which is often heterogeneous in form, work instead to select, to seek out dominant features around which they can construct organic forms of literary discourse—that is, to construct genres. Virgil worked with an

11   There are important observations on this score in M. Labate, "Da Catullo a Ovidio: forme della letteratura, immagini del mondo," forthcoming in *Storia di Roma* (Turin: Einaudi).

edition of Theocritus which included *Idylls* of various kinds (bucolics, mimes, encomia): but there is no doubt that his own *Eclogues* construct a coherent pastoral world by restricting the possibilities of the Syracusan Muse (understood as hexametric poetry of lower-middle level): every exception in Virgil will present itself as just that.[12] When compared with the multiform variety of Hellenistic elegiac poetry, Roman elegy is certainly characterized by a unified project which selects and retains only those traits which, once they are put into systematic relation with one another, make elegy the specific representation of a tormented and unbalanced love relationship (suffering and *servitium*).[13]

Once the world has been trimmed according to a *partial* intention, the rhetoric codified in the genre produces an ideology and a language, that is, it reformulates the world by extracting from it only certain contents (which thus take the place of the whole of reality) and by constructing a mode of expression appropriate to such a partiality (this means constructing a language which is a selection from the linguistic possibilities but suffers no deficiencies, a language which is reduced but at the same time full and complete, coherent). The rhetoric of the genre is, in short, a perspective which is limited but which can reduce everything to itself, and make everything in its own image. Thus a great literary theoretician, Julius Caesar Scaliger, observed in the sixteenth century: "Pastoralia cuiuscumque generis negotium semper retrahunt ad agrorum naturam" [14] ("Pastoral poetry reduces any business, any matter to a bucolic nature, any element of this world is 'told' in the language of country-life"); this means that bucolic poetry is constructed as a closed and self-sufficient discourse, in which every element becomes a symbolic figure connoting the whole pastoral world: things enter into the text only if they agree to be spoken of in the language of the world of shepherds, only if they know how to adapt to that system of the poetic imagination. Genre, modelling the world in accordance with its own language, invites us to believe that nothing exists outside the image which it knows how to give of the world. And, even if it is true that this reduction of the world to a partial view is the way every literary genre, as the process whereby discourse is formed, inevitably

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12   The most obvious case is certainly that of the Fourth Eclogue, which is introduced by the explicit programmatic declaration *paulo maiora canamus* so as to signal a slight distance from the homogenous and codified level of the bucolic genre. Even so, the very theme ("greater") of the new "aurea aetas" which is announced here is modulated by Virgil in pastoral terms and according to the bucolic imagination.

13   Cf. Labate, *op. cit.*

14   J.C. Scaliger, *Poetices libri septem*, III, 150, A. Buck, Stuttgart 1964 (=1561).

manifests itself, it is still true that the genre of Latin love elegy practices this restriction even more consciously, inasmuch as it makes this the keystone of its poetics. For the elegiac poet bases his identity upon diversity, declares that he is enclosed within one part of the world (within a "model of the world") which seems to him *self-sufficient*.

The sensitivity of Roman poets towards genres *a parte subjecti* is confirmed by the curious phenomenon of "empty slots." The development of Roman poetry towards a canon of genres provokes a tension so strong that it raises expectations around "unoccupied" spaces, *blanks* created and delimited at the borders of already fulfilled genres. Thus, for example, Ovid notices in some of Propertius' elegiac experiments the potential for an unoccupied genre (Ovid actually calls it *opus*, "specific form of poetic creation"): and his *Heroides* are written to fill up just this generic space, which is still free, *ignotum aliis* according to Ovid's well-known definition (*Ars Amat.* 3.346). Once the Augustans' work has in fact satisfied the most ambitious expectations, substantially completing the work of construction of an articulated literary system (the long-awaited Roman Alcaeus, Hesiod, and Homer are no longer lacking), it becomes easier to see slots which remain empty and perhaps will never be filled: Horace's letter to Augustus is dominated by the sense of a lack, a hole left open in the system of genres by the absence of a modern theater: cultural and social conditions which cannot be easily modified make the undertaking impossible by now, even for a generation of talented poets.[15] The very awareness of these lacunas indirectly confirms that by this time the system of genres has become a fully constituted reality which contemporaries have begun to recognize—and of which even the schools too will be taking notice before long.

Correspondingly, we must suppose that ancient readers attached considerable significance to the question, "To what genre does this new text belong?;" for otherwise the complexity of many ancient texts—for example

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15   Attempts at tragedy had not been lacking in the modern period: Varius' *Thyestes* was a success and had gained for its author an extraordinary reward which was perhaps also an encouragement to continue along this path; long before Ovid's *Medea* pleased Quintilian (10.1.98), it had delighted its author, who boasts that he is quite up to so difficult a task (*Am.* 2.18.13f.); and yet individual successes are not enough to satisfy expectations for a new Latin theater (the Greek tragedians and the archaic Latin tragedians had produced a corpus of works which could be staged in regular theatrical "seasons"): Varius' *Thyestes* is not enough, *Romana Tragoedia* in person can still ask Ovid "nunc habeam per te . . . nomen" (*Am.* 3.1.29f.). And not even Ovid's *Medea* will suffice: Quintilian will judge that Ovid had demonstrated what could be achieved by a talented but undisciplined poet, one capable only of touching upon a genre, not of giving it life and vitality.

Persius' choliambs—verges on senselessness. Naturally, when the question, "To what genre do you belong?" is directed to the text, it provokes not only obvious answers, but also novelties, displacements, disequilibria and new equilibria: that is why it is such an interesting question. As I have already pointed out, the genres I find most interesting in this perspective are the most traditional ones: epic, bucolic, elegy, satire, etc. I believe in fact that it is these genres—their relations, boundaries, conflicts, redistributions of territory, etc.—that are at stake in the really important games played out between author and reader. To define genres differently makes the game lose interest, at least for me. I do not believe that an ancient reader trembled with emotion when assailed by the doubt, "but is what I am reading a *propempticon* or an *epibaterion?*"

As you certainly know better than I, hermeneutic criticism in its deconstructionist version is enjoying increasing success in many places, if for no other reason than because it answers to a widespread need. Many people seem in fact to believe that our relation with the classic texts is running the risk of becoming tired, static, unadventurous. The idea that these texts have shot all their bolts of meaning and have been definitively understood is truly frightening: we would then be left with sluggish readers on the one hand, and texts that are no longer interesting on the other. Deconstructionist hermeneutics responds to this crisis with a new movement that gives an undeniable impression of vitality: it draws its motto from a recognition that "there is no peace in the texts." As a struggle against conformism this is certainly positive (and also—but let us not say this too loudly—because it promises to provide a living for a larger number of interpreters, a promise all the more attractive for classicists, who are obliged to work on a finite body of material—a source of energy which cannot be renewed!). As a pre-deconstructionist critic, I wish these developments good luck; but I refuse to limit myself to a static and rigid vision of my own hermeneutic practice. I do not believe that literary criticism, as I understand and practice it, needs this medicine.

Take the question of genres. It is certainly possible to use genres in a static, classificatory, descriptive and almost tautological way. I need not give examples: we know that in this way we run the risk of a rather funereal peace (and in that case it is easy to prefer perpetual motion, the unlimited production of meaning, the construction and deconstruction of the text, etc.). But in my view the genres are not at all (at least, not *merely*) a factor of order, stability, and identity: precisely the opposite is the case.

For example: to many people the didactic epic may seem a quintessentially peaceful genre, one based upon clear and elementary rules, practically a container indifferent to the specificity of the discourse it puts forward. A similarly static conception of the didactic genre is often applied to Lucretius too, who is said to have wedded (with some adaptation) a new ideology to a traditional "generic" structure. Interpreted in this way, the didactic character of the *De rerum natura* is fragmented into many tiny, entirely superficial generic signals—like the formulas of transition and of persuasion—or is reduced to recalling the function of the addressee Memmius. In my own view, the new form which the didactic genre takes on in Lucretius finds its necessary complement in the creation of an addressee who knows how to adapt himself to the sublime level of an overwhelming experience: the doctrine on atoms is not only described in its own terms but is also seen in the reaction of vertigo which it can generate.[16] If the addressee of the *De rerum natura* is to know the sublimity towards which the poet wants to elevate him, he must become sublime himself. The sublime transforms the didactic genre by providing the model to which the poet adapts his discourse and to which the reader must adapt his behavior so that this too will be lofty and resolute. At this point the didactic form and the teacher-student relation are no longer unproblematic, as they were, say, in Aratus or Nicander. The sublime form of the text and of the addressee are the result of the transformation which the didactic genre had to undergo when it chose to become the means of communicating a moral journey—they are the obvious signs of an agonistic interpretation of the didactic experience. The relation between teacher-bard and addressee-disciple is not a tranquil agreement, but a tense wager which may fail. The teacher-student relation, which had been a stable framework in the traditional didactic genre, becomes in the *De rerum natura* a center of tension and a problematic theme in itself. The transformation of the genre into a proselytizing, missionary discourse is afflicted by incessant anxiety and doubt. And to understand how new this is, let us recall, by contrast, the bland, relaxed didactic structure of poems on snake venom, on the constellations, or on gastronomy. As we shall see below, genre can become a problematic—even an unruly—ingredient of the work itself. And perhaps it might even be suggested that this deployment of genre as the problematic or "theatrical" contents of a work is a characteristic of Roman poetry, of its tendency to put

16   Cf. G.B. Conte, "Insegnamenti per un lettore sublime. Forma del testo e forma del destinatario nel 'De rerum natura' di Lucrezio," Introduction to *Lucrezio: La natura delle cose* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1990) 27-42.

the choice of language and of genre in "dramatic" terms, almost to "stage" the problem of the choice of literary form.

To the prescriptive immobility which menaces the notion of genre, scholarship has tried to respond with an image which seems more dynamic: the formula of the "Kreuzung der Gattungen." Scholars like Deubner and Kroll analyzed Alexandrian and Roman poetry as the production of hybrid and cross-bred texts. Now the idea of "Kreuzung" is not false in itself, even if it often relies upon examples which are rather mechanical and superficial. The fact that Callimachus writes a hymn in elegiac distichs is certainly remarkable, but it does not constitute by itself the great novelty of his poetics. The real fault of "Kreuzung," anyway, is its recipe character, which ends up making it look at literary questions only in terms of the production of texts: we can explain by "Kreuzung" how a text is "put together" with various genres. The idea behind this is that of the *workshop*, while for me (as I have said) genre functions instead as a *strategy*.

Let me take as an example Virgil's Tenth *Eclogue*, if only because some years ago I ventured an interpretation of it.[17] Kroll insisted upon the fact that the bucolic genre is a miscellany of various genres: on this view the Tenth *Eclogue* in particular is a hybrid of bucolic and elegy. But that is certainly not the most important fact for readers and interpreters of this composition: otherwise Klingner would be mistaken in considering it one of the texts which most resist interpretation.[18] I think instead that Kroll's line of reading should be completely reversed. This *Eclogue* is not the result of a combination of influences: bucolic does not renounce its own literary individuality by becoming contaminated in some way with elegy; indeed, the meaning of the Tenth *Eclogue* is founded precisely upon flaunting the difference between the two genres, on the one hand the bucolic world of Virgil, on the other the elegiac world of Gallus, a momentary "guest" in the shepherds' world. Upon the limited terrain of a shared space, elegy and bucolic take on life and confront one another, compete with and define one another in turn. The fact that the specific individuality of each of the two opposed genres can be measured is entirely due to a shared space which allows the comparison: it is only because the same *carmina* can be intoned in both the elegiac register and

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17   *Virgilio: il genere e i suoi confini* (Milan: Garzanti, 1984) 13-42 (=*The Rhetoric of Imitation. Genre and Poetic Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poets*, trans. from Italian, ed. and with a foreword by Charles Segal [Ithaca-London: Cornell University Press, 1986] 100-29).

18   F. Klingner, *Virgil. Bucolica, Georgica, Aeneis* (Zürich-Stuttgart 1967) 166: "The Tenth Eclogue is the most peculiar, so peculiar that to a large extent its interpreters have exercised their ingenuity on it in vain."

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the bucolic one (by Gallus' mouth in the second part of the *Eclogue*) that we can become aware of the "formative" function which each register possesses. The Tenth *Eclogue* presents itself, then, as the exploration of the boundaries of one poetic genre (the bucolic) at the moment in which its specific and distinctive features are defined, dialectically, by the comparison arising from its juxtaposition with another genre. Thus we see how the various genres of a literary culture can be defined precisely in their reciprocal and systematic relations, each with regard to every other one. In the final analysis, the space of the Tenth *Eclogue* becomes the *confrontation between two genres* which mediate two worlds, and two models of life, as well.

For the proponents of "Kreuzung der Gattungen" in interpreting the works of Latin literature, perhaps no other text seems to lend itself so well as Ovid's *Heroides:* are they not an exemplary case of a continual mixture of tragedy, epic, bucolic, elegy? are they not obviously an intersection of different genres? And yet here too it would be easy to demonstrate the falsity of such a perspective. For Ovid reinterprets all this material of heterogeneous provenance organically and dynamically according to a new literary code, the language of elegy:[19] and in particular he precipitates out a model of life which is the elegiac one. In this case, elegy becomes a form of the world that reproduces with greater precision the life of women, a life of suffering, of true *servitium,* of humiliation. The *Heroides* represent that literary genre which is almost ingrained in the socio-cultural condition of women, they are the declension of the elegiac paradigm in the feminine gender.[20] Ovid's consciousness of genres permits elegy to rediscover its original vocation as poetic lament, becoming women's expressive form—the form of their voice.[21]

With regard to genres, the Augustan poets seem to experience a level of anxiety without precedents and without analogies: their attitude is one of problematic self-interrogation, and they thereby testify to the existence and importance of the question. Even more significant, and more characteristic of my own approach, is the fact that the reader becomes involved in this process. Such problems are so familiar for us that we tend to consider the whole

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19   Cf. in this connection A. Barchiesi, "Narratività e convenzione nelle *Heroides*," *MD* 19 (1987) 63-90, esp. pp. 67ff. Cf. also the same author's "Problemi di interpretazione in Ovidio: continuità delle storie, continuazione dei testi," *MD* 16 (1986) 77-107.

20   Indeed, this specific "declension" of the elegiac paradigm comes to constitute, as it were, a sub-genre of elegy (the elegiac epistle), an expressive form adapted to representing the voice of a marginal or marginalized character, upon whom the very distance at which she finds herself confined imposes a subjective filter through which events are interpreted.

21   Cf. G. Rosati, "Introduction" to *Heroides* (BUR).

phenomenon natural. Propertius, all in all a pure elegist, is also one of the first to transform his own poetic career into an *object of representation* (even a superficial comparison between the books of Propertius and that of Catullus shows a significant difference in this regard). What readers are shown is not only Propertius the lover, but also Propertius the poet facing genres, facing the elegiac genre, which is built and dismantled: it should suffice to recall the sequence of metaliterary reflections which lead from the poetic comparison with Ponticus in the first book to the proem and envoi of the second one, and to the programmatic elegies which open the third book.

Then, in the fourth book the poet offers, so to speak, a *dramatized* representation of his own generic consciousness: we are present at a dialogue in which the two interlocutors impersonate two possibilities of the elegiac form which are felt *by now* to be decisively different, indeed almost opposed to one another. In fact, the fourth book of Propertius contains both Roman aetiologies in the manner of Callimachus and love elegies (though these latter have new elements with regard to the elegies of the earlier books). As is well known, the interpretation of its proem is extremely difficult and controversial;[22] but if we agree with the majority of Propertian scholars nowadays that the figure of Horos is not simply a caricature, then we must also admit that Propertius has decided to make us participants in a *hesitation* between two modes of practicing elegy, indeed, I would say, between two distinct elegiac genres.[23] It has also been suggested that 4.1 is a *recusatio* quite similar to other Propertian *recusationes*, for example 3.3 and 3.9: but you will agree with me that the ambiguity of the character who intervenes here to dissuade the poet from a "grander" project (Horos is not authoritative like Apollo or Calliope) makes this composition a true *haesitatio* rather than a toned down *recusatio*. Propertius' new elegiac experiment does not make the status of this genre more uncertain, but sets the *new* attempt against "traditional" love elegy, by now codified in its genre. It is significant that, for those who, like Horos, pose as conservatives and antiexperimentalists in literary issues, elegy means love elegy *tout court: at tu finge elegos* (4.1.135), as though by now *elegi* meant only love poetry and hence *servitium*.[24] Hence Propertius'

22   A good recent discussion is offered by C.W. Macleod, "Propertius 4.1," in *Papers of the Liverpool Latin Seminar 1976*, pp. 141-53 (= *Collected Papers* [Oxford 1983] 202-14).
23   This has been well seen by W. Suerbaum, "Der Schluss der Einleitungselegie zum 4. Properzbuch (Zum Motiv der Lebenswahl bei Properz)," *RhM* 107 (1964) 360-61.
24   To a large extent, this still holds good even for those who are inclined to endorse the clever hypothesis of C.W. Macleod (*loc. cit.*, p. 147 and n. 41), who suggests that ll. 135-146 may be a kind of quotation from Apollo's past orders. In any case, according to Horos,

hesitation, so far from signifying indifference to the generic codification, indirectly reinforces the very concept of genre, and indicates its boundaries more decisively.

In short, the most characteristic, most constant element of Augustan poetry is the poet's insistence on letting us know that he could also be doing something else. The genre "stages" itself, becomes spectacle: the *recusationes* are better explained as a parade of literary genres and of related genres of life. At *Remedia Amoris* 381, Ovid prepares the reader according to simple expectations: *Callimachi numeris non est dicendus Achilles: Cydippe non est oris, Homere, tui*, that is, he reminds the reader of a natural coherence of matter and form; but the rest of his career will go on to demonstrate the limits of this canon. It will remain true that heroes like Achilles are not suited to the elegiac distich, but the *Heroides* show that this too can be done: Achilles is a character in the *Heroides*, as is Cydippe. On the other hand, everybody knows that love-affairs like Cydippe's were made for the elegiac distich, and yet in the *Metamorphoses*, a hexametric epic, love is the most important theme (even more than metamorphosis itself). I do not mean to imply that the work of Ovid consists solely in destroying the traditional codifications: to limit ourselves to the *Metamorphoses*, we must admit that this work shows respect for a hierarchy and for an order which are relative but not nonexistent.[25] What, however, seems most obvious in Ovid—who is perhaps an exceptional author in this regard—is his incessant consciousness of the system of genres. 1) He justifies the *Amores* as a form in search of a theme: Cupid has stolen a foot from a hexameter, and the result is the production of the elegiac distich (as though to say, in jest, *numeros tene, res sequentur*); 2) The *Tristia* explain the conversion of the same metrical form to a different theme: this time the pentameter is the lame foot of an exile in distress; 3) Sappho writes a "Herois" in distichs to her beloved Phaon: "You will wonder"—she says to him—"why I am not writing lyric: it is the subject matter—a sad one: my unhappy love— which demands the weeping song of elegy."[26] As you see, either the form

Apollo's commands *still* retain their full validity. If this is so, composing aetiological elegy is not an acceptable way of complying with that injunction to compose elegiac poetry.
25   These problems formed the subject of Richard Heinze's controversial monograph (*Ovids elegische Erzählung*, Leipzig 1919 = *Vom Geist der Römertums*, Stuttgart 1960, 3rd edition, pp. 308-403); now S. Hinds, *The Metamorphosis of Persephone. Ovid and the Self-Conscious Muse* (Cambridge 1987) has returned to them with a new theoretical awareness.
26   It might be objected against my use of this passage in *Her.* 15 that the poem's Ovidian authorship is still *sub judice*, even if the tendency to consider it authentic has been prevalent for some time (most recently on the opposite side, but often with forced arguments, R.J. Tarrant, "The Authenticity of the Letter of Sappho to Phaon," *HSCP* 85 [1981] 133-53). Examined

chooses the theme or vice versa. 4) The *Fasti* are practically obsessed with their own generic status: the poet asks himself to what extent *elegi* can sustain themes of heroic, hexametric song (*heroi res erat ista pedis: Fasti* 2.126); inversely, he is delighted that the distich has grown so far after having sung the humble poetry of love: 2.8 *ecquis ad haec* (to the *Fasti*) *illinc* (from the *Amores*) *crederet esse viam?*[27] What had been the hesitation of Propertius 4.1 thereby becomes the open exhibition of the problem: indeed, genre and the difference among the genres become spectacle. Every new text, as it unfolds, justifies its own relation with the system of literary genres, which it simultaneously takes as norm and evades.

The example of Ovid may suggest to us that the poet can only choose between respecting the canons—so endorsing the tradition codified in terms of genres—and upsetting them. It may make us wonder whether anything else exists besides genres and texts which respect them, violate them, or discuss them. But we have also seen more complex examples: the Tenth *Eclogue* has reminded us that genres not only represent themselves but are also forms of meaning, articulated models of possible worlds. In short: genres are particularized in texts, life is generalized in models. Between genres and models there is a profound osmosis.

To return, in conclusion, to the problem I posed at the beginning, I cannot agree that it is absolutely necessary to oppose the fiction of poetry to the reality of the empirical world: true, literature is different from reality, but it is not the exact contrary of reality.[28] What we should avoid is thinking of reality naturalistically, as though it were a simple datum. In fact, reality is nothing but a system of perceptions determined by cultural codes and is therefore itself a construction, even if one at a different level from literature. The empirical world, in order to be perceived, must of necessity be translated into something which it is not—into a model of reality, endowed with a meaning and therefore with a form. Genre functions as a mediator, permitting certain models of reality to be selected and to enter into the language of literature: it gives them the possibility of being "represented."

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closely, indeed, the verses considered here (5-8) can provide a further argument for the Ovidian authorship of the epistle: for such consciousness of the problem of genres hardly belongs to an imitator-forger's capacities and intentions.

27   Hinds, *op. cit.* 115.

28   I had occasion to offer some reflections on this subject in the course of my discussion of the interpretation of Roman elegy proposed by P. Veyne (*L'élégie érotique romaine. L'amour, la poésie et l'occident*, Paris 1983), in "L'amore senza elegia: i 'Remedia amoris' e la logica di un genere," Introd. to *Ovidio: Rimedi contro l'amore*, ed. by C. Lazzarini (Venice 1986) 49-50, n. 19 (= *Poetics Today* 10.3 [1989] 458f. with n. 19).

The empiricist too could agree that, in comparison with the extraordinarily rich variety of reality, literature operates by *selection:* where he probably would end up disagreeing is in his notion that the selection acts directly upon naked facts rather than upon conventions and models which preexist literature. The selection cannot be conceived without certain procedures, which, as strategies of communication, guide the reader to understand the selective processes which underlie the text. The strategy of communication is to make things speak, to charge them with meanings and symbolic values: but, in culture, things already have their own voice, they already mean something independently of the fact that they enter into one system of selection rather than another. That is why it is incorrect to believe, for example, that the elegiac poet's refusal of *militia* (or of a career) must necessarily refer to empirical and personal choices on the part of characters who, unlike their contemporaries, recoiled from committing themselves to a promising military campaign;[29] or else to believe, in precisely the opposite direction, that such a refusal, insignificant in itself, becomes significant only as a formal characteristic of rhetorical literary expression. Both the "realistic" interpretation and the "formalistic" one miss the point. Instead, we should say that the elegiac poets whom we cite as an example work on models and concepts of reality which have already become active and operative (in this case: what military service *represents* in the Roman cultural system). These strategies of selection, in short, function as just so many programs, they correspond to just so many genres: indeed, they are the genres themselves. A genre does not add new information, but it shows things from a new point of view: the specificity of each genre resides in the combination, indeed in the recombination of elements of reality. In this way the reader is set on the path towards constructing an imaginary situation or world, in which only some of the many conventions found in the extraliterary world enter into systematic relation with one another. That is why it is easy to discover in literature many of those conventions which regulate culture, society, empirical reality: this is the starting point for the naturalistic fallacy of much empiricist criticism.

Conversely, the force of empiricism, which tries to give an account of genres as *historically* fulfilled possibilities, becomes obvious by contrast with the purely formalistic perspective which—if only in principle—would like to imagine indefinitely many possible genres. Theory and empiricism coincide in

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29   It should suffice to recall here Propertius' elegy to Tullus (1.6) or Tibullus 1.3 *Ibitis . . . sine me . . .*

the need to explain critically the various forms of literary language of a given culture and to describe the system of genres with their relative internal variations and their reciprocal delimitations. Behind those forms of language which assure recognizable lines of communication between author and reader, the cultural project of the author and at the same time the expectations of his addressees must be sought out: the reader finds in the genre an interpretative model of reality, a simulacrum of meaning, which, drawing him strategically into a network of presuppositions, "provokes" him and makes him capable of reacting to the impulses which the author has transmitted to him. Evanescent though it is, it is the genre which suggests a sense of the totality of the text and provides a meaning to the various components by ordering them typologically: in this way the "déjà vu" precipitated out in cultural experience and in the literary tradition can activate an effective "rhetoric of difference," by means of which—practically, that is, by comparing and contrasting—the reader can recognize what is new, and at the same time perceive the specificity of the individual text which is offered to him.[30]

But nothing would be more useless than to conceive of genres as simple, immobile abstractions, or as lifeless specimens to be collected in sterile bell jars: genre lives only in individual works. Just as we see not Man, but many individual human beings, whom we are capable of distinguishing from fleas or from horses, so too we see not the epic genre or the elegiac genre, but individual works which belong to particular genres, as we can recognize even in the case of hybrids. And not only because they share a family resemblance, as it were, but because genre lives in the individual totality of each work. We may say that the genre constitutes the bone-structure of a text, inasmuch as it sustains it and holds it together; but we must be careful not to think of it as a fleshless skeleton, for otherwise we will lose the very substance of the living text. In the *Dialogues of the Dead,* Lucian recounts the Cynic Menippus' meeting in the Underworld with the skeleton of Thersites, the ugliest of all the

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30   On the other hand, it is true that the changeable and interpenetrative structure of genres often renders too rigidly schematic a definition of them useless for the work of interpretation. Even if the genre can be thought of in the pure state as a working hypothesis, its real action (in texts) is subject to many possible deformations: it can undergo procedures of combination and aggregation, of inclusion and of selection, of reduction and amplification, of transposition and reversal, it can undergo functional mutations and adaptations; it can also happen that contents and expressions already strictly codified become dissociated so that they can be associated with other expressions and with other contents. But it remains true that within the system of the Classical literatures any discursive combination, however complex and disparate it may be, still always respects one discursive project (one genre) which predominates over all the others that go to make up the text and subordinates them to its own intention.

Greek warriors who went to Troy, who points out to the philosopher the skeleton of Nireus, the fairest of all who went to Troy. But in fact, there is no visible difference between the two skeletons. For those of us who are looking for texts, and want to read them and distinguish between them, it is the flesh that makes the difference, that lets us distinguish every time between Nireus and Thersites.

(Translated by Glenn W. Most)

CONTENTS

OF GENRES AND POEMS
Response to Gian Biagio Conte

Professor Conte's characteristically subtle and perceptive paper brings out the falsity of the opposition between "empirical" approaches, insisting on the relationship of poetry to the facts of real social life, and those which disregard living experience in favour of schematic and theoretical lines of thought. The level of discussion is rising in a way which we should all find welcome, as unsophisticated and over-simple arguments and approaches begin to learn from each other's shortcomings and to do more justice to the complexity of such poems as the elegies of Propertius and the *Eclogues* of Virgil.[1]

Continued meditation on the difficult problems posed by the relation of poetic genres to individual poems has led me to think that in my own work in this area I have tended to disregard the question of the genres. Certain over-emphatic and one-sided treatments impelled me to redress the balance. Anxious to emphasize the mutual interplay between literature and life, I conducted the analysis much more in terms of works than of genres. I take this opportunity to look more seriously at that aspect.

We must welcome Professor Conte's insistence that to possess real value for these studies the idea of genre must include elements both of form (expression) and of content. Only in that way can sterile disputes be

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1   Not quite everywhere, however. Thus R.F. Thomas writes: "It is a curious phenomenon that this type of criticism" (*i.e.* that of my *Latin Poets and Roman Life* [London 1986] and other, alarmingly unnamed, "influential quarters") "is confined to Latin lyric and elegy. Critics of Greek poetry take it for granted that their subject is literary, and their approach to it addresses literary concerns, the relationship of lyric diction to the Homeric poems, the treatment of myth, the use of metaphor, and so on. The reason for the discrepancy is, I think, that we know so much more about Roman society and history of the first century B.C. . . ." (*CP* 83 [1988] 61f.). By a delicious logic, a procedure hard to avoid in an area where a certain kind of evidence is absent—and yet much of the most important work on Greek poetry has succeeded in going beyond it—becomes the sole permitted model for work in an area where that evidence exists. Thomas assumes as eternally orthodox a present fashion for isolating literature from the society in which it was produced and enjoyed; "the critic's business" is sharply distinguished from "that of the historian" (*ibid.*). Books, then, are begotten by books, and a description of pretty girls swimming is influenced neither by painting nor—still less—by life, but "for my money [Catullus] provided an erotic embellishment of *Argonautica* iv.940" (*ibid.* 58). One misses only an explicit reference to the setting in which, doubtless, the ancient poet, like the modern scholar, did his work: the university library.

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transcended. Such an approach will yield dividends. For instance, I was struck by the perception that the *virga* of Mercury, retained in the First Book of the *Metamorphoses* as the god turns from divine messenger to oxherd, glances at the genre of bucolic: "At once the scene is transformed from epic to bucolic, and Mercury starts to speak in a bucolic style." The retention of the *virga* and its changed function "underlines the change of code and of world." This is very attractive. We might add it to another touch, from the Second Book, when Mercury falls in love with the Athenian princess Herse and comes down to make love to her. He takes care to look his best:

> tanta est fiducia formae;
> quae quamquam iusta est, cura tamen adiuvat illam,
>   (*Met* 2.731f.)

combing his hair, adjusting the fit of his tunic, and seeing to it:

> ut teres in dextra, quae somnos ducit et arcet,
> virga sit.   (*ibid.* 735f.)

> (that in his right the staff, with which he brings
> and keeps away sleep, might be well polished).

Here the commentators observe that Ovid makes his amorous god observe the instructions to be careful about their appearance, which the poet gives to mortal lovers in his *Ars Amatoria*.[2] The ordinary lover in Augustan Rome did not call on his girl with a stick in his hand, like a gentleman of 1900, and so the *Ars* gives no specific instruction for the smartness of one's cane. Mercury, however, is the god who always carries a staff—is recognized by carrying it, like a saint in religious iconography—and so it is available to the poet for witty and ingenious applications. In the Io story it becomes a herdsman's oxdriving stick; in the Herse story it shares in the general smartness appropriate to all the accoutrements of the men about town when bent on pleasure. For the latter is set in a town and in a palace, while the former is set in the open air, on the hill-side, among the herds.

So far, so good. But we have not exhausted the question. How important is the specific question of poetic genre? In the episode of Herse the

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2   *Ars* 1. 511f.; cf. *Remedia Amoris* 679f.

poet clearly meant to glance at his own notorious poem the *Ars* and—as so often—to make a connection between its hedonistic world of urban sophistication and the archaic setting of the myths. Franz Bömer, in his commentary on the passage, remarks grimly that this is "frivoles Spiel des Dichters mit dem Bereich des Göttlichen (oder, nach neuester Auffassung, Humor.)"[3] What is added if we insist that the genre of the *Ars*, rather than the atmosphere, is important?

I approach the question by returning to Book One and Mercury driving the cattle with his divine staff. Other parallels suggest themselves. Thus: in Theocritus 24th Poem, the *Herakliskos*, the poet tells us that Heracles, a baby of ten months old, was attacked by two horrendous serpents sent by Hera. The poem opens with a charmingly Biedermeier scene: Alcmena bathed her twin sons, gave them their fill of milk, and

> "laid them to rest in the bronze shield, that fair piece of
> armour of which Amphitryon had spoiled Pterelaus when he fell.
> And stroking the boys' heads she [uttered a short lullaby]. And
> with these words she rocked (δίνησε) the great shield, and sleep
> came over them." (Theocritus 24.3-10; trans. Gow).

Now, the defeat of Pterelaus was the one great heroic exploit of Amphitryon (it is splendidly described in the *Amphitryo* of Plautus); this shield, therefore, must have been his greatest trophy. We remember the heroic pride and passion which center on the winning of armour from the vanquished in the *Iliad*, and we see, with a special educated pleasure, the very different scene of two babies being rocked to sleep in a captured and heroic shield. As for the rocking: in the *Seven against Thebes* the gigantic Hippomedon intimidates the besieged by brandishing in their sight a mighty shield emblazoned with the figure of the fire-breathing monster Typhoeus:

> ἅλω δὲ πολλήν, ἀσπίδος κύκλον λέγω,
> ἔφριξα δινήσαντος (Aeschylus, *Septem* 489f.)

> (When he whirled a mighty orb around, I mean the
> circle of his shield, he made me shudder).

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3   F. Bömer, *P. Ovidius Naso: Metamorphosen. Kommentar I* (Heidelberg 1969) 410 on 2.731. Not for the first time, one wonders what makes a scholar decide that he is by nature the right man to comment on a particular poet.

Same verb, δινέω, but a totally different ethos: from heroic threatening to maternal tenderness.

The procedure here seems to me to have a strong family resemblance to that of Ovid in describing Mercury keeping the kine with his divine staff of office. But when we ask for the role of genre, it is hard to know what to reply. The Theocritean poem has just begun: the audience can hardly have formed a definite conception of the genre to which they are to assign it. *Idyll* 24 does not begin, like 22, with words which unambiguously suggest a particular generic nature. So they can hardly be relying on the contrast with a different genre in order to understand and appreciate this passage. The piquancy which it contains is much less a matter of specific poetic genres than of general stylistic levels, and of the normal setting in which a piece of paraphernalia like a hero's shield makes its appearance: the shield which failed to protect a man's life now shelters the infant children of his slayer, and the triumphant boast of the warrior gives place to the tender lullaby of the nursing mother.[4]

Another aspect of the Ovidian passage presents itself, too. Mercury drives the cattle with a *virga* normally reserved for other and grander uses. A memorable passage of the *Aeneid* makes a similar point. In his abuse of the Trojans as effeminate Orientals, the Italian prince Numanus Remulus stresses the toughness of the Italians:

> Omne aevum ferro teritur, versaque iuvencum
> terga fatigamus hasta. (Virgil, *Aeneid* 9.609f.)

> (All our life is lived out with weapons, and we goad our
> oxen's backs with a reversed spear).

The warrior's spear, too, can serve as cattle-driver: as Donatus comments *ad loc.*, "una atque eadem species et ruri servit et bello." But the specifically bucolic aspect is surely not present in this passage, which is concerned to deny the existence of any opposition at all between agricultural and military prowess:

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4   On εὐχωλή and cognates see E. Benveniste, *Le vocabulaire des institutions indoeuropéennes* (Paris 1969) ii.237ff.; A.W.H. Adkins in *CQ* 19 (1969) 20-33.

at patiens operum parvoque adsueta iuventus
aut rastris terram domat aut quatit oppida bello.
                    (*ibid.*, 607f.)

(But bearing toil and being inured to want our young men
tame the earth with hoes or shake cities in war).

The passage recalls, as the commentators seem not to bother to say, that strand in the Homeric epics which emphasizes the identity of the herdsman and the hero. Even the less obvious activity of ploughing is placed in a similar light by Odysseus, when the suitor Eurymachus insults him by saying that he would not dream of accepting a job, reaping or ploughing: "I am unsurpassed," Odysseus tells him, "at ploughing with a team of oxen, and if war were to come, you would see me in the front rank." The ploughman is the hero in mufti: the hero is the ploughman in arms.[5]

On the one side of the Ovidian passage, then, we see a kind of composition which takes pleasure in depicting objects from the heroic world re-used in ways and in settings which convey a profound change of ethos: such passages may work by glancing at a specific poetic genre and contrasting it with that of the main text, but that may be, as with the shield re-used as a cradle, at most a very small part of their effect. On the other side, there are passages, no less effective in their own style, which are concerned rather to annihilate any distinction than to flaunt it: thus Numanus emphasizes not the polar opposition of bucolic and epic, but on the contrary their compatibility and even their identity. But in terms of ancient literary theory both are *epos*.

Something rather similar can be said, I think, also about the interesting suggestion that the dispute between Cupid and Apollo, as to which of them should wear and use the bow and arrows, introduces the generic question of epic *versus* love elegy. The idea is appealing, and certainly Ovid was, as Conte rightly emphasizes, keenly self-conscious on the question of the relation of elegy and epic. But a related motif is also known to us, which was at home in the Alexandrian epigram: that of Aphrodite ὁπλισμένη, wearing armor. Leonidas wrote two epigrams on the theme[6] and six others—a total of eight—

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5   Homer, *Odyssey* 18.371. Cf. J. Duchemin, "A propos de l'*Hercules tueur de lion*" *Miscellanea di studi alessandrini in memoria di A. Rostagni* (Torino 1963) 311-21; J. Griffin, "Heroic and Unheroic Ideas in Homer," *Chios,* edd. J. Boardman and C.E. Vaphopoulou-Richardson (Oxford 1986) 3-14.
6   *Hellenistic Epigrams* edd. A.S.F. Gow and D.L. Page (Cambridge 1965) 2107 and 2585.

are preserved in the *Anthology*. The question "Why Venus in Sparta wears armor" was a theme in the schools of the declaimers.[7] Apollo's objection to the unwarlike Cupid using the bow is of a similar kind. Even closer to the dispute in the *Metamorphoses* are other epigrams: one by Meleager explaining that it is nothing strange (οὐ ξένον) if Eros shoots blazing arrows, as his father is Ares; another by Philip (69 Gow-Page) describing Eros wearing the lion-skin and arrows of Heracles.[8] The question of the appropriateness of unwarlike deities parading in weapons goes back to the fifth Book of the *Iliad*.[9] It is one which of its nature recalls the epigram at least as much as the developed love-elegy. When we do find an elegy on such a theme, as with Propertius 2.12 (*quicumque ille fuit, puerum qui pinxit Amorem*), a poem which does indeed develop the question why Cupid is armed with bow and arrows, the epigrammatic content and movement can easily be detected.[10] These considerations must be added, I think, to the statement that "Cupid, too, has *arma*, which are a distinctive feature of the elegiac code." And we remember that in the epic of Apollonius, in its most celebrated part, Eros fires an arrow at Medea which makes her fall in love with Jason.[11] In view of the use made by Virgil of that book of Apollonius, Ovid must have been familiar with it. Even in the epic, then, the archer Eros had figured conspicuously, as well as in the epigram. It seems to follow that, while it may indeed be true that the Ovidian passage is intended to evoke the elegy, that is not its sole resonance: and even, to put the point in another way, that what is to be evoked in the mind of the reader is less specifically the generic point (elegy *versus* epic) than a vaguer and more complex constellation of ideas: love poetry and its traditional armory; the archer Eros of Apollonius who lies behind the Virgilian Cupid and the passion of Dido; the epigram, and the love elegy which enlarges and develops it. I agree that the word *arma* has an epic colouring and recalls the epic, and one element of the effect aimed at here is an emphasis on the fact that Ovid's poem is not an epic of a certain sort—above all, of a Virgilian sort. The specific work, the great poem of the previous generation, the lion in the path for Ovid and the rest, is perhaps more urgently present than the genre of epic. It was the first thing which the word *arma* would evoke.

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7   Quintilian 2.4.26.
8   *The Garland of Philip*, edd. Gow and Page (Cambridge 1968) 4038; 3090.
9   Homer, *Iliad* 5.330ff.
10   E.g. A. La Penna, *L'integrazione difficile: un profilo di Properzio* (Torino 1977) 60.
11   Apollonius Rhodius 3.280-7.

What emerges from this is that my difficulty is not with the kind of analysis which Conte offers—that seems to me very enlightening, a judicious balance of detail and theory—but with his estimate of the importance of the genres and of generic analysis. I think there are a number of cases in which the genre is of less significance for the understanding of a poem than some particular other poem or work of literature. I say "work of literature" because the significant model can itself be a poem. For instance, the first *Ode* of the Second Book of Horace is addressed to Pollio and discusses his *Roman History*. Five of its ten stanzas evoke the atmosphere and the events of that stirring and tragic time:

> iam nunc minaci murmure cornuum
> perstringis auris, iam litui strepunt,
>   iam fulgor armorum fugaces
>   terret equos equitumque voltus . . .
>   (Horace, *C.* 2.1.17-20).

Nisbet and Hubbard comment that Horace's *Ode* reflects the tone and substance of the *Historiae* . . . and particularly of the proem, which he surely had read. After a highly colored and pathetic development of the themes of the war, Roman suffering and Roman guilt, the poet recalls himself, at the end of his poem, to the proper task of his own lyric poetry—smaller and less serious themes and effects. An allusion to the Greek lyric poet Simonides helps to clinch the transition and forms an elegant and literate close. I dwell for a moment on this familiar example because it shows, I think, that genres can even be brought into explicit contrast without it being a principal role of the poem to define or delimit them. In writing of disaster and guilt Horace would not, it seems, be leaving the province of lyric poetry altogether: the dirges of Simonides were classics of the lyric. In as far as Horace defines his own practice, for the rest of Book Two at least, it is *within* the possible lyric space. Potentially, lyric could accommodate such material in such a tone; it is the lyric poet Horace who declines to write it.

I turn to another and perhaps more central example. The Tenth *Eclogue* has received from Conte some penetrating analysis, for which we are all grateful.[12] And yet I find myself wondering whether the conception of genre

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12   G.B. Conte, *Il genere e i suoi confini* (Torino 1980) 11-45 = *The Rhetoric of Imitation* (Ithaca 1986) 100-29.

which he has developed—one which includes, as he rightly insists, both formal elements and elements of content—is the single key to the poem in quite the way which he suggests. Conte's analysis concludes that "the meaning of the Tenth *Eclogue* is founded precisely upon flaunting the difference between the two genres" of bucolic and elegy; the two genres define each other and themselves by their comparison. "The Tenth *Eclogue* proposes itself as the exploration of the limits of one poetic genre (the bucolic) at the moment in which its specific and distinctive features are defined, by dialectical comparison, by its bordering upon those of another genre."

Do all the elements of the poem really fall into place with such an analysis? I think it hard to be convinced. The poem opens with the statement that what follows, the last of the *Eclogues*, is meant as a tribute to Gallus and his love: it will tell the story of his amorous sufferings, in the hope that both Gallus and his fickle beloved Lycoris may read it. *Sollicitos Galli dicamus amores*—a phrase which seems to include both telling of his passion and also (if, as seems likely, Gallus called his elegies *Amores*), retelling his own versification of that passion. The reader at once wonders why Lycoris, if she did indeed read the poem, should be expected to be vitally interested in the question of the definition of poetic genres. What would interest her, we might think, would be not a problem in literary theory, but an account of the sufferings and devotion of her lover, with praise of her own irresistible power.

That, however, is a smaller point than the question of the attitude envisaged in Gallus himself. "In the final analysis," writes Conte, "the space of the Tenth *Eclogue* becomes the *confrontation between two genres* which mediate two worlds, and two life projects, as well." The ancients constantly speak of their poetry in terms less of literature, in our sense, than of music; and I think that musical analogies are often, for us, the most illuminating. Here, then, we have an example of a device so common in music as to need no explanation, but in poetry much rarer and more problematic: *tema con variazioni*, variations on a theme.

Gallus, poet and friend of Virgil, has already received high praise and made a personal appearance in the Sixth *Eclogue*. There he appears in the context, it seems, of the characteristic subject matter of the neoteric poets of Catullus' generation: Hylas, Pasiphae, the sisters of Phaethon. At least one such poem, the *Io* of Calvus, is actually quoted.[13] Then we see Gallus "wandering by the River Permessus," led by one of the Muses into the presence

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13   Virgil, *Buc.* 6. 47 and 52.

of Apollo, and presented with the pipes which once belonged to Hesiod, on which he is to sing of the Grynean Grove (*Buc.* 6.45-73). Apparently what is envisaged is a short learned hexameter poem, on a subject touched on by Euphorion and Parthenius. In the Tenth *Eclogue* he appears again, this time not in Boeotia but in Arcadia. In an evocation of the first *Idyll* of Theocritus, Virgil makes the gods Apollo, Silvanus, and Pan all vainly remonstrate with the poet in his unhappy state, pining away in the Arcadian solitude and mourning for the beloved Lycoris, who has left him to follow a soldier through ice and snow.

It appears from the coincidence of *Buc.* 10.46ff. with Propertius 1.8.5ff. combined with Servius' comment on line 46, that the motif "Your soft feet are at risk from the ice," comes from a celebrated poem of Gallus himself.[14] Gallus, it seems, lamented the loss of a fickle beloved, abstained from blaming her, and hoped the bitter cold would spare her dainty feet. Virgil has transposed this plangent note from the elegy, with its characteristic metre and also ethos (urban, sophisticated), to an Arcadia of fantasy, where a love-lorn singer is naturally a herdsman, his comforters are not *amici* like those of Catullus or Propertius but rustic gods, and publication is by means of carving in the bark of a tree. The elegiac poet's characteristic utterance is transposed into another key. But are we right to infer that what we witness is "the confrontation of two life projects?"

Surely Gallus felt the poem to be, in the first place, a tremendous compliment. Virgil is saying that Gallus as a poet is the appropriate figure to stand at the end of his book of *Eclogues*; and he flatters both Gallus and himself by showing how a masterpiece of his friend's production can be elegantly and melodiously varied in his own bucolic style. There is no question of a serious choice of life for Gallus, who of course in reality was no moonstruck lover but a capable officer on campaign, and who as a poet is not being challenged to turn to bucolic; and the juxtaposition of bucolic with elegiac mode is less a confrontation than a musical refinement. The point, that is, lies much less in any abstract significance of the fact of genre than in the pleasure of seeing a delightful poem which is also, by a stroke of cleverness, a recognizable variant on two other delightful poems: the Latin elegies of Gallus, and the Greek hexameters of Theocritus. A poem in Latin but in

14   Cf. J. Hubaux, "Parthénius, Gallus, Virgile, Properce," in "Miscellanea Properziana," *Atti dell' Accademia Properziana del Subasio-Assisi* 5.5 (1957) 31-9.

hexameters, with Gallus recognizable but transformed in a Theocritean setting, combines and varies all the elements in a new and surprising whole.

These remarks have tended to play down the importance of purely generic considerations, at least in some cases. That is not to say that they are never important; such obvious instances as the constant glances at tragedy in Old Comedy show how vital they can be. But I suspect that we have tended, in recent years, to exaggerate the extent to which Augustan poets were constantly thinking of the question of epic in the abstract rather than of the *Aeneid*, or of a genre of literature rather than a scene or a poem. Professor Conte has broadened and refined our idea of genre; we now, I think, need to broaden and refine our conception of the way in which that conception is relevant to particular texts.

8.   GIAN BIAGIO CONTE

Response to Jasper Griffin's Response

To Jasper Griffin's polite question, "what is the use of the notion of genre compared to the concrete notion of the poetic work?"—for example, "what is the use of speaking about the elegiac genre, given that certain elements are shared by epigram and elegy?"—I think I would answer that I use the distinction in order to *avoid confusion*, to grasp literary specificities, and to make clear the different functions which particular elements have in different contexts.   Let me take an example.   The armed Cupid is a theme of Alexandrian epigrammatic literature (the epigram asks wittily about the significance of those weapons); but the tension between the space of eros and that of weapons, which in the epigram is occasional and witty, becomes in Ovid a specific contrast between elegy and epic. It would be easy to show that this is the case in Ovid by systematic analyses of Ovidian texts (and by literary historical investigations of elegy, contrasted for example with the love lyric of Horace, who often likes implicitly to compete with elegy); but here it will be enough, I believe, to recall the programmatic scene of the prefatory elegy of the *Amores,* in which we see precisely a "confrontation" between epic and elegy. The systematic implications involved in the dilemma which is "staged" by the poet in this poem are all well known: Cupid dissuades the poet intent upon singing *arma . . . violentaque bella* and imposes upon him the elegiac rhythm by simply stealing a metrical foot; the episode continues with a dispute about spheres of competence and ends with an arrow well aimed by Cupid (a love affair).

My purpose is not to point out in the ancient authors passages which could be subjected to sophisticated analyses possibly relevant to the question of genre. My purpose is to find a way to *interpret* these passages: and in this question Jasper Griffin's perspective and my own differ perhaps somewhat from one another, alas. It seems to me that this is made clear by at least one other example. He recalls the well-known passage in the *Aeneid* in which Numanus makes a claim for the unity of the peasant element and the warrior element in Italic culture as contrasted with foreign cultures. An index of this unity is the reversibility of the warrior's *hasta,* his spear, ready to become a cattle-driver. Griffin maintains that in this passage, as far as the reversed warrior's *hasta* is concerned, "the specifically bucolic aspect is surely not present," and that Numanus "emphasizes not the polar opposition of bucolic and epic, but on the contrary their compatibility, even their identity." I must confess that this argument leaves me rather confused. I do not understand what bucolic has to do with this, and in fact I do not see how it could possibly have anything to do with it: for the reversed *hasta* is indeed used to urge on cattle, but these are cattle that are drawing the plow, not ones that are going to pasture. The man who is holding the *hasta* is not a *pastor* but a *georgos.* It is entirely true that no opposition between the georgic world and the epic world is presented here: but this is precisely because Virgil's *Georgics* had been constructed upon the ancient ideological premise which saw the Roman as a farmer-soldier. This does not mean, however, that there is not a georgic specificity as well as an epic specificity. Rather, it means that in the text we witness an ideological operation which proposes their partial identity. It assumes an existential model which is at least partially shared in common (something that I doubt Nicander and the Alexandrian georgic didactic poets would have contemplated). In short, I would wish the motif of the "reversed spear" not to be treated only in terms of content nor simply in formal terms, but in terms of how form and content necessarily interact and reshape each other. By the way, let us not forget that the motif of plowing with the spear has a precise genealogy which derives specifically from heroic epic: this is just what Jason does in Apollonius Rhodius 3.1321-30, "he grasped his resistless spear wherewith, like some ploughman with a Pelasgian goad, he pricked the bulls beneath, striking their flanks . . . They moved on at the bidding of the spear."

It should be clear from this discussion that I am not advocating an exclusively generic approach to poetry. Literary genres are one component of poetic discourse, as are syntax, meter, or narrative and rhetorical procedures. It is simply a matter of seeing whether referring to genre makes the texts we study more interesting, richer in meaning and in problems. The advantage is that of discovering behind the apparent fixity of the texts a more mobile perspective: one which is programmatic, dynamic, close to the very act of poetic composition and to its richness in problems.

One last point. Friedrich Klingner, my teacher many years ago in Munich, left me rather cold when he practiced criticism in musical terms, and I must confess that the notion of "theme and variation" seems to me too vague to put matters in order, given that it is applicable to any artistic procedure whatsoever. Besides, as far as I know, genres exist in the musical tradition as well, and composers expect the audience to react to their specific choices.

Above all, what I really don't want to happen is for my position to be unintentionally distorted into a reductive formalism (fifteen years ago I might

have been considered perhaps something of a formalist, at the time I wrote my book about allusion and intertextuality). It seems to me that Jasper Griffin tends to restrict my interpretation of the Tenth *Eclogue* to a problem of literary theory. Well, I am afraid it is not so. As far as I am concerned, the confrontation between two genres also *mediates* two worlds, two ideologies, two ways of life, and two kinds of mental horizon.

BOUNDARIES, WORLDS, AND ANALOGICAL THINKING, OR HOW LUCRETIUS LEARNED TO LOVE ATOMISM AND STILL WRITE POETRY

If I could choose an epigraph for this paper it would be the scenes in Stanley Kubrick's film, *Dr. Strangelove*, in which the mad general fiercely protects the perimeters of his base on the one hand and is obsessed with the idea of conserving bodily fluids on the other. It is a jump, I know, to Epicurus; but he too is deeply interested in boundaries and, judging from his negative view of sex ("It never did anyone good, and it is lucky if it did not do harm," frag. 62 Usener) he too is not happy about the loss of bodily fluids. Indeed the Garden is itself a safely bounded world; and Lucretius' metaphor, in the famous proem of Book 2, of the sage's vision from a celestial citadel, fortified by the philosophy of his master, may have its roots in Epicurean thinking about boundaries.

Boundaries and their violation play an important role in Lucretius' thought, as they did to some degree in that of Epicurus. Lucretius imbues with new poetic feeling what was a perhaps latent tendency in his Master's view of the world. This venture will also take us into the thorny problem of applying modern psychological theories to an ancient poet. This is the hermeneutic side of this paper and I shall come back to it at the end. I shall be arguing, in part, that the mental operations of displacement and analogy, which play a large role in Freudian (and other psychological) approaches to the self help us understanding the ways in which Lucretius has made Epicurus' thought his own and has interpreted in his own personal, poetic way Epicurus' moral mission of rescuing mankind from the fear of death and making his fellow-men more serene and happier with their lives.

The fear of mutilation or dismemberment constitutes what psychologists label "primary boundary anxiety," anxiety about the invasion, transformation, or deformation of one's corporeal being.[1] Such concerns about the integrity

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1   The standard works are Seymour Fisher, *Body Consciousness* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1973) and *Body Experience in Fantasy and Behavior* (New York 1970). For applications to classical texts see R. F. Newbold, "Boundaries and Bodies in Late Antiquity," *Arethusa* 12 (1979) 93-114 and "Discipline, Bondage, and the Serpent in Nonnus' *Dionysiaca*," *Classical World* 78 (1984-85) 89-98; also my essay, "Boundary Violation and the Landscape of the Self in Senecan Tragedy," *Antike und Abendland* 29 (1983) 172-87, reprinted in my *Interpreting Greek Tragedy* (Ithaca 1986) 315-36.

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