Statian Closure from Epic to Pastoral


My Thebaid, on whom I have spent twelve wakeful years, will you long endure and be read when your master is gone? Already, it is true, Fame has strewn a kindly path before you and begun to show the new arrival to posterity. Already great-hearted Caesar deigns to know you, and the studious youth of Italy studies and recites you. Live, I pray, and do not attempt the divine *Aeneid*, but follow her footsteps from afar in adoration. Soon, if any envy still spreads clouds before you, they shall perish, and after me you shall be paid the honors you deserve.

2. Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde* 1786-1799

Go, litel book, go litel myn tragedie,
Ther god thy maker yet, er that he dye,
So sende might to make in som comedie!
But litel book, no making thou nenvye,
But subgit be to alle poesy;
And kiss the steppes, wheras thou seest pace
Virgile, Ovyde, Omer, Lucan, and Stace.

And for ther is so greet diversitee
In English and in wryting of our tonge,
So preye I god that noon miswryte thee,
Ne thee mismetre for defaute of tonge.
And red wherso thou be, or ells song,
That thou be understonde I god beseche!
But yet to purpose of my rather speche.

Go lytell boke and put the in the grace
   Of hym that is moste of excellence
And be nat hardy to appeare in no place
   Without supporte of his magnyfycence
And who so ever in the fynde offence
   Be nat to bolde for no presumpcyon
Thy selfe enarme aye in pacynce
   And thee submytte to theyr correccyon,

*Verba translatoris ad librum suum.*

And for thou art enlymned with no flowres
   Of Retoryke, but with whyte and blacke
Therefore thou muste abyde all showres
   Of them that lyste set on the alacke
And whan thou art most lykely go to wracke
   Agaynst them, thyn Errour nat diffende
But humbly withdrawe and go abacke
   Requerynge them all yt is amysse to mende.

Here endeth the Troycbooke otherwise called the Sege of Troye translated by John Lydgate monke of the monastery of Bery.


Go lytyl John / and who doth you appose
Sayng your quayer / kepe non accordance
Telle hym as yet / neither in ryme ne prose
Ye ben expert / praye him of suffrancce
Chyldren muste be / of chyldly governance
And also they muste entretyde be
With esy thing / and not with subtyle.

Go lytil quayer / submytte you every where
Under correction of benyvolence
And where envye is / loke ye come not there
For ony thinge / kepe your tretye thens
Envye is full forward reprehens
And how to hurte / lyeth ever in a wayte
Kepe your quayer / that it be not there bayte.
4. Spenser, *The Shepheardes Calendar* (1579)

a) Front Matter

**TO HIS BOOKE.**

Go little booke: thy selfe present,
As child whose parent is unkent:
To him that is the president of noblesse and of chevalree
And if the Envie barke at thee,
As sure it will, for succoure flee
   Under the shadow of his wing,
And asked, who thee forth did bring,
A shephears swaine say did thee sing,
All as his straying flocke he fedde:
And when his honor has thee redde,
Crave pardon for my hardyhedde.
But if that any aske thy name,
Say thou wert base begot with blame:
For thy thereof thou takest shame.
And when thou art past jeopardee,
Come tell me, what was sayd of mee:
And I will send more after thee.

b) Envoy

Loe I have made a Calender for every yeare,
   That steel in strength, and time in durance shall outwear:
And if I marked well the starres revolution,
   It shall continewe til the worlds dissolution.
To teach the ruder shepheard how to feede his sheepe,
   And from the falsers fraud his folded flocke to keepe.
Go lyttle Calender, thou hast a free passeporte,
   Go but a lowly gate emongste the meaner sorte.
Dare not to match thy pype with Tityrus hys style,
   Nor with the Pilgrim that the Ploughman played a while,
But followe them farre off, and their high steppes adore,
   The better please, the worse despise, I aske nomore.
THE
Shepheardes Calender
Conteyning twelue Æglogues proportionable
to the twelve monethes.

Entitled
TO THE NOBLE AND VERTU-
ous Gentleman most worthy of all titles
both of learning and cheualric M.
Philip Sidney.

AT LONDON.
Printed by Hugh Singleton, dwelling in
Creede Lane neere vnto Ludgate at the
signe of the gylden Tynne, and
are there to be solde.

1579.
To the most excellent and learned both

Drake and Poet. Mayster Gabriele Harvey, his
verse special and singular good friend E. K. commen-
deth the good liking of this his labour,
and the patronage of the
new Poets.

Inco the vulniste, Sayde the olden famous Poete
Chaucer, whom for his excellency and wonderfull skill in making,
his schoaler Ludie, a worthy scholler of so excellant a master, cal-
lish the Lord of our Language: and whom our Colvmn dight,
in his Eglogue called Timothys the God of the shepheardes, comparing hym
to the worthines of the Roman Timotheus Virgile. Which proveth
myne owne good friend Mr. Harvey, as in that good Poet he fet-
ured soell Pandare in purpose, for the bofisheing of his busie brocage, so very well taketh
place in this our nev Poete, whom for that he is vacuious (as said Chaucer) is vnself, and
vsnown to molt me, is regarded but of fewe. But I doue not, for soone as his name shall
come into the knowledge of men, and his shepheardes be founded in the trump of fame,
but that he shall be not onely futile, but also beloved of all, embraced of the moss,
and vemed at of the bel. No lefe I think, deforme his vertuosity in devouing his pith-
nette in vertuising his complaints of foue so loudly, his disconfort of pleasante so pleasurously,
his pathellall dulcetess, his moral vertuosity, his devise obturiting of Decenm every
where in personages, in heaven, in sunder, in generaly, in all freemly. Simplicity
in handling his matter, and framing his words: the which of many things which
in him be strange, I knowe well all the strangeness, the words them selfe being so
ancient, the inventing them so short and straitly, and the whole Periodes & comma-
fale & gesichtes & significaciones of his roundness, and so grace for the strangeness. And
fruith of the vwords to speake, I grant they be somewhat hard, and of molt men vnadevled,
yn both English, and alio vled of molt excellent Authors and molt famous Poetes. In
wom_en this is our Poete hath beene much truall, and thorowly red, how could
it be, (as that worthy Orator sayde) but that walking in the tyme although for other
caus he walke, yet needees he ought to be furthurn, and having the found of those aunc-
ient Poetes full ringing in his ears, he oughte needes to finging his out out of the zere
tunes. But whether he vwith them by such caloundrie and unharm, or of fet purpose and
ehyle, as thinkeing them fitte for such ruffalec mansel of shepheardes, eyther for that
theyr rough founde would make his tymes more ragged and ruffale, or the becaus of other
olds and obsolete words are most vled of country folks, sure I thinke, and thinke I
not smif, that they bringe great grace and as one vould say, vertuisme to the verse. For
albe amongst many other faultes is specially to be objected of Vally against Lute, and of oth-
er against Salute, that vwith ovr much studie they affect antiquite, as counteriing ther-
by credence and honor of elder yeeres: yet I am of opinion, and doe the best learnt are
of the lyke, that those auncient folleme words are a great ornament both in the one &
in the other: the one labouring to set forth in his workes an eternall image of antiquite,
and the other carefully disscouering matters of grannie and imporance. For is my memo-
ry fayle not, Tullis in that bookes, wherein he endeavoure to set forth the pattern of a

Immerito.
December.

And roote, ere they were halfe mellow ripe;  
My harvest wait, my hope away dows wipe.

The fragrant flowers, that in my garden grewe,  
Bene withered, as they had bene gathered long.  
Their roots bene hyppd up by lacke of neue,  
Yet derved with teares they can be euer among.  
Ally who has wont to my Relaind this spight.  
To spit the flowers, that should her girdon blisht.

And I, that wishome want to frame my peppe,  
Unto the hifting of the shephards soote:  
Those folkes nature have gatered as too ripe,  
And cast hem out, as rotten and wiseste.

The lower Lasse I cast to please none more,  
One if I please, enough is me therefore.

And thus of all my harvest hope I haue  
Thought reaper but a weorde crop of care:

Which, when I thought bene threathe in sweetness deaue,  
Colden for compe, and chaste for harlye bare.

Some as the chaste spoule in the fan beyde,  
All was blisse away of the wooning wynde.

So now my peare draues to his latter ceme,  
My spring is spent, my sommer burnt up quyte.

My harbette hales to stire up winter scene,  
And bids him alwayes with rigorous rage bys right.

So nope he steames with mawd a furrow shewe,  
So now his blustering blacke eche cote both shewe.

The carefull cold bath nyght my rugged ynde,  
And in my face bepe sursorose ob bath righ:

My heate desprent with howe frothe I fynde,  
And by mony ere the Crowe his clothe both wyght.

Delight is lapd abonde, and pleaure part,  
So nowe now shynes, cloudes han all overse.

Now leave ye shephards hope your merry glise,  
My life is hoaste and weary of this stowe.

Decemver.

Here will I hang my pypp upon this tree,  
Was never pypp of creede did better founde.

Winter is come, that blows the bitter blaste,  
And after Winter heretoe death does hale.

Gather pe together my little storde,  
My little storde, that was to me so liere:

Let me ablere te me in your solos pe lock,  
Cee the thyeme Winter breede you greater grieffe.  
Winter is come, that blows the balefull brede,  
And after Winter commonly tymel brede.

Adieu delights, that lullas me asleepe,  
Adieu my peace, whose lute I bought to scare:

Adieu my little Lambe and tuone the true,  
Adieu pe Woolde that oft my winstewe were:

Adieu good Habbinol, that was so true,  
Tell Relaind, her Coln bids her ageue.

Colins Embleme.
December.

A poem on the month of December, mentioning the constellations and changing weather.
This series promotes approaches to Roman literature which are open to dialogue with current work in other areas of the classics, and in the humanities at large. The pursuit of contacts with cognate fields such as social history, anthropology, history of thought, linguistics and literary theory is in the best traditions of classical scholarship: the study of Roman literature, no less than Greek, has much to gain from engaging with these other contexts and intellectual traditions. The series offers a forum in which readers of Latin texts can sharpen their readings by placing them in broader and better-defined contexts, and in which other classicists and humanists can explore the general or particular implications of their work for readers of Latin texts. The books all constitute original and innovative research and are envisaged as suggestive essays whose aim is to stimulate debate.

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me miserum at Am. 1.1.25 — a cry framed, remember, within a genre which never ceases to be alive to its own funereal aetiology.

In short, the fact that language renders us always already acculturated guarantees that there is no such thing as a wholly non-negotiable confluence, no such thing as zero-interpretability. This is the basic insight of the semiological intertextualist; and in principle, as well as for the more practical dividends which it can offer, it should be embraced within the philological allusionist’s enterprise, not treated as irrelevant or (worse) as a threat to it.

4 Topoi and accountability

If the ‘accidental confluence’ is regularly set in opposition to the clearly defined allusion in the philological scheme of things, another category traditionally opposed to allusion (not as uninterpretable, this time, but as interpretable within narrowly circumscribed limits) is the topos or commonplace. As normally defined, the topos is an intertextual gesture which, unlike the accidental confluence, is mobilized by the poet in full self-awareness. However, rather than demanding interpretation in relation to a specific model or models, like the allusion, the topos invokes its intertextual tradition as a collectivity, to which the individual contexts and connotations of individual prior instances are firmly subordinate. Thus, in one of the most lucid treatments of the matter, Charles Martindale (as a classical Latinist) could begin his 1986 book on Milton by issuing a call to order to readers less familiar than he with the topoi-traditions of ancient epic, urging that a clearer distinction be drawn between Milton’s ‘allusions’, in which he alludes to particular models, and his adaptations of topos, in which he plays with stock material, and in respect of which claims for specific allusivity could lead to misinterpretation.

However (as, indeed, the Charles Martindale of the 1990s might be the first to argue), there are dangers of too easy an essentialism in such a firm distinction between allusion proper and participation in a topos. The present discussion provides an environment hospitable to a small test of the strength of the distinction, a test which will proceed by dismantling a topos and putting it back together again. As in the previous sections, the aim will be to explore and to come to a better understanding of a durable philological category, not to put a new category in its place.

In the course of his sustained exploration in Saturnalia 5 of Virgil’s use of Homer as chief archetype (5.13.40 per omnem poesin suam hoc uno est praeceipue usius archetypo), Macrobius has Eustathius juxtapose a passage in Aeneid 6 in which the Sibyl declares herself incapable of compassing all the crimes and punishments of the underworld, even had she multiple tongues, multiple mouths and a voice of iron, and a passage in Iliad 2 in which the Homeric poet uses almost the same set of terms to cast doubt upon his capacity to extend his famous catalogue of Greek forces from leaders to other ranks (Aen. 6.625–7, II. 2.488–90, ap. Sat. 5.7.16):

non, mihi si linguae centum sint oraque centum,
ferrea vox, omnis scelerum comprehendere formas,
onnia poenarum percurre re nominata possim

Not if I were to have a hundred tongues, a hundred mouths, and a voice of iron, could I compass all the forms of crime, or list all the names of the punishments

πληθύνο ὑ’ οὐκ δι’ ἄγω μυθήσαμαι οὐδ’ ὄνομήν, 7
οὐδ’ ε’ μοι δέκα μὲν γλώσσαι, δέκα δὲ στόματ’ ἐτεν, 8
φωνή δ’ ἐφρηκτος, χάλκεων δ’ ἔμεῖ ρέα, 9

But the multitude I could not tell or name, not if ten tongues were mine and ten mouths, an unbreakable voice and a heart of bronze . . .

At this point in his disquisition Eustathius has reduced his interpretative input to a bare listing of correspondences (5.3.15–17). Flesching things out for ourselves, we might provisionally agree on the basis of the data given that this looks like a clear and specific allusion: ‘Virgil preserves the anaphora of the Homeric model (δέκα . . . δέκα), but for greater effect changes the number from 10 to 100.’

My quotation comes from an actual modern commentary; but I cheat a little. This is a note by Richard Thomas, not on Aen. 6.625–6, but on an

\footnote{For an influential definition and history of the topos as a category in philological criticism, see Curtius (1953), 70–1, 79–105.}

\footnote{Martindale (1986), 4–11; among the more familiar instances of topos-adaptation discussed are ‘thick as autumnal leaves’ (P.L. 1.302) and ‘if great things to small may be compar’d’ (P.L. 10.306, et al.).}

\footnote{More conventional accounts of the ‘many mouths’ topos than the one below are available: e.g. Häussler (1976), 322–3.}
identical line-and-a-quarter at Geo. 2.43–4, in which Virgil had earlier deployed, verbatim, the same configuration of tongues, mouths and voice to declare his unwillingness to embrace in his verse the totality of didactic lore on arboriculture. More on the Virgilian duplication later; for now I stay with the Georgic version of the doublet to bring in another ancient witness. Scholia on Geo. 2.43 reveal the existence of an intermediate version of the ‘many mouths’ conceit, by Ennius (cited below as restored by Skutsch, Ann. 469–70):

linguae: Homericus sensus Graeci poetae, sicut et Ennius:
non si, lingua loqui saperet quibus, ora decem sint
in me, tum ferro cor sit pectusque revinctum

The idea is taken from the Greek poet Homer; so too Ennius: ‘Not if I were to have ten mouths with which my tongue could have sense to speak, and my heart and breast were encased in iron.’

The allusive narrative becomes a little more complicated; but, if anything, there seems to be an increase in specificity and point. In ferrea vox Virgil modifies Homer’s χαλκεον . . . τοπ by switching a metallic epithet from the heart to the voice; and it can now be seen that he incorporates an acknowledgement of Ennius, who had already changed that metal from bronze to iron. ‘Virgil has conflated his two models’ (Thomas again, on Geo. 2.44).

But there is more. Twin notes by Servius on the Georgic-Aeneid doublet plot into the picture an otherwise unknown passage of Lucretius:

non ego cuncta meis: Lucretius versus; sed ille aerea vox ait, non ferrea

Verse from Lucretius; but he says ‘voice of bronze’, not ‘of iron’.

‘Unwillingness’, not ‘incapacity’, a notable modification of what will emerge below as the usual emphasis, acutely interpreted by Thomas (1988a) ad loc. as laying claim to a specifically Callimachean virtuosity which could compass the totality but chooses not to: Geo. 2.42–4 non ego cuncta meis amplexcti versus viribus opto. non mihi si linguae centum sint oraque centum, I ferrea vox.

I quote Breviis Expositio Geo. 2.43; cf. Schol. Bern. ad loc.

Serv. Geo. 2.42, with Lachmann’s aerea for aeris; cf. Serv. Aen. 6.625 non mihi si linguae centum sint: Lucretii versus sublatus de Homero (‘lifted from Homer’), sed aerea vox dixit. On attempts to place this passage in Lucretius see Farrell (1991), 232n.56, with bibl. too on the idea that it should be reassigned to Lucilius, scribal confusion between the two names being common.

What emerges from this testimonium (if reliable) is that Lucretius has already performed the modification of Homer which we were crediting a moment ago to Virgil: he has already switched the metallic epithet from the heart to the voice – but without following Ennius in changing the metal from bronze to iron. Our complex allusion now orchestrates three models.

For one last (extant) complication, we may return to Macrobius. In Saturnalia 6, Furius puts Eustathius’ survey of Virgil’s debts to Homer (discussed above) into direct competition with a survey of Virgilian debts to Roman predecessors (6.1.7): quaedam de his quae ab Homero sumpta sunt ostendam non ipsum ab Homero tulisse, sed pribus altius inde sumpsisse, et hunc ab illis, quos sine dubio legerat, translusisse ‘As for certain of the things taken from Homer, I shall show that Virgil did not himself get them from Homer but that others before him had taken from that source and that Virgil (having certainly read their works) copied from them.’ Among his examples is the following (6.3.6):

Homeri est:
ούσι ει μετα δέκα μεν γλώσσαι, δέκα δε στόματα· εἶν
hunc secutus Hostius poeta in libro secundo belli Histriici ait:

non si mihi linguae
centum atque ora sient totidem vocesque liquatae
hinc Vergilius ait:

non mihi si linguae centum sint oraque centum

. . . Following Homer, the poet Hostius says in the second book of his Bellum Histriicum: ‘Not if I were to have a hundred tongues, as many mouths, and voices clear’. Hence Virgil says: . . . (etc.)

It now turns out that the first move which Thomas (and implicitly Eustathius) credited to Virgil, the multiplication ‘for greater effect’ of Homer’s ten mouths to a hundred, was anticipated in the Bellum Histriicum of the epic poet Hostius (late second century BCE) at fr. 3. Note Furius’ emphasis: Hostius follows Homer, Virgil follows Hostius, and the polemical point is that (therefore) Virgil does not follow Homer. However, an approach in terms of complex allusion will rather see Virgil as absorbing and transforming both Homer and Hostius – along with Ennius, Ann. 469–70 and the possible fragment of Lucretius.

Our initial attempt to read Virgil’s ‘many mouths’ passage as a tightly
controlled allusion is perhaps becoming a little problematic. Closer investigation has now yielded no fewer than four models, including the Homeric archetype; and that proliferation raises questions of emphasis and foregrounding which cannot all be answered as crisply as (say) Thomas was able to answer such questions for the *Argo* intertexts in Catullus 64. The permutations of markers linking Virgil’s iron voice to Homer’s bronze breast via Lucretius’ bronze voice and Ennius’ iron breast can indeed be plotted tidily, with every permutation leaving its isolable trace in the philological record – so that Thomas’s note on *Geo.* 2.44 about Virgil’s conflation of two models (Homer and Ennius) can be revised in Thomas’s own terms into a description of an even richer conflation of four models. But, on the matter of the multiplication which increases Homer’s ten mouths to one hundred, the first-quoted note by Thomas constitutes a small philological crisis. If interpretable allusion requires isolable markers or cues, then the multiplication of mouths can be used to talk about Hostius’ allusion to Homer; but the priority of the Hostian passage robs the marker of its interpretability in respect of Virgil’s allusion to Homer – unless we dodge the methodological bullet by positing blank ignorance of the Hostian passage on Virgil’s part.

However, philological markers notwithstanding, it seems to me that Thomas’s note on the multiplication deserves to be defended – at least as a reading of the *Aeneid* version of the doublet. Despite Hostius’ priority (and with due caution expressed in view of the decontextualized state of his fragment), in the larger schemes of the *Aeneid* it is surely intuitively right to describe this as a moment at which Virgil is in dialogue with Homer, not with Homer and Hostius. However, such a reading necessarily involves a renunciation of philological fundamentalism in favour of a less tidy approach to the allusion, grounded not so much in isolable cues as in what may be called for now a broader and more dynamic sense of contextual appropriateness (on which more at the end of the section).

A further wrinkle. Michael Wigodsky conjectures on the basis of the blanket claim in the twin Servian notes (‘Lucretii versus’) that Lucretius too (after Hostius) anticipated Virgil in the 10-to-100 multiplication.39 That would require us, and Virgil, to allow a Lucretian multiplication as well as a Hostian one to fade into the background as the Homeric archetype is invoked, and ‘capped’, in *Aen.* 6.625–6. Fair enough: but can this same permission be granted in the case of the *Georgics* version of the doublet (the one on which Thomas actually comments) where, although the markers are identical, Lucretius may have a better claim to the status of archetype than Homer, given the generic affiliation of the earlier Virgilian work with didactic?40 Granted, this new Lucretian wrinkle rests upon the evidence of Servius, a commentator notorious for his vagueness in delimiting allusive debts; but in methodological terms the important lesson is that an approach based on tight allusive control shows increasing vulnerability as problems and possibilities of *this kind* build.

Modern commentaries on Roman poetic texts face this sort of difficulty all the time. It is interesting that, of the two recent commentators on the *Georgics*, Thomas, who reads 2.43–4 as a precise and pointed allusion, can do so only by occluding some of the material which his own procedures would seem to require him to account for; whereas Mynors, who does name all the Republican passages attested by ancient Virgilian exegesis, avoids the discourse of allusivity altogether by presenting the passages as, in effect, the timeless record of a *topos*.

The usual philological solution to the kind of problem recreated above is to enact precisely this latter, reifying move. In other words, faced with a Babel of claims and counter-claims to specific allusive interpretability coming from untidily proliferating sources, the commentator capitulates, deciding that the motif in question is so common – such a *topos*, as the term has it – as to forfeit any potential to be treated as more than merely inert. Many philologists would argue for just such a capitulation in the case of the ‘many mouths’ motif; and they might cite the world-weary words of the satirist Persius to claim a warrant in ancient poetic practice for the move towards reification (5.1–4):

\[vatibus hic mox est, centum sibi poscere voces, centum ora et linguas optare in carmina centum, fabula seu maestro ponatur hianda tragoeod, vulnera seu Parthi ducentis ab inguisse ferrum\]

This is the poets’ custom: to demand a hundred voices, to seek a hundred mouths and a hundred tongues for song, whether the piece

39 Wigodsky (1972), 98–9, whose agenda is the promotion of the better-known Lucretius (or Lucullus: see prev. n.) over the ‘minor epic poet’ Hostius as Virgil’s model for the 10-to-100 multiplication.

40 Homeric and Lucretian claims at *Geo.* 2.43–4 are finely handled by Farrell (1991), 232–4.
before them be a play for the tragic actor’s sad gape, or a tale of the wounded Parthian pulling iron from his groin.

Vattibus hic mos est: a cliché, a dead horse being flogged at an exhausted Hippocrene.41

But this is a counsel of despair. Persius’ characterization of the ‘many mouths’ habit of elevated poets does seem to support the idea of the topos as an inert collectivity, and indeed to lend aid and comfort to more general philological strictures which seek to limit the situations in which significance should be attached to verbal and thematic recurrence in Latin verse, on the grounds that Latin verse works with a limited number of words and themes. However, easy appeals to such strictures seem to me to do scant justice to the characteristic dynamics involved in the production and reception of elevated poetry in Rome. A discourse which is as circumscribed as is Roman poetry in its choices of genre, subject-matter and vocabulary is more sensitive, not less sensitive, to the need to confront its past utterances. The so-called commonplace, despite our name for it, is not an inert category in this discourse but an active one, with as much potential to draw poet and reader into, as away from, engagement with the specificities of its history. Members of the Roman literary élite learned in school to declaim on set themes such as the sacrifice of Iphigenia, or the deliberation of the three hundred Spartans at Thermopylae, and to embellish their declamations with expected topics like the details of a storm, or the vicissitudes of fortune.42 The immediate point of these exercises was to make something new and fresh out of something well-worn; and the way to excel will have been to engage actively with existing literary and rhetorical versions of the given theme. Against Persius may be cited the Younger Seneca, encouraging his addressee Lucilius to take on that favourite poets’ topic, a description of Mount Etna (Ep. 79.6):43

condicio optima est ultimi: parata verba venit, quae aliter instructa novam faciem habent

The last comer has the best situation. He finds the words to hand; differently arranged, they take on a new look.

More than that, Persius himself can be cited against Persius:44 in the very act of characterizing the ‘many mouths’ as a cliché, the satirist executes his own brilliant swerve upon it (5.5–6):

‘quorum saec? aut quantas robusti carminis offas
  ingeris, ut par sit centeno gutture niti?’

‘Where is this going? What great goblets of robust song are you
taking in, that need one hundred gullets to strain?’

Suddenly the image of utterance has become an image of ingestion, and the hundred mouths, rather than singing out poetry, are swallowing it down their hundred gullets in bite-sized chunks: nothing could be farther from inertia than this programmatic co-opting of a favourite epic motif to the alimentary aesthetic of satire.45

A more promising way to talk about the toposness of the ‘many-mouthis’ topos might be to characterize it, not in terms of allusive inertia, but, with the help of a key Conterian distinction, in terms of a subordination of modelling by particular source-passages to modelling by code. In the defining illustration of Conte’s powerful double vision of literary imitation, Homer functions for Virgil in the Aeneid as the ‘modello-esemplare’, i.e. ‘as the model constituted by the accretion of a series of individual imitations’; but he also functions as the ‘modello-codice’, i.e. as ‘the representative of the institution of epic poetry itself’. The former kind of imitation involves the ‘reproduction of [a] single loci’, the latter involves the ‘assimilat[ion of] rules and codifications’. Homer is often, indeed nearly always, Virgil’s “exemplary model” (together with Apollonius of Rhodes, Naevius, Ennius, the Greek and Roman tragedians, and several other authors), but he is also constantly the “code model”.46

41 We may infer from Persius’ description that our extant list of ‘many mouths’ passages is incomplete: no tragic instances are known to us.
42 Sen. Sius. 3, Sius. 2; Winterbottom (1974) vol. 2, index II s.vv. ‘descriptions of storms’, ‘commonplaces on fortune’. My use of these analogies for rhetorical practice is not intended to elide the distinctions between topos as a term of modern philology and topos as a term of ancient rhetoric: see Pernot (1986).
44 My thanks to Dan Hooley for pointing me in this direction.
45 At 5.26–9 Persius is ready to reappraise the motif on his own terms: cf. Bramble (1974), 8–9. At 5.189–91, in the satire’s coda, the pattern of counting by hundreds makes one last surprise appearance – which distorts the terms of the topos almost, but not quite, beyond recognition: cf. Anderson (1982), 162–3.
46 Quotation and retranslation of Conte (1966); 31, after (1985). 121–2; cf. also (1981),
All the discussions above of Virgilian and pre-Virgilian transformations of the ‘many mouths’ motif, whether more or less tidy, involve reading II. 2.488–90 as inaugurating a system of cues – a code – for expressions of epic countlessness. The permutations (of number, of metal, of location of metal) are interpretable as negotiations within that system rather than with the specific situations in the specific poems thus drawn on (in the case of Iliad 2, muster of Danaan forces at Troy). In other words, active modelling does occur here; but it is modelling by code, not modelling by particular source-passage. On this formulation, the toposness of the ‘many-mouths’ topos lies not in allusive inertia tout court, but in the observance of a stable set of parameters (a topos-code) within which endlessly active (and endlessly interpretable) allusive variation can be contained.

This is an enabling formulation (and one quite compatible with Martindale’s accounts of Miltonic engagement with commonplace-traditions). However, having established it, I also want to put it to work by destabilizing it a little. Observe that my Contean redescription of the topos does not banish the appeal to inertia altogether, but rather relocates it in a semiological appeal to the fixity of a topos-code. But how fixed is that fixity? In my account of Virgilian and pre-Virgilian ‘many mouths’ passages, it was notably easy to construct the iron voice, bronze voice, iron breast and so forth as allusive permutations within a stable code, because in the case of three of those passages (the Ennius, Hostius and Lucretius) the topos is transmitted to us as pure topos, stripped of all other contexts. However, if we turn our attention to the interaction of non-fragmentary instances of the topos, can we be so sure that the code itself will remain immutable under the pressure of a more palpable and less circumscribable range of textual and intertextual agendas?

Consider Ovid, Tristia 1.5.53–6, where the poet complains about the plethora of woes, mala, which have beset him since his exile:

> si vox infragilis, pectus mihi firmius aere,
> pluraque cum linguis pluribus ora forient,
> non tamen idcirco complecteris omnia verbis,
> materia vires exsuperante meas

If I had an unbreakable voice, a breast stronger than bronze, and a plurality of mouths with a plurality of tongues, not even so could I embrace them all in words, for the material surpasses my strength.

Granted, we can get a good run for our money with the same analysis of permutations within a fixed system as was deployed for the Virgilian doublet. Plura . . . ora, linguis pluribus: the imprecision of the enumeration is readable as a precise comment on the prior history of the topos: more than Homer’s ten, more than Hostius’ and Virgil’s hundred, more than the ten, hundred and thousand already deployed by Ovid in a microcosm of this topos-intensification played out in his own earlier oeuvre (A.A. 1.433–6, Met. 8.533–5, Fast. 2.119–20 respectively). Pectus mihi firmius aere: at one level the comparative firmius can underline the translation of the Homeric original (‘like Homer’s χόλεις ἱππος, only more so’); at another level, perhaps, it hints at what had previously been made of that Homeric original by Ennius (‘Q: What is stronger than a breast of bronze? A: A breast of iron’).

However, here are two other interpretative directions, which in different ways put pressure upon the toposness of the topos as we are currently defining it. First, this Tristia passage can be argued to engage with II. 2.488–90, not just as the archetype of the topos, but with attentive reference to its extra-topical particularities – not just as ‘modello-codice’ but also as ‘modello-esemplare’. At the point at which the topos occurs, the elegy is about to shift into an extended and explicit synecesis between Ovid’s sufferings and those of Ulysses (1.5.57–84): thus the evocation of Homer’s Iliad in 1.5.53–6 can be felt to anticipate and to set off the coming tour de force of allusion to Homer’s other great poem, the Odyssey. In 1.5.57–8 Ovid will claim to outdo Homer’s proverbially ‘much-enduring’ Ulysses in quantity of woes endured;

> pro duce Nerito docti mala nostra poetae scribite: Nerito nam mala plura tuli

Learned poets, write of my woes instead of the Neritian leader’s! for I have endured more than the Neritian

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This paragraph is indebted to a conversation with John Dillery.
in 1.53–6 he prepares for this by alluding to the famous passage in which Homer himself had acknowledged that epic quantifying is a difficult thing to do. Ovid even ‘annotates’ his allusive shift from the Iliadic catalogue of leaders to the Odyssey by the way in which he names Ulysses in the transitional couplet just quoted. Ulysses is envisaged, precisely, as a leader (duce); and he is given an abstruse geographical epithet (Neritio) which can be glossed from Ulysses’ own entry in the Iliadic catalogue.\(^4\) In sum, Iliad 2.488–90 is invoked not just as topos, but in its own (inter)textual particularity: Ovid has forced us to break down Martindale’s confident distinction between the interpretative procedures respectively appropriate to commonplaces and to allusions.

A second kind of pressure can be applied if we take a closer look at some of the Tristia passage’s most immediate predecessors in the timeline of the topos – paying attention now, not to the question of factor-ten multiplication, but to some less measurable considerations which were unavailable in the case of the fragmentary transformations adduced in connexion with the Virgilian doublet. None of the following suggestions is tidy; none can even begin to approach isolability (unlike the pattern of allusion to the Iliad just proposed); but cumulatively they may allow us to put some pressure on the very distinction between ‘modelo-codice’ and ‘modello-emplaire’ – if (as in section 3 above) we are prepared to speculate for a while in the outer reaches of interpretability.

Ovid’s earlier, thousand-mouth instance of the topos in the second book of the Fasti explicitly characterizes the poet as under strain because he is burdening an elegiac poem with weighty subject-matter (Augustus and his exploits) more appropriate to epic (2.119–26).\(^5\) One might argue that this programmatic emphasis on generic difference resonates here in the later elegiac setting of Tristia 1.5, in which (as we have just seen) Ovid juxtaposes the topos with a strong hint that the proper poetic vehicle for his countless woes would be a sort of super-Odyssey.

In Ovid’s hundred-mouth instance at Metamorphoses 8.533–5 (written, like the Fasti passage, in the years just preceding his exile), the topos expresses the countlessness of the funeral laments offered by his sisters to the dead Meleager. In terms of subject-matter, this is closer to what Ovid is counting in Tristia 1.5—mala, woes—than are any of the other commodities catalogued in the known previous history of the topos. Moreover, in the sense that Ovid pervasively figures the Tristia as a collection of funeral laments for a poet to whom exile was death, his accumulation here of his own sorrows finds an apt anticipation in the sisters’ tristia . . . dicta ‘words of sadness’ (Met. 8.533) for Meleager.\(^6\)

To venture even deeper into the shadows of exile as death, Virgil’s version of the topos in Aeneid 6, voiced by the Sibyl, uses it of the countlessness of Tartarean crimes and divine punishments. Ovid repeatedly in the exile poetry portrays his sufferings as a punishment meted out to him for an alleged crime by a god-like Augustus. So does Virgil’s prestigious intervention in the topos attract Trist. 1.5.53–6 in the direction of an association between Ovidian mala and hellish Virgilian poenae?\(^7\) Perhaps, perhaps not.

Setting aside discussion of other strains which such proposals may put upon a philological decor of interpretability, I want to interrogate them in terms of my code-based approach to toposness. Do the allusive reverberations just countenanced read as permutations within the fixed topos-code, or as extra-topical echoes of their predecessors quae ‘modelli-emplare’?\(^8\) The answer, I think, lies in between: these reverberations—conjectural reverberations, if you will—expose a mobility and renegotiability in the code of the ‘many mouths’ topos which is not usually acknowledged when such topo are under description. When Trist. 1.5.53–6 and Met. 8.533–5 are read together, for instance, a common concern with the infinity of (funereal) woes emerges—a concern irrelevant to the archetype of the topos at II. 2.488–90, but relevant again to a later ‘many mouths’ passage at Statius, Theb. 12.797–9. Can it not then be argued that the ‘many mouths’ topos has generated a subset-topos encoding, not just countlessness, but the countlessness of woes?

The fact is that conventional surveys of the topos leave unacknowledged many such constellations. What does the ‘many mouths’ topos encode? Simple (inc)capacity to compass a huge theme or body of knowledge? (In)capacity to compass a huge theme or body of knowledge in the\(^9\)

\(^4\) II. 2.631–2 αὐτὸς Ὀδυσσεύς ἐς Κεφαλῆς μεγαθώμοις, ἀν τὸ ἱππικὸν ἐλαύνοι καὶ ἒμπορον ἐλεύθερον Ὦν Ἠθέλεται ἔλευσεν ἤλευσεν ἄλλην Ἰτακη λητά ἢ Νέριτος καὶ Νεριτίως καὶ Νεριτιζέινος Οἵτινες ὄλοις ἦλευσεν ἑλεύσεται ἢ λεύσεται ἢ λευτήσεται ἢ λεύσεται


\(^6\) On Ovid’s tendency to coopt motifs from his own earlier mythological poetry in constructing the ‘myth’ of his exile in Trist. and Pont., see Hinds (1985). 26–7.

\(^7\) Some years later, in Pont. 1.2.37–40, Ovid will compare the protracted poena of his exile to the punishment of Titys, in language somewhat reminiscent of the Tytys vignette in Virgil’s Tartarus (Aen. 6.595–606).
composition of epic poetry, and, if so, measured within itself in terms of what Homer could and could not do? or (as it seems from an Ovidian or Persian standpoint and also, perhaps, from the comic standpoint of Plautus and Caecilius) in terms of what other genres can and cannot do vis à vis epic, Homeric or not? To a Flavian the code might seem to be one of specifically martial countlessness — whose internal permutations would include the muster of forces in preparation for war (Valerius, Arg. 6.33–41; cf. II. 2.488–90, thus reasserted as archetype), their slaughter in mid-war (Silius, Pun. 4.525–8), and their funerals (and the concomitant lamentations) at war's end (Statius, Theb. 12.797–9 again). Or yet another constellation (envisaged earlier in passing) might reconfigure the code as one of didactic countlessness (cf. A.A. 1.433–6, Geo. 2.43–4, Lucretius ap. Serv. Geo. 2.42). A move away from the *topos*-code may remain anomalous; but it will often have the potential to find incorporation as a subset or (more than that) as a rival configuration.

To return to a main concern of the chapter, the present section's accumulation of possibilities for the non-inert reading of a commonplace adds its own challenge to the terms of a tidy 'philological contract' between author and reader. The ideal of a reader who sees exactly the same cues within the *topos* as the author, and constructs them in the same order and in the same way, will always in the final analysis be unattainable. This would not cease to be true even if we had access to the author's first readers (and to the most attentive and well-read among them). Nor, indeed, can the intervention of the author himself, i.e. the very first reader, be regarded as exempt from this ebb and flow of interpretative context. Cues which on one reading are experienced as

52 Plaut. Bacc. 128 (which rarely gets its billing as the earliest extant instance of the *topos* in Latin); Caec. fr. 126–7 R.S.

53 To revisit the mathematics of the question, does the multiplication of mouths from 10 to 100 and beyond convey that epic subject-matter is now many times bigger than it was for Homer, or that the standard capacity of one mouth is now many times smaller than it was for Homer? The former implication is especially clear in Ov. Trist. 1.5 (see above), the latter in Ov. Fast. 2 (Homer's breast paired with 1,000 Ovidian [legiac] voices) and in Sil. Pun. 4.525–8 (Homer's tongue paired with 100 Silian voices). For the latter implication I am indebted to Alessandro Barchiesi: in his words, 'il *topos* è frazione e divisivo, non moltiplicativo e crescente'.

54 A point to be reemphasized in chapter 5.

55 — an image which might appropriately be used to deconstruct the idea of 'confluence'. R.G. Williams (1993), 51, offers a postmodern twist in a related context (cf. n. 59 below): 'we cannot step into the same stream once' (emphasis mine).

56 Genette (1982), 8–9; Conte (1986), 29n.11.

57 When 'allusion' is renounced for 'intertextuality' (albeit not without qualms) by a critic who has worked as long and effectively with 'allusion' as has R.O.A.M. Lyne, it is clear that the question is now firmly on the poetic Latinist's agenda: see Lyne (1994).

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5 The limits of intertextualism

Most of the strategies adumbrated in the case-studies of sections 3 and 4 are indebted in some way to the semiotic intertextualism which underpins Conte's approach to poetic imitation. The refusal to treat categories like 'confluence' or 'topos' as inert or non-negotiable, the location of poet and readers in broader interpretative communities and in discursive contexts which problematize approaches predicated on precision, control and the tuning out of 'background noise' — these enlargements of philological debate are all energized by intertextualist inquiries whose scope can be as broad as discourse itself. Why not, then, abandon the apparatus of allusion altogether, and embrace intertextualism unconditionally? As I argued towards the end of section 3, the term 'allusion' privileges the interventions in literary discourse of one intention-bearing subject, the alluding poet. But such an emphasis runs up against one of the most famous and broadly acknowledged impasses in twentieth century criticism: the ultimate