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Stephen Hinds

«Proemio al mezzo»:
Allusion and the Limits of Interpretability

The title of this volume – *Memory, Allusion, Intertextuality* – bears witness to an unresolved debate among classicists about terms of reference; Don Fowler has set out key elements of that debate in his introductory essay. Our two colloquia held in early 1995, one in Corpus Christi College, Oxford and one in the University of Washington, Seattle, can be read as offering different but compatible sets of answers to the same question: what are the strengths and limitations of the traditional philological model[1] of 'allusion', as developed and refined by twentieth-century students of Hellenistic and Roman poetry, building upon an amalgam of Greek and Roman precept and practice? As classical studies adjusts to the perpetual *aggiornamento* of method in modern literary criticism, is 'allusion' a term which has outlived its usefulness, or a term which is ready to gain a new lease on life?

Two colloquia and, originally, two separate titles: in Oxford, *Intertextuality and Latin Poetry*; in Seattle, *Allusion and the Limits of Interpretability*. The former title modifies philological rules of engagement by abandoning 'allusion' for the overlapping but larger interpretative model of 'intertextuality', whose genesis lies outside classical philology – and indeed, strictly speaking, outside literary studies at large. The latter title also advertises its intent to apply methodological pressure to the study of allusion – but this time reformist pressure from within rather than revolutionary pressure from without.

In practice, as in much recent work by literary classicists, methodological affinities and coincidences between the two pro-

1. Or models: even aside from the question of the importation of 'intertextuality' into philology, different sects of philologists have tended to favour their own tribal labels in this area: *'arte allusiva'* (both as animated by G. Pasquali, *Stravaganze quarte e supreme*, Venice 1951, 11-20, and as bureaucratized by G. Giangrande, *'Arte allusiva' and Alexandrian Epic Poetry*, «Class. Quart.», n.s.17, 1967, 85-97, 'creative imitation' (D.A. West and A.J. Woodman (edd.), *Creative Imitation and Latin Literature*, Cambridge 1979); 'poetic reference' (R.F. Thomas, *Virgil's Georgics and the Art of Reference*, «Harv. Stud. Class. Phil. 90, 1986, 171-98).

grammes complicate the clear tribal distinction advertised by the terminology – a distinction whose ideological and epistemological underpinnings Fowler has so well traced. The second, third and fourth papers in the Oxford set all quickly move in their opening pages to restrict the kind of intertextualism which will constitute their focus. Alessandro Schiesaro's formulation is representative (I quote his own English translation):

> ... all texts are, necessarily, intertextual, even if and when they happen to be only marginally engaged in direct allusion. Yet it is generally and rightly admitted that Seneca and, for that matter, several other "silver" authors revel in a particularly intense fashion in the expressive possibilities afforded by a sustained (and often problematic) dialogue with their models.

The fact is that the reader of this volume has come across the term 'allusion' several times in the course of the Oxford papers. Likewise, the rival label will by no means be absent from the second half of the volume: the limits of allusive interpretability explored in the Seattle papers will often be locatable in territory which has been claimed by Fowler for 'intertextuality'.

This refusal of the two sets of papers to deliver a tidy picture of two distinct schools of thought can be read in part as a reflection of recent accommodations between old ways and new in classical studies: traditional philologists are less hostile to ideas imported under the banner of 'theory' than they were a generation ago, and proponents of 'theory' are also less likely than before to treat the competition between methodological paradigms as a zero-sum game.

The methodological mix is also a matter of human geography: the career of the modern scholar takes classicists, and with them their ideas, between universities and across international boundaries more frequently than has been the case for any academic generation since World War Two. Not only did the organizers in both Oxford and Seattle field panels which mingled local with imported talent, but each colloquium featured *individuals* whose careers embody cross-cultural fusions between and among various scholarly traditions in Britain, Ireland, Italy and the United States. (I myself further complicated the demographic picture by taking part in each of the two colloquia[2]). We live in a world,

2. My Oxford paper, not reproduced in this volume, contained material now written up in chapter 3, sections 1-3 of my forthcoming *Allusion and Intertext: Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry*, Cambridge 1998 – a book in which one classicist attempts to map some of the issues mapped here by many.

then, in which the ideas of classicists are not necessarily bottled at source.

Finally, there may be a more profound epistemological reason for a tendency among critics like us, in this volume and elsewhere, to assimilate intertextualist models to allusionist ones, and *vice versa*. As classicists we are blessed, or cursed, with what, even allowing for diversification through various random accidents of preservation and loss, is a remarkably narrow and *prepackaged* corpus of written materials from the Greco-Roman world. To a degree which we still often underestimate, a work of Greek or Roman literature was *intended* at the outset to be legible within a linear, unified narrative of tradition, thus (as it turned out) preprogramming it for the various tests of canonization and recanonization which it would face over the centuries to follow. The reception of classical literature is a history in which ideas of genre, canon and poetic authority formed by Greeks and Romans are repeatedly fed back into Greek and Roman literature itself, sometimes more recognizably, sometimes less so, but almost always implicitly or explicitly reconfirming the idea that the narrative thus formed should be a coherent one. Now much of the energy of modern intertextualist approaches comes from a kind of heuristic dissolution of literary canons, whereby texts and kinds of text deemed peripheral to a given (classicizing!) narrative of literary history are brought into its centre, to see how arguments will thereby be changed. But for classical literature itself, as we have it, in which marginality has usually resulted in actual extinction, opportunities for such reconfiguration of centre and periphery are far fewer and less radical than a modernist, or even a medievalist, can conceive: as classicists we are faced with a corpus in which most of what has survived has done so precisely because at various critical points in history it was somehow perceived to be integral to a distinct, unified and often reified tradition. The fact is, then, that the narrow predisposition of the allusionist to privilege direct and conscious familial links between texts finds in the extant corpus of Greek and Roman literature a body of work whose history makes it disproportionately amenable to such an approach. Hence the continuing appeal of 'allusion' to classicists, even when many critics of modern literature and culture have dismissed its narratives as too limited for their purposes. Hence too, I think, the tendency even among classicists who favour the rival term to be 'soft' intertextualists, in the sense that they often gravitate towards the same correspondences and arguments which already interest classical allusionists: our surviving corpus is simply *resistant* to 'harder' kinds of intertextualism. This is not, I hasten to say, an argument against the wider use of inter-

textualist models within classical studies advocated by Fowler – quite the opposite. Just as we need the papyrologist and the epigrapher to give us glimpses, however fragmentary, of more randomized worlds of textual dissemination to set against the centralized and centripetal narratives of the classical tradition, so the varied models of the intertextualist can do something to *denature* the classical tradition's powerful teleologies, giving us glimpses of different ways in which its extant stories might be arranged and hierarchized – and different ways in which its gaps might be arranged and hierarchized too.

Let me move back towards specifics by drawing attention to one aspect of the negotiation between 'intertextuality' and 'allusion' which is peculiar to our tale of two colloquia, viz a productive tension in each between the term chosen and the *particular range* of classical texts to which it is applied. Another Fowlerian prospect can be revisited here. The Oxford event, while opting for 'intertextuality', concentrates on readings which lie firmly within the traditional home territory of allusive studies (albeit in some of its less explored districts): that is, the poetry of Rome, self-consciously literary and notoriously fixated on its relationships with the poetic past. In contrast, the Seattle event, though retaining 'allusion', includes readings which move that term away from its Hellenistic-Roman base so as to test its viability for earlier Greek material which more obviously problematizes boundaries between oral and literate, performed and written, myth and text – boundaries often ignored or elided by allusionists, and, in fact, more usually accorded attention by those who align themselves with intertextualist (and indeed interdiscursivist) models. More on this below, as also on the related interpretative challenges which arise when a single paper heuristically juxtaposes an account of Hellenistic poetic allusivity with an account of allusivity between historiographical prose texts (and, perhaps, between larger discourses of history).

This collection, then, deploys an intertextualist colloquium with a strong allusionist accent and an allusionist colloquium with a strong intertextualist accent – two colloquia with enough community of purpose to justify their presence in a single volume, but with enough differences of internal dynamic to lead us, as editors, to respect the integrity of each in the volume's arrangement. The two sets of discussions come together in a building a few blocks away from the Piazza dei Miracoli in Pisa, in which, ever since the publication of a seminal book in 1974, the methodological claims of allusion and intertextuality have been entertained with acuity and generosity under the welcoming sign which completes the triad of overlapping terms in our title: *memoria dei poeti*, poetic 'memory'[3]. The fact that our two gatherings in Anglophone universities eight time-zones apart each included as a guest a former *habitué* of Via Galvani 1 says something about the international impact of Pisan Latin: we Anglophones are grateful for the reciprocal *xenia* which now brings our joint results home to the seat of Pisa's own journal.

A number of linked and recurrent themes will emerge in the papers which follow. Patricia Rosenmeyer's study of Sappho's dialogue with Homer will begin by asking the main question raised by the expansion of 'allusion' away from its Hellenistic-Roman base:

> If by "allusion" we mean an interaction between two texts, do we need to redefine our terms when the "texts" under consideration originate in an oral, performative context?

As she observes, imitation within oral poetic culture has often been envisaged by modern critics as a kind of generalized evocation of tradition unencumbered by felt associations with specific models: from this point of view, only in the poetry of a later, literate age will authors choose precise passages in precise authors for imitation. Rosenmeyer puts pressure upon this chronological distinction by portraying a Sappho who is so positioned in the history of publication that she belongs both to the world of oral performance and to the world of written transcription and dissemination. One corollary of this approach might be to remind us that oral and written experiences of intertextuality continue to coexist in later periods too, even in the book-friendly cultures of Alexandria and Rome: the oral/written question will always demand synchronic as well as diachronic approaches.

Picking up this strand in Rosenmeyer's paper, Michael Halleran's inquiry into allusive practices in fifth-century Athenian tragedy will acknowledge distinctions and overlaps there too between engagement with mythic traditions and engagement with specific literary texts. Halleran begins by isolating a clear example of what he terms 'literary' allusion (it involves a precise reference to another text which treats a different myth); he then goes on to devote the greater part of his paper to cases in which mythic tradition is found to resist such tidy textual appropriation and containment.

3. G.B. Conte, *Memoria dei poeti e sistema letterario*, Turin 1974, largely translated in *The Rhetoric of Imitation: Genre and Poetic Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poets*, Ithaca 1986; more recently cf. Conte, *Genres and Readers*, trans. G.W. Most, Baltimore 1994, esp. 133-8.

Another way to explore our expectations of the term 'allusion' in oral, performative contexts is to consider the presence or absence of effects which seem more easily apprehensible by a recursive reader than by a one-time listener. Halleran will draw attention, in passing, to a set of intricate verbal and numerical correspondences between the opening thirteen lines of, respectively, the *Oedipus Tyrannus* and the *Oedipus at Colonus*. As he notes,

> The implications for such precise echoes in a performance medium, where they are rare, are worth pondering.

Again, one lesson may be that a diachronic account of orality versus literacy in matters of intertextual practice will not suffice: this instance rather encourages us to draw a synchronic distinction between a writing and reading poet on the one hand, and a listening audience on the other, who experience the Sophoclean text in different ways. It can also prompt us to speculate (as many classicizing Hellenists are reluctant to speculate) about different levels of attentiveness and expertise in relation to such matters within the Athenian theatre audience itself – some perhaps accustomed to discuss Sophoclean poetic technique even in between festivals, and hence ready to weigh every syllable as the *O.C.* gets under way; others paying less attention to matters of line-by-line structure, but looking for the play's core message, so as to argue about it later; and still others cracking nuts, signalling to their friends, and wondering how long it will be before a good song and dance number comes up.

Another recurrent interest in the papers below is in the issues of interpretative authority and control, both theoretical and empirical, raised by the verb 'to allude' – with its inherent privileging of the agency of an actively alluding author. How far *can* an author control and delimit, or be felt to control and delimit, the meanings of an allusion? Halleran's paper will pose a version of this question in negative terms:

> How can an author refer to only *part* of another tradition or text, while denying or ... even ignoring another part[?]

His case studies offer no easy answer. What they do suggest, however, is that a dramatist can sometimes emplot this very problem quite deliberately within the text of his play – whether with the intent of reminding his audience of a mythic road not taken or, less closurally, to leave his audience in continuing doubt as to whether a given road is envisaged as taken or not. Halleran's approach shows some affinities with the story of allusive negotiation between different interpretations of text and tradition which will emerge from Rosenmeyer's reading of Sappho fr. 16. In that poem, Rosenmeyer describes and mediates between two sets of 'multiple voices', Helen's and Sappho's own, among which interpretative authority can be felt to be distributed.

In thus delicately negotiating between interpretative open-endedness *tout court*, and a kind of interpretative open-endedness embraced and channelled by the author, Halleran and Rosenmeyer make frequent appeals to the responses of audiences and readers, both ancient and modern. This is of course as it should be; for the only author to whom we have access is a figure whom we, as readers, find in (or read out from) the text. We allusionists permit ourselves to look for authorial subject-positions, believing that the figure of the alluding author, however conjectural, is 'good to think with', and even that this speculation may require a little more in the way of metaphysics than text-and-reader-oriented intertextualists (with their communally constructed ' "model" or "textual" authors') are prepared to contemplate. My own treatment of 'literary historical self-annotation' in Statius and Martial will attempt to show how enabling it can be to posit an alluding author who is always, at every moment, a tendentious, *atypical* reader of the poetic traditions which he or she appropriates. The undoubted fact that no allusive intention can ever be wholly retrieved (even, as I shall suggest, by the author him- or herself) does not free us, as critics, from all responsibility to find ways in which to talk about allusive intent. However, it is equally important that we not allow our speculations in this area to become easy, unexamined or (above all) unresponsive to textual nuance, lest we fall back into the excesses of biographism and romantic identification which the broad prohibitions of the intentional fallacy sought quite reasonably to stamp out[4].

The status and boundaries of the texts (or 'texts') involved in allusion; the knowability (to others and to self) of the alluding author, and his or her capacity and desire to control the meanings of an allusion: these are among the issues discussed and problematized in the papers below. One other shared concern,

4. For fuller elaboration of the approach taken in this paragraph, cf. Hinds (op. cit. n.2), chapter 2, section 5. For a representative theorization of the 'model author' see U. Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, Cambridge 1992, 64: 'Since the intention of the text is basically to produce a model reader able to make conjectures about it, the initiative of the model reader consists in figuring out a model author that is not the empirical one and that, in the end, coincides with the intention of the text.'

already handled more than once in the first half of the volume, is worth highlighting. What kinds of statement concerning power, prestige and self-definition may be encoded in the allusive gesture? What larger ideological issues are at stake? Traditional studies of imitation and allusion have often been content simply to document a link, or to label it (in narrow terms derived from the ancient commentators) as a homage, a borrowing or a theft. In one of his '*otto punti*' at the end of our volume, Alessandro Barchiesi will seek to counter the familiar charge that among classicists what allusion amounts to, and indeed intertextuality too, is the study of pure literary form by pure literary formalists. In response, Barchiesi will treat anew a fundamental principle of Pisan Latin (translation mine),

> An interest in intertextuality does not signify a position taken in a dispute, more or less implicit, between formalist and historicist readings of ancient texts.

James Clauss's paper will afford a good point of access to these matters. He offers two parallel case-studies in the use of sustained allusion to construct a literary character: Apollonius uses Homer's Nausicaa to shape his Medea; Livy uses Sallust's Catiline to shape his Hannibal. Now, exponents of *arte allusiva* have found it easy enough to read the Apollonian pattern as a matter of pure literariness; it has, after all, been normal in Apollonian studies for the *Argonautica* to be regarded as a display-piece of Greek epic technique largely uncontaminated by other considerations of cultural context and history. But the historiographical pattern of allusion, or at least *this* historiographical pattern of allusion, cannot so easily be kept in a formalist box. We all know that Hannibal does a great deal of work in Roman culture as an 'other' against whom the Romans define themselves. When, in Clauss's analysis, Livy allusively aligns Hannibal, a foreigner and a paradigmatic 'enemy without', with Sallust's Catiline, a Roman, but also a paradigmatic 'enemy within', it becomes clear that more is at stake than the borrowing by one historian from another of a useful set of narrative *topoi*. How can this pattern of allusion *not* be read as reflecting and complicating discussions of Roman national self-definition, and indeed of causation and patterning in history itself? These are questions which Clauss's paper will raise; and it will use its bipartite structure to explore broader senses in which *all* allusion entails some reflexion upon identity, upon selfhood and otherness.

Likewise, for Rosenmeyer, Sappho's allusion to Homer is not something which takes place in an ideological vacuum, or outside history. She sets the stakes thus:

> Given what seems to be a fairly standard male response to the female voice in antiquity, epitomized by Penelope's silencing in *Odyssey* book 1, I suspect that female and male authors cannot engage in intertextual dialogue without gender influencing their gestures and our interpretations.

That suspicion will be amplified in the latter half of her paper into a sustained exploration of issues of gender, genre and reading- (or listening-) community negotiated in Sappho's dialogue with Homer – including a notable reassessment of Winkler's concept of Sapphic 'double consciousness'.

The complexity of such readings brings with it a reminder that we must not allow the polemic of doctrinaire historicists, old or new, to bully us into thinking that, in order for literature to be about power, it always has to be about something other than literature. For poets in Greek and Roman culture, 'power, prestige and self-definition' very often means power, prestige and self-definition in relation to other poets and poetry, both past and present. Literary history has its own internal power-plays – and we should not apologise for counting these as real history too. Again and again in the papers which follow, the allusive event will have an historical dimension of this kind; my own paper will define allusion as a *mobilization* of such history.

Every critic in this volume has his or her stories to tell about how texts come together and interact in literary tradition. It seems probable that every critic could also tell more private stories about difficulties encountered in talking about these matters – difficulties in satisfying oneself, and difficulties in satisfying one's fellow philologists, who may find a given approach too abstract or too mired in detail, and a given allusive correspondence under-interpreted, over-interpreted or, quite simply, 'incredible' (a word which Latinists, at least, have never been shy about applying to one another's efforts in this area). In the final essay below (which serves as an epilogue not just to the Seattle colloquium but to the whole volume) Alessandro Barchiesi will offer a programmatic emblem of his anxieties and hopes for our project, combining one of the most venerable images in Greco-Roman poetry with an *objet trouvé* from his trip to Seattle (translation mine):

> ... a chart of the jagged coasts of the Northwest, with critical points marked wherever past and more recent ships have gone to the bottom.

Let me fill in some names of features on that map (all genuine): Cape Disappointment, Destruction Island, Cape Flattery, Obstruction Pass, False Bay, Deception Pass, Double Bluff, Posses-

sion Point, Restoration Point, Point No Point. In Barchiesi's allegory, the *punti critici* to be negotiated by the student of allusion and intertextuality all carry histories of past error no less grievous than these. But that is no reason for us to lose hope:

> After all, there are different ways to use a map of shipwrecks: he who sees in it a record of defeat and error misses the advantages of using it as a pilot's handbook for safer navigation, or the pleasures of dreaming of rich traces of underwater treasure.

Those accustomed to the grace and ease with which Barchiesi's own writing appears to navigate the rocks and shoals may be surprised at the element of continuing wariness in his critical stance: but this is the wariness of a master mariner, who knows whereof he speaks. In giving him the final position in this volume, we editors eschew the false assurances of an overly tidy closure, choosing instead to subscribe to a rich meditation on memory, allusion and intertextuality which is as sensitive to this volume's divergences as to its convergences, and which shows responsibility alike to past, present and future debate.

I end this 'proem in the middle' with some acknowledgements. The idea for the Seattle colloquium, held at the University of Washington on April 29 1995, came from Michael Halleran; it was a pleasure to co-organize and co-chair the event with him. Generous support was given by the UW Department of Classics and the UW Center for the Humanities, the institutional hosts; Vanessa Smith and Douglas Machle in the Classics office helped greatly with logistics and publicity. Both speakers and audience on the day itself contributed to a lively and fruitful set of discussion periods, from which every one of the papers below has benefited. In bringing together the Oxford and Seattle colloquia for this publication, Don Fowler and I received much help and encouragement from Alessandro Barchiesi. Barchiesi's article develops and extends some reflexions offered at the end of the Seattle meeting; his formal colloquium paper 'Augustan Hypertexts' will drop anchor in another port.

University of Washington, Seattle