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Virgil: Reception and the Myth of Biography

Ideas of Virgil's 'reception' and of his mythical 'biography' can both be illuminated by an exploration of Virgil's role as a constructed character in his own poetry. The following discussion of the poet's individual presence in the performance and reception of his work has been prompted by an apparent consensus between some earlier Roman responses to Virgil and the traditions of commentary on the poet from later in antiquity. The earlier sources, which show an interest in the development of Virgil's work over time, often convey a strong sense of the poet's character. The later material presents Virgil as an instructor – of poetic technique and of rhetoric, and sometimes of philosophy as well. He is regarded as someone who composes to be heard as well as read. The role ascribed to the poet by all of his ancient readers amounts to a *dramatic* role.

Of course it is still customary to treat the words of the *Georgics* as Virgil's own, and even to conceive of one or two speakers in the *Eclogues* as mouthpieces of the poet¹. But the manner in which most readers today seem to approach the *Aeneid* is what gives the game away. This epic is routinely regarded – at times almost like a Greek tragedy – as a window which looks directly on to the events, characters, and historical concerns of the story. Of all the characters in the *Aeneid*, the one who is the most conspicuous to the audience is Virgil, the poet, whose speaking voice and whose language mediates the actions, speeches, and everything else to be discerned in the text. Can this poet be related to the figure of Virgil presented in the ancient biographical tradition?

The story of Virgil's deathbed wish to destroy his work is told most graphically in Suetonius' *Life of Virgil*². Although the story is very unlikely to be true, it had considerable currency in antiquity and it was the subject of a number of declamations and minor poems: Sulpicius of Carthage's elegy on the theme is quoted by Suetonius, and ancient verse pastiches of Gallus and Augustus also survive, in which these prominent individuals plead with Virgil to save his epic³. But the importance of the tradition that Virgil wanted to burn the *Aeneid* might really lie in some burning questions it raises – about the relation between Virgil the author on the one hand and his corpus of poetry on the other. The poet's request to incinerate his masterpiece has implications which are very important for the development of literary criticism in general. The story can be regarded as a sort of parable – and parables can be interpreted in more than one way.

The literal meaning is one on which Virgil's critics have frequently depended. The story indicates that the *Aeneid* is imperfect, if only because it was incomplete. This eventually led to attempts by Latin poets to 'finish' the *Aeneid* by tacking on new endings which they wrote themselves. But there is a more common way of setting Virgil right. As early as the first century

¹ Korenjak 2003.

² Suet.-Don. *u. Verg.* 36-41.

³ *Anth.* (ed. Riese) 242 and 672 are pleas attributed to Cornelius Gallus and Augustus respectively.

AD, a philosopher called Favorinus, was bold enough to identify the verses about Mount Etna in Book 3 of the *Aeneid* as one of the passages that needed revising and correction, confident as Favorinus was in his knowledge that the poet had not been able to polish and refine his poem completely⁴.

And Suetonius follows his account of the incomplete state of the *Aeneid* by listing first the Roman grammarians who tried to correct or improve Virgil's text, and then those who sought to point out his more general defects. Even in our own time, scholars have sought to make corrective judgements, not just on the handful of incomplete verses, but also on lines or passages of their own choosing. In short, the idea that Virgil was unsure of his epic can lead to more critical verdicts of his work, at the same time as it can reassure people that the poet was aware of his shortcomings.

The other way of understanding the story has a more profound significance for literary criticism and literary history. The story could show that what the poet wants is not always what is best for the poem. In continuing to preserve and read the *Aeneid* we are disregarding the poet's wishes. Or, to present this another way, the *Aeneid* has a life of its own which its poet would have denied. In that sense it is more ours than his, more the property of the reader than the author. By disregarding the mortal Virgil's wishes, one can create an *immortal* Virgil whose words have different messages for different people in different times. By disregarding the mortal poet's wishes, other things can be created too: poetry modelled on Virgil, poetry which parodies or fakes Virgil (as we find in the *Appendix Vergiliana*), and even *centos* which represent the most decisive way of disregarding the wishes of the late Publius Vergilius Maro. The idea that readers have more rights than authors, or that poems are more important than poets could well *arise from* reflecting on the story that the dying poet wanted to burn the *Aeneid*. And that idea would be all the more likely to arise among devotees of Virgil who considered that story to be true.

Emphasis on, or a kind of desire for, the poet's presence – might help ease the tension between Virgil the author and 'Virgil' the body of texts. The texts can themselves be used to reconstruct an idea, or a dramatic *re*-presentation of the author who wrote them. It may seem obvious that the poet, as he is apprehended through his works, is a speaking character with individual qualities. But properly taking on board the conception of Virgil as a *constant* dramatised presence can help to make some ancient responses to his work look much less puzzling or irrelevant.

Modern readers are often daunted, or quite simply repelled, by Virgil's early critics. They are confronted by a Scylla and Charybdis: grammatical-rhetorical interpretation on the one side and allegorical criticism on the other. But these general approaches to Virgil's poetry make more sense once it is understood that presuppositions about the centrality of the poet's role underlie them both. Tiberius Claudius Donatus makes this very explicit for rhetorical criticism in his ever unpopular commentary on the *Aeneid*. He calls the poem 'a most ample rhetorical treatise' and says that the poet's main purpose is to provide an encomium of Aeneas⁵. There is no doubt whatsoever that the twelve hundred pages of Donatus' fourth-century commentary give *Virgil himself* the starring role. The same assumption about the poet's priority is also made by the speakers in Macrobius' dialogue, the *Saturnalia* (written in the same period), just as it was by Quintilian three centuries before⁶. When all these authorities agree that Virgil should be counted

⁴ Gell. XVII 10; compare Suet.-Don. *u. Verg.* 42.

⁵ Claud. Don. *Proem.* II 10, cf. II 455 (30); 456 (1).

⁶ Macr. *Sat.* V 1,1: *Vergilium non minus oratorem quam poetam habendum, in quo et tanta orandi disciplina et tam diligens obseruatio rhetoricae artis ostenderetur.*

as an orator no less than as a poet, they are thinking more about his discourse as a whole than about the speeches he gives to his characters – which are what mainly interest modern critics concerned with rhetoric in the *Aeneid*.

But even if these writers had chosen to address Virgil as a poet instead of as an orator, Virgil's style, diction, and voice are still what would have been put centre-stage – not his characters, his stories, or his general message. That is roughly what Servius' commentary does: its principal object of attention is the poet. The glosses in Servius exhibit a determination to reach the character of Virgil by recognising the individuality and the quality of the poet's expression. Servius' notes about Roman religion, myth, and history reflect the same inclination – to understand what it was that Virgil himself meant to say. And whenever Servius comments on what modern critics call 'narrative technique', he speaks of *persona*, a word which refers straight back to the character of the poet⁷.

Even though they are always being accused of imposing alien, anachronistic meanings on to texts, allegorical critics also strove to recognise, or at least to construct, the character of the poet they addressed. For instance, Fulgentius' allegorical commentary on the *Aeneid* is a dramatic dialogue in which the ghost of Virgil explains his own work. Fulgentius himself is only relaying these moral and philosophical interpretations to his readers. The Scylla and Charybdis of early Virgilian interpretation end up looking rather similar. Neither approach primarily regards Virgil's content in the ways we might – as Augustan political literature or as a kind of soap opera. Both approaches instead lead to the presence of Virgil, whose voice is directly heard. His own voice, whether it is seen to belong to an orator or to a philosopher, is heard in the way that he uses words and figures. The rhetoricians are concerned with the ways in which Virgil deploys those words and figures; the allegorists seek to uncover the meanings lurking behind them.

It could be objected that the poet's presence is something altogether different from the more routine notion of the poet's voice. However, the issue that will remain for this next part of the discussion, the emphasis Virgil's readers place on him being dead, should show that the most palpable conceptions of Virgil's presence – those involving phantom apparitions – might be on a continuum with more routine ways of reading or hearing the poet.

When W.F. Jackson Knight sometimes had problems with his Penguin translation of the *Aeneid*, he used to consult Virgil through a psychic medium⁸. The involvement of Virgil's ghost with the reception and exegesis of his poetry has been an enduring one. As we shall see, Fulgentius and Ermenrich of Ellwangen are two Latin writers who, long before Dante, played on the idea of Virgil inhabiting the underworld of his own invention – and what is more Virgil seems to haunt them. The main reason for this is obvious. It must be due to the powerful account of the underworld in Book 6 of the *Aeneid*. The book received special attention from Roman poets who followed Virgil, as well as from all the early commentators already mentioned. Classicists have given the impact of *Aeneid* 6 ample coverage – here it is worth just considering the effect of an exemplary passage (VI 264-267) from that book, in which Virgil explicitly invokes the shades of the dead to reveal hidden knowledge:

Di, quibus imperium est animarum, umbraeque silentes
et Chaos et Phlegethon, loca nocte tacentia late,
sit mihi fas audita loqui, sit numine uestro
pandere res alta terra et caligine mersas.

⁷Laird 1997, 283.

⁸Wiseman 1992, 172-209.

This is an example of *sciomancy* – the less gruesome alternative to necromancy – as a way of talking of the dead or securing a passport to the realms below. Servius defines sciomancy as *umbræ evocatio* (‘the evocation of a shade’). And that is exactly what we hear the poet doing, in his own voice. This passage confirmed early readers in their belief that there were deeper levels of occult meaning in his poetry: the matter must have been further complicated in later antiquity when the word *umbra* came to mean ‘allegory’ as well as ‘shadow’ or ‘shade’.

Virgil’s evocation of the shades evidently influenced Fulgentius who copies Virgil’s own technique of sciomancy in order to call up the *persona* of the Mantuan bard himself ‘to bring his fugitive meanings to light’ (Fulg. *Verg.* 85, ed. Helm):

Cede mihi nunc personam Mantuani uatis, quo fugitios eius in lucem deducamus amfractus.
Nam ecce ad me etiam ipse Ascrei fontis bractamento saturior aduenit, quales uatum imagines solent,
dum assumptis ad opus conficiendum tabulis stupida fronte arcanum quiddam submurmurat.

Fulgentius is not only interpreting the mysteries of Book 6: he is also practising them. The image of Virgil immediately appears, this author tells us, ‘just as images of bards are accustomed to, with his tablets taken up in order to finish his work’. The boundary here between *hocus pocus* and the business of extracting Virgil’s meaning is not as secure as we might like it to be.

The images and shades of Virgil in the Latin writing of late antiquity could be dismissed as a poetic convention that got out of control. But strange as this might sound at first, these apparitions can be regarded as a perfectly natural way of recognising Virgil. The visions of the poet suggest that what we routinely call ‘the poet’s voice’ was being equated with a dramatic sense of the poet’s presence. And those visions can actually be rationalised and better understood in terms of the practices of *reading* that were prevalent in antiquity.

The best source for ancient reading practices is Saint Augustine. His writings reveal far more about the psychology and experience of reading than classical critics and rhetoricians do⁹. Augustine approached reading through a theory of signs which was modelled on oral communication: with a conception of the relationship between sender, receiver, and sign. Reading can be seen as being comparable to interpersonal communication (though the reader himself sets it up) – and reading can provide an individual with a kind of information equivalent to that offered by sense perception.

For example, in *De Trinitate* VIII 4,7 Augustine explains that anyone reading or listening to the writings of St Paul is bound to draw a picture in his mind of the Apostle himself which may or may not correspond to the features and figures formed in the minds of other readers:

Necesse est autem cum aliqua corporalia lecta uel audita quae non uidimus credimus, fingat sibi animus aliquid in lineamentis formisque corporum sicut occurrerit cogitanti, quod aut uerum non sit aut etiam si uerum est, quod rarissime potest accipere, non hoc tamen fide ut teneamus quidquam prodest, sed ad aliud aliquid utile quod per hoc insinuatur. Quis enim legentium uel audientium quae scripsit apostolus Paulus uel quae de illo scripta sunt non fingat animo et ipsius apostoli faciem et omnium quorum ibi nomina commemorantur? Et cum in tanta hominum multitudine quibus illae litterae notae sunt alius aliter lineamenta figuramque illorum corporum cogitet, quis propinquius et similius cogitet utique incertum est.

«When we consider any corporeal things, of which we have read or heard but which we have not seen», Augustine says, «it is inevitable then that our mind fashions them for itself

⁹Stock 1996.

as something with bodily features and forms, just as it occurred to our thoughts». Augustine's meditative psychology of reading was connected to the 'mnemotechnics' or the art of memory, an element of classical rhetoric, which laid considerable emphasis on visualisation. Augustine had the idea that formation of a salient mental picture of an author was a standard consequence of apprehension through *reading*. This provides a better understanding of why visual images of Virgil appeared to his readers. The next passage might be a report of precisely this process. It is an excerpt from a letter about linguistic usage by a ninth-century Christian author, Ermenrich of Ellwangen. But this writer digresses to describe how he has frequent visions of Virgil. Significantly, these visions are not something he welcomes (*Epistula Ermenrici* 561-562):

Nolo tamen ipsum uidere, quem credo in pessimo loco manere, et quia terret me uisus eius. Saepe uero quando **legebam** illum, et post **lectionem** capiti subponebam, in primo sopore, qui post laborem solet esse dulcissimus, statim affuit monstrum quoddam fuscum, et per omnia horribile, interdum gestabat **codicem**, interdum **calamum** ad aures, ueluti **scripturus** aliquid, ridebat ad me, uel, quia dicta eius **legebam**, irridebat me. Ast ego euigilans, signabam me signaculo crucis, **librum** eius longequae proiciens iterum membra dedi quieti.

The density of references to reading are obviously meant to signal something: Ermenrich makes it abundantly clear that it is after he has been reading, and reading Virgil in particular, that the apparition presents itself. It's also worth noting that the figure appearing to Ermenrich brandishes writing materials. The *persona* of Virgil also came to Fulgentius equipped with stationery – *quales uatum imagines solent* 'just as the images of bards are accustomed to'. The tablets, codex, and pen convey that a *sender*, as well as a receiver, is involved in the Augustinian model of reading as an interpersonal relationship. My point is that reading might be leading to a form of voluntary or involuntary 'sciomancy.' It is obviously involuntary in the case of the unfortunate Ermenrich. Though the style of his letter as a whole may recall the rhetorical narrative of Augustine's *Confessions*, he still cannot help importing some of Virgil's phrases, even as he puts the poet down.

Most importantly, Ermenrich's dreams do not focus on any of the phantasmic creations to be found in the corpus of Virgil's poetry: Allecto, for example, or the Cyclops, or the Harpies, or tree-roots oozing blood. All those are creations which could be the stuff of nightmares for readers today. Instead Ermenrich's dreams focus on the character of Virgil himself. This seems strange— like someone who goes to see a horror film then having nightmares about the director. But the specific nature of Ermenrich's visualisation is more in line with Augustinian psychology than our own. Ermenrich of Ellwangen, who is neither an allegorist nor a rhetorical interpreter, shows that a salient impression of the *poet's* presence is what arises, first and foremost, from his reading of Virgil.

But are there any specific sources from closer to Virgil's time that might have led to the later sense of the poet's centrality as a constructed character in his own work? Might the poet himself be inadvertently responsible for his presence being dramatised or even actualised as a visible image which came to his readers from the world below?

The 'Incipit', added to the beginning of Virgil's epic probably not too long after it was composed, may lead to an answer¹⁰:

¹⁰ See now Mondin 2007.

Ille(A) ego qui quondam(B) gracili modulatus auena
 carmen, et egressus siluis(C) uicina coegi(D)
 ut quamuis auido parentent arua(D) colono
 gratum opus agricolis, at nunc horrentia Martis(E).

In five centuries of debate about the authorship of these verses, no one seems to have noticed something rather important – underlined and marked here with the letters A-E. Those capital letters mark an interesting set of parallels of theme, diction, syntax, and word-order between these verses and the standard opening of the *Aeneid*:

Arma uirumque cano(A), Troiae qui primus(B) ab oris(C)
 Italiam fato profugus Lauiniaque uenit
litora(D), multum ille(A) et terris iactatus et alto
 ui superum, saeuae memorem Iunonis ob iram(E).

The letter ‘E’ marks the nice correspondence of Mars to Juno at the end of the two sets of lines, but the parallel marked ‘B’ – between *qui quondam* and *qui primus* – is what best draws attention to the principal association (‘A’). That association is between the poet and the hero of the poem. The association between poet and hero is further underlined by ‘C’ and ‘D’, the changes of location to which both hero and poet are subject: the poet moves from the woods to the fields of the *Georgics*, the hero goes from Troy to the Lavinian shores.

Even if we leave aside the suggestion of a parallel between Virgil and Aeneas himself, the accommodation of the Incipit means we have to regard the *Aeneid*’s narrator as a speaking character. The Incipit is much more than an optional preface that could precede the text to follow – it also functions as a *frame* for that text, providing the official or unofficial information that the speaker of the *Aeneid* is male (there are no other indications of that in the epic to follow), and that this speaker was also the singer of the *Georgics* and *Eclogues*. In short it is no other *persona* but the author himself, Virgil, who speaks to his audience.

But just as importantly, the Incipit comments on, or even recommends, how the poem is to be read and received: the narrative to follow becomes embedded in the speech of the poet whose *presence* is dramatised. This has implications for how we, and readers in the past, might conceive of the *Aeneid* in performance. The words of the speaking poet then become far more vivid than those of any of the personages he introduces – indeed *introductae personae* is the very term Servius uses for characters in Virgil’s works other than the poet himself.

There are comparable performative effects in other ancient texts: Socrates is present to narrate some of the Platonic dialogues in which he takes part; and in Lycophron’s *Alexandra*, a late Hellenistic poem, it is a present, dramatised Cassandra who sings of the fall of Troy and the wanderings of Aeneas and the Trojans which led to the supremacy of Rome. Although the connections between Lycophron and the *Aeneid* could be further explored, the principal point is that acceptance of this Incipit confirmed, or even inspired, the inclination of readers to see Virgil as a constant dramatised presence, to hear Virgil’s voice uninterrupted from one work to the next.

Whilst the second word in the *Aeneid*, *cano* might alone be enough to confirm or inspire the inclination to regard the poem as the sustained monologue of an individual, the contested verses, if added, considerably amplify that effect. The spurious Incipit could date back to the last few years of the 1st century BC. One of its purposes may have been to canonise the *Eclogues*, *Georgics*, and *Aeneid* as genuine works of the poet. Its verses have much in common with a second early source, the famous tomb inscription, also attributed to Virgil:

Mantua me genuit, Calabri rapuere, tenet nunc
Parthenope; cecini pascua rura duces.

Again, as in the Incipit, the *Eclogues*, *Georgics* and *Aeneid* are referred to in the sequence in which these works were written. Again, the suggestive power of topography is used to evoke the poet's identity and to plot his biographical trajectory, but this time we have the names of specific places – Mantua, Calabria, Parthenope. The naming of the last two places shows that this epitaph cannot be the work of a mortal Virgil: the poet would otherwise have needed truly clairvoyant powers to know that his death would be in Calabria and his burial at Parthenope. The retrospective knowledge about his own death and burial which is put into the poet's mouth enhances a paradox which is a feature of epitaphs: they present the words of someone who is no longer there to speak.

An epitaph like this might help to account for the emphasis on *Virgil* in particular speaking as a dead poet, but that idea could also have been fuelled by the Incipit to the *Aeneid* too. As well as sharing stylistic features with this epitaph, that appendable opening to the *Aeneid* has a haunting, funereal quality of its own. Actual tomb inscriptions beginning with the *Ille ego* formula are post-Virgilian, but at least they show that the tone of the Incipit could be transferred to a funerary context.

Such a colouring on Virgil's own discourse would reflect the occasional epitaphic tinge the poet gives to the words of his characters. The first-person obituary Dido pronounces on herself at the end of Book 4 is one striking example. Fraenkel remarked on the 'lapidary' quality of this passage, comparing it to inscriptions on the tombs of the Scipios¹¹. But such a lapidary quality can also be found in the ancient literary convention of the device of the *sphragis* with which a poet could close a poem or group of poems, asserting his authorship and authority as he does so. The final lines of Virgil's fourth *Georgic* are a famous example of such a 'signature passage':

Haec super aruorum cultu pecorumque canebam
et super arboribus, Caesar dum magnus ad altum
fulminat Euphraten bello uictorque uolentis
per populos dat iura uiamque adfectat Olympo.
Illo Vergilium me tempore dulcis alebat
Parthenope, studiis florentem ignobilis oti,
carmina qui lusi pastorum audaxque iuuenta,
Tityre, te patulae cecini sub tegmine fagi.

We see nothing funereal or epitaphic here, mainly because we know full well Virgil went on to write the *Aeneid*, but if the *Georgics* had been Virgil's last work, some critics might well be arguing Virgil did *not* write these lines. As Llewelyn Morgan puts it forcefully 'th[is] passage is a blatant misrepresentation of the poem it purports to epitomise'¹². As things are, both the Incipit and the tomb inscription for Virgil were probably in part inspired by this *sphragis* – especially the tomb inscription, given the recurrence of *Parthenope*, a word not found elsewhere in Virgil.

The writers of the apocryphal Incipit and tomb inscription might well have been excavating an epitaphic significance they saw already lurking in these closing lines of *Georgic* 4. And even

¹¹ Fraenkel 1957.

¹² Morgan 1999, 214.

if they did not, the existence of those paratexts could have led to a perception that the *sphragis* did have a such an epitaphic significance in the minds of subsequent readers. Before dismissing this, one should consider the effect these final verses of the *Georgics* would have in a recitation of the poem after Virgil's death, once Octavian's triumphal progress through the East had become a historical memory. The utterance of verses 563-564

Illo **Vergilium** me tempore dulcis alebat
Parthenope

would represent a point at which the distinction between Virgil the poet and anyone reciting these lines would be very pronounced. At that point the independent identity of whoever recited the lines would be affirmed and the absence of the original poet himself, who is lost for ever, would become most acute. Indeed the sounding of Virgil's name makes Virgil's dramatic absence more conspicuous than it is at any other point in the *Eclogues*, *Georgics* or *Aeneid*.

The close of the *Georgics* is by no means the only passage in Virgil which invites reflection on reception and performance: another example would be the address to Nisus and Euryalus in *Aeneid* 9. There, the poet speaks of the power of his poetry to confer immortality, as he aligns his verses to the permanence of the Capitoline rock. Just as when we consider the claims Horace makes for the enduring monumentality of his work in *Odes* III 30, we can never escape having an awkwardly pragmatic thought: we are bound to note, even if only for a moment, the fact that the person who made those claims is indeed long gone.

The last text to be surveyed here is very different, but it may have something to do with the peculiar emphasis among later writers on Virgil's status as a poet who is dead – and it may even have something to do with the enduring interest in invoking, addressing, or even visualising the presence of the poet. It was very likely some six years *after* Virgil was buried in Naples, that Horace published his fourth book of *Odes*. Just as his first collection of lyrics had begun with poems addressed to Maecenas, Augustus, and Virgil, so this final book is closed with odes which are addressed to Maecenas, Virgil, and Augustus. It is IV 12, which involves Virgil. The theme of the first half of poem is the return of spring, but in spite of the light rhythm this standard theme is treated in a measured and rather solemn way: the opening stanza describes the new season's effect on the winds, sea, land, and rivers; the second presents a swallow building her nest, although she is in mourning for her son Itys. The third block of verses brings in a cameo from Virgil's *Eclogues*: shepherds are tending their sheep on the spring grass and singing songs with a reed pipe in honour of Pan. It is in the pivotal fourth stanza that Virgil himself is addressed:

adduxere sitim tempora, **Vergili**.
Sed pressum Calibus ducere Liberum
si gestis, iuuenum nobilium cliens,
nardo uina merebere.

And then Horace goes on to ask Virgil, more specifically, for an onyx jar of nard to ease the wine out of Sulpicius' cellar. The 'onyx of nard', used in Roman funeral ritual, was associated with the world of the dead¹³. That makes it perfectly clear why this is the currency his addressee is expected to use. Horace is in fact the first writer to think of staging an appearance of the

¹³ Prop. II 13,30.

dead Virgil – simply because he wants to replay the familiarity they once enjoyed. This attempt to reprise his own bantering tone in their lost exchanges, which has perplexed some critics, shows how Quintilian’s famous remark that ‘letters serve as guardians of voices’ can have quite another kind of application. This invocation or evocation of Virgil is different from the others we have seen, partly because we know Horace feels the lack of the poet’s presence not just as a reader, but as a friend. The closing lines of this nostalgic but quietly optimistic poem are more of a self-address. They show the touching complex of ways in which Horace accommodates Virgil’s absence:

nigrorumque memor, dum licet, ignium
 misce stultitiam consiliis breuem:
 dulce est desipere in loco.

It may be pertinent that some imperial Roman authors who concentrate on the figure of Virgil even ascribe to him a kind of divinity. But the visions of the poet we can read about in later Latin writers may be a sign of something other than literary decadence. After all, *Eclogue* 8 ends by suggesting that ‘those who love might fashion dreams for themselves’ (*ecl.* 8,108 *qui amant, ipsi sibi somnia fingunt*). For those who claim to love Virgil, a sense of the poet’s presence is actually essential for a fuller appreciation of his achievement. The *Eclogues*, *Georgics* and *Aeneid* are representations of pastoral, heroic, and historical worlds, but they also constitute a representation of the poet’s character, as an autographic imprint of Virgil himself.

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