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Parallel Lives.

Civic Rhetoric in the Native Receptions of Euripides and Dante

Alan Bennett's new play the *Habit of Art* stages – in many senses of the word – an imaginary meeting between the poet W.H. Auden, the composer Benjamin Britten, and the man who would one day write their biographies (though none of them yet knows this), Henry Carpenter.¹ Towards the end of their meeting, Carpenter asks the two artists – who have been discussing Britten's work on his new opera *Death in Venice* –: «Would it not surprise you to learn that there is a growing number of your devotees who would in the nicest possible way be happy to see you dead?»². Auden and Britten are incredulous; Britten protests: «I've still got so much to do», but Carpenter defends his ground:

There's no malice in it. It's just an entirely human desire for completion... the mild satisfaction of drawing a line under you. Death shapes a life.

Dead, you see, you belong to your admirers in your entirety. They own you. They can even quote you to your face – only it will be a dead face – at your memorial service perhaps, or when they unveil the stone in Westminster Abbey. Over and done with: W.H. Auden. Benjamin Britten. Next.

In his introduction to the Faber and Faber edition of the play, Bennett himself identifies (apropos of Carpenter's words) the artist's death, marked as it is by the chance it offers us finally to «draw a line under» him, as the very «cue for biography»³.

What this essay considers is another opportunity offered by the death of the poet, one that like Bennett's notion of 'line-drawing' does on the one hand demand that death, but also requires the passage of time (typically a few generations) after the artist is gone. In the first section of his elegy on the death of William Butler Yeats⁴, Auden himself had meditated on the idea that, in death, a poet's life and words are entirely yielded to his public:

Now he is scattered among a hundred cities
And wholly given over to unfamiliar affections,
To find his happiness in another kind of wood
And be punished under a foreign code of conscience.
The words of a dead man
Are modified in the guts of the living.

¹ The play, set in a rehearsal room in London's National Theatre, depicts the rehearsal of an internal play in which the meeting between Auden, Britten, and Carpenter takes place.

² Bennett 2009, 70-71.

³ Bennett 2009, x-xi.

⁴ *In Memory of W.B. Yeats*, February 1939. There is a spellbinding moment in *The Habit of Art* in which 'Auden' recites six of the nine verses from the third and final 'movement' of this poem: Bennett 2009, 82.

There are some cases, however, in which it is not only the words of a dead man, but even the entire and essential shape of his life story, that after his death becomes exposed to ‘modification’ at the hands (and «in the guts») of the living. In what follows I would like to look at a particular set of cases where this seems to hold especially true, namely the cases of writers who during their lifetimes suffered some sort of rejection by their own cities and fellow citizens. One hardly needs to dig deeply into the annals of literature to find examples of authors, even those celebrated in their own day, who developed notoriety in the cities with which they are now most closely associated: we think of Henrik Ibsen and Oslo, Oscar Wilde and London, Thomas Bernhard and Vienna... How comes it, then, that artists once rejected by these cities may later earn a place within the same cities’ civic pantheons not merely of great literary figures, but of great citizens of the past – their canonised rosters of *uiri illustres*? In other words, what I would like briefly to explore here is the rhetoric that we sometimes find surrounding a certain kind of poet’s immortalisation by later generations as a man whose merits as a citizen even eclipsed his accomplishments as an artist.

Already in Greek antiquity we find a prime example of a poet who, though slighted by his countrymen, was after his death reclaimed as one of the most illustrious citizens in his city’s history. The surviving ancient biographies for the Athenian tragedian Euripides are largely constructed around the idea that this poet became so tired of harsh and mocking treatment from his fellow citizens that he relocated to the court of King Archelaus in Macedon, where he lived out his days in a kind of self-imposed ‘exile’ enjoying the generosity and appreciation of the Macedonian king and his people⁵. Yet by the 330s BC (or about seventy-five years after the poet’s death, in 406) we find something of a Euripides ‘recovery project’ underway in Athens, spearheaded by the dominant politician of the era, Lycurgus of Boutadae. The aim – or at least the principal effect – of this project was the recasting of Euripides as one of the model citizens of Athens’ noble past, an enterprise that depended in no small part upon the wholesale suppression of the ‘Macedonian exile’.

Given Euripides’ eventual status as a luminary in Athenian civic history, here I would also like to use aspects of his fourth-century ‘native’ reception as an angle from which to think a bit about a biographical genre more familiar to us from Roman antiquity and Renaissance art and literature. This is the tradition of collections of short biographies on (or visual cycles of) *uomini famosi*, or *uiri illustres*. The practice’s Roman origins are generally credited to Varro and the intellectual circle of Cicero, while the Renaissance ‘resurrection’ of this method of collective civic biography seems to be located in the Trecento with Petrarch’s anthology of brief *vitae* of Florence’s illustrious Roman ‘forefathers’ (the *De uiris illustribus*), a work that was published posthumously in 1379⁶. Cycles of *uiri illustres* were conceived as collections of *lives* with a didactic and exemplary purpose – that is, their aim was to edify the reader (or viewer) by inspiring him to emulate the morals, characters, and (oftentimes patriotic) deeds of the illustrious men. This kind of biography asks us to see its subjects, certain distinguished *uomini famosi*, as worthy objects of emulation.

Although I consider primarily the case of Euripides’ reception as a *uir illustris* in fourth-century Athens, towards the end of the essay I shall introduce the comparison of the reception of Dante in fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century Florence. The similar trajectories of these poets’

⁵ For the testimonia see T1 Kannicht 2004 (Γένος Εὐριπίδου καὶ βίος) esp. IB.10; III.4; IV.2-3; Gell. XV 20; Satyrus F 6 esp. fr. 39 IX; fr. 39 XVII-XIX; for tales of the ‘Macedonian exile’ see T 112-133 Kannicht 2004.

⁶ See the edition of Ferrone 2006; on the origins of the *uomini famosi* conceit in Florence see esp. Donato 1985.

relationships with their native cities are on certain points striking. Both suffered ruptures from their homelands: the ancient biographical tradition for Euripides may perceive him as having imposed a kind of self-exile on himself, but Dante was actually sentenced to exile from Florence in 1302⁷. While in exile Dante died in Ravenna at the court of Guido Novello da Polenta, and Euripides supposedly died still in his self-imposed exile in Macedon at the court of Archelaus. Both Euripides and Dante were cherished by the potentates and cities that ‘adopted’ them, and we also have notices that attest to later petitions which the poets’ repentant homelands sent to those adoptive cities asking for their remains to be returned. In each instance the petitions were denied⁸, and in both cases the poet’s native city responded by erecting a cenotaph for him: Dante’s can still be seen today in the Basilica of Santa Croce in Florence, while Euripides’ would have lain somewhere along the road that led from Athens to the Peiraeus. Thus despite the fact that more than 1700 years separate the deaths of these two poets, the common journeys that they took from scandal at home to a kind of highly politicised national heroisation are so full of parallels as to suggest that a closer look may shed some light on the *continuità* of ancient traditions for the reading and rewriting of authors’ lives. For these poets death marked not only the «cue for biography», but also the first step of their symbolic repatriation to the cities that had once cast them out.

In a 1981 article from *Artibus et Historiae*, Christiane Joost-Gaugier sought to identify the early beginnings of the ‘humanist’ conception of *uiri illustres* in Greco-Roman antiquity, particularly in antiquity’s literary traditions. To do so was and remains a difficult project given that, as Joost-Gaugier herself writes, «nowhere in our knowledge of Renaissance literature do we encounter anything but the vaguest references to the history or origins of the idea in antique literature»⁹. Yet despite the impossibility of drawing a firm and direct line for the tradition from antiquity to the Renaissance, she was able to produce a sizable repertory of examples of ancient literature that concerned itself with 1) the commemoration of illustrious individuals and 2) the desire to demonstrate that those individuals represented the forefathers of certain modern cities and communities. Her article thus tours through Greek and Roman literary history in search of these kinds of tropes, passing through Homer, Pindar, Herodotus, Demosthenes, sepulchral epigram and Hellenistic biography before reaching Rome in the first century BC. It is there and then, Joost-Gaugier argues, that the litterateurs Varro, Atticus, Cicero and Cornelius Nepos first came very close to ‘anticipating’ the *uiri illustres* method of didactic and thus morally-edifying form of ‘illustrious-man’ biography that would surface – or more likely resurface – in Florence nearly 1500 years later.

There is, however, new evidence to suggest that a form of the *uiri illustres* biographical method already existed in Athens as early as the fourth century BC. Recently the date of the career of Neanthes of Cyzicus, the first known author of such a work in Greek (α Περὶ ἐνδόξων ἀνδρῶν) has been convincingly pushed back to precisely that period (the surviving fragments indicate that Neanthes touched on the lives of at least Epicharmus, Sophocles, Periander, Heraclitus, Plato, Antisthenes, and Timon)¹⁰. It is unlikely to be coincidental, then, that the first author of work on ‘illustrious men’ should have lived in the same century – the century that

⁷ Klein 2004 is a facsimile reproduction with critical edition of the *Libro del Chiodo*, which contains the roster of those condemned by the Guelf party between 1268 and 1379.

⁸ Gell. XII 50.

⁹ Joost-Gaugier 1981, 100.

¹⁰ On the re-dating of Neanthes and his work *On illustrious men* see Schorn 2007. Amphicrates, a rhetor of the first-second centuries AD, also wrote a work with this title: see *FGH* IV 300 (Jacoby 1950).

saw the first real origins of Greek biography – in which we begin to find in oratory, particularly epideictic oratory (including the Athenian funeral orations), a number of names of prominent historical Athenians who are consistently proffered as exemplary models of past citizens: these names include Solon, the tyrannicides Harmodius and Aristogeiton, King Erechtheus, the generals Themistocles and Miltiades, and others. And although it is a well-recognised trait of these orators that they are careful to attribute great deeds of the past to the collective action and spirit of the Athenian people rather than solely to exceptional individuals, from the historical narratives and allusions that appear in a number of these speeches we are nevertheless able to get a basic sense of which prominent figures of the past the Athenians of the fourth century would have counted among their own *uiri illustres*, that is, their civic heroes.

The speech that the Athenian statesman Lycurgus made *Against Leocrates* is one such oration drenched in historical allusion, as much of it has an epideictic character – here Lycurgus uses his petty prosecution of Leocrates (whom he accuses of having illegally abandoned Athens after the Battle of Chaeronea in 338) as an opportunity to espouse his views on a number of civic and cultural issues, from the city’s Macedonian policy to its festal life and practices of commemorating great men with statues. In the course of the speech, Lycurgus even offers an abridged version of an *epitaphios logos* (a funeral oration) in praise of the Athenians who died at the Battle of Chaeronea; in doing so he adopts a rhetorical mode (as elsewhere in the oration) that is highly encomiastic of the city and its glorious history. Two-thirds of the way through the speech, at section 100, Lycurgus introduces the first in a string of three extensive quotations of verses by poets of the past (Euripides, Homer, and Tyrtaeus), each of whom he takes pains to tie closely to the history of the Athenian people. The first poetic passage comes from a now-lost tragedy by Euripides called the *Erechtheus*, a play which staged the legendary Athenian King Erechtheus’ decision to sacrifice his daughter, a sacrifice that the gods have demanded if Erechtheus wishes to prevent an army of invading Thracians from ransacking Athens. In delivering *Against Leocrates*, Lycurgus appears to have quoted the entire speech made by Erechtheus’ wife, Praxithea, in which she justifies her and her husband’s decision to allow the death of their daughter. Thanks to the anything but subtle patriotic rhetoric of Praxithea’s speech, Peter Wilson has remarked that in this context Lycurgus «virtually assimilates» Euripidean tragedy to the Athenian *epitaphios logos*¹¹. As author of the speech, Euripides becomes subtly configured as precisely the type of eminent Athenian citizen routinely selected by the city to give the funeral oration.

Another aspect of the passage which contributes to this construction of Euripides ‘the Athenian citizen’ is the rhetoric which Lycurgus uses to frame the quotation. He first introduces the Euripidean verses with an account of their author’s praiseworthiness (*Leocr.* 100):

δικαίως ἂν τις Εὐριπίδην ἐπαινέσειεν, ὅτι τὰ τ’ ἄλλ’ ἦν ἀγαθὸς ποιητής, καὶ τοῦτον τὸν μῦθον προεῖλετο ποιῆσαι [...]

Someone would justly praise Euripides, because, in addition to being a good poet in all other respects, he also chose this story to portray [...]

After the recitation of Praxithea’s speech, Lycurgus again suggests that Euripides is to be thanked for his choice of subject material: Euripides depicted (ἐποίησε) Praxithea as loving her country even more than her daughter, and thereby gave the Athenians a model which they should aspire to follow. However, what is most striking about Lycurgus’ introduction to

¹¹ Wilson 1996, 314.

the lines quoted above is the fact that the language sharply recalls the formulaic language of Athenian honorific decrees (particularly for their use of the verb ἐπαινέω), the official decrees with which Athens honoured its benefactors. In this passage of the *Against Leocrates*, Lycurgus rhetorically insinuates that Euripides should be remembered not only as a poet who was ‘good’, but also as an exemplary Athenian citizen, whose qualities as ‘ἄνῆρ ἀγαθός’ even outshone his achievements as an ‘ἀγαθὸς ποιητής’. Euripides’ poetry embodied the ideal spirit of his own city’s civic institutions, and therefore praise of this particular poet would ‘justly’ (δικαίως) be articulated in the city’s official acclamatory language.

On the basis of the pre-Lycurgan Athenian representations that we have of Euripides, Lycurgus’ rhetorical move to cast him as an exemplary citizen looks to mark a radical departure from the earlier discourses that had constituted the tragedian’s native reception. In Aristophanes, for example, Euripides had appeared first as an overly intellectual and ‘sophistic’ poet (as particularly in the *Acharnians*), and later – especially in the comedy that took the prize at the Dionysia the very first year after Euripides’ death – as a playwright whose representations of sexual scandal and general immorality had irrevocably corrupted the Athenian people (the view espoused by ‘Aeschylus’ in the *Frogs* of 405). In the Platonic dialogues, on the other hand, Euripides is singled out as a particular encomiast of tyrants: in Book 8 of the *Republic* (568a-b), Glaucon explains (and Socrates will agree) that Euripides

sings the praises [ἐγκωμιάζει] of tyranny as something godlike and says many other such things — both Euripides and the other poets do this¹².

This predilection of tragedians to praise tyrants becomes in the *Republic* one of the firmest grounds on which tragedians are to be excluded from Socrates’ ideal city. Even in the *Frogs*, the character Dionysus had made an uneasy allusion to a kind of tension between Euripidean tragedy and the Athenian democracy: when ‘Euripides’ defends his works by claiming that he wrote them in the spirit of democracy (δημοκρατικὸν γὰρ αὐτ’ ἔδρων, 951), Dionysus’ response would indicate that the subject of Euripides’ relationship with the ‘democracy’ was still a sore one (ll. 952-953):

Τοῦτο μὲν ἔασον, ὦ τᾶν.
 Οὐ σοὶ γὰρ ἐστὶ περίπατος κάλλιστα περὶ γε τούτου.
 Let that one go, my friend,
 As your relationship with that topic isn’t the best of ones.

The Lycurgan ‘recuperation’ of Euripides for Athens, a project carried out by the recasting and stylisation of Euripides in markedly civic terms, thus appears as a significant innovation with respect to the earlier ‘reception’ traditions. Moreover, the evidence for such a project is not merely limited to Lycurgus’ presentation of the poet in *Against Leocrates*. The ancient sources credit Lycurgus with a number of laws and initiatives concerned with the Athenian theatre over the course of his administrative career, the most celebrated of which is the so-called third ‘Lycurgan law’ reported in Pseudo-Plutarch’s *Lives of the Ten Orators* (841f): this law prescribed that official texts of the plays by the three great tragedians be prepared and deposited

¹² Euripides’ name is also raised in connection with tyranny in the spurious Platonic *Theages* (125b-d).

in the city's archive, and that bronze statues of the three men be erected at the Theatre of Dionysus. On the basis of his analysis of the surviving putative Roman copies of these statues, Paul Zanker has concluded that the Lycurgan portraits of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides represented the men not so much in their roles as poets, but more importantly and generally as thoughtful and engaged Athenian citizens of the city's venerable past: Euripides in particular «is portrayed as an Athenian citizen, a venerate ancestor, just like those so prominently displayed on the grave monuments of wealthy families»¹³ in the city's main cemetery (where, incidentally, the Athenian funeral orations were delivered). If Zanker's conclusions are correct, the images of the tragedians conveyed by the Lycurgan statues would have been perfectly coherent with the vision of Euripides espoused in the *Against Leocrates*, namely the vision that cast him as a model citizen above all else, and which saw his plays as by-products of his own character and the spirit of Athens.

The Lycurgan ideal of Euripides is thus one that assimilates him to the city's roster of great historical figures by emphasising his role as a patriotic Athenian democratic citizen above all else. It is worth re-emphasising that this view of the tragedian works against nearly every other surviving biographical tradition that we have for him: above I have mentioned the cases of Aristophanes and Plato, and to these we might add the Hellenistic (likely late-third/early-second century) biography of Euripides by Satyrus in which we find similar insinuations that Euripides harboured a great love of monarchical rule. Despite this potpourri of 'hostile' biographical traditions, however, by Lycurgus' time a kind of Euripides mania had spread across the Greek world – there is a great deal of evidence that his works were hugely popular in Sicily and Macedonia, for example – and it is easy to see Lycurgus' rhetoric to do with the poet as a highly politically charged move to reclaim Euripides for his native city by assimilating him to Athenian democratic and patriotic ideals. It is, I think, no coincidence that Lycurgus, a staunch opponent of Macedon and advocate of Athenian culture, made these kinds of moves to reclaim Euripides for Athens: as I have argued elsewhere, already by Lycurgus' time the Macedonians seem to have begun capitalising on the tradition that it was they who had lovingly received Euripides when the ridicule and ignorance of his fellow Athenians had forced him to impose a sentence of exile upon himself¹⁴.

Lycurgus' various efforts at recovering Euripides as a model Athenian poet and an ideal Athenian citizen worthy of emulation also would have marked attempts to further enhance Athens' self-construction as the 'school of Greece' – the intellectual centre of the world, if no longer the political or military one. What is more, this highly tendentious rhetorical assimilation of the tragedian's own views to Athenian patriotism enjoyed the benefit of the fact that, by 330 BC, few (if any) Athenians were still alive who possessed a personal memory of either Euripides the man or the festival premieres of his plays. To adopt an important distinction recently outlined by Angelos Chaniotis, by the Lycurgan era the Athenians' memory of Euripides was no longer a 'collective memory', but rather a 'cultural' one¹⁵ – that is, a kind of memory much more malleable and open to elaboration, adaptation, and reconfiguration. Thanks to the fading of the city's memory of the 'real' Euripides, he could now (like the other poets Lycurgus mentions in his long passage of poetic quotations) be refashioned as a kind of Athenian *uir illustris*, whose life – even more than his works – represented a fine example of patriotism that every Athenian should strive to emulate.

¹³ Zanker 1995, 57.

¹⁴ Hanink 2008.

¹⁵ Chaniotis 2009, 253-266.

Similarly, in the case of the native – that is, the Florentine – reception of Dante, it appears to have been individuals who were at least three or four generations removed from the exile and death of the poet who most aggressively and politically «transpos[ed] Dante on to a civic template», «reinterpreting him as an emblem and ideal model of active and politically committed Florentine citizenship»¹⁶. As was the case with Euripides in Athens, the biographical tradition for and view of Dante in Florence was a highly variegated one, and in his monograph on *Dante and Renaissance Florence* Simon Gilson has shown how between the 14th and 15th centuries «all of Florence’s main social groups make use of Dante»¹⁷, appropriating his legacy in support of their own political and cultural programmes. Here I would like very briefly to consider the two primary biographies of Dante from the period, Boccaccio’s *Trattatello in laude di Dante* from about 1355, which as the title suggests is a highly encomiastic biographical piece, and Leonardo Bruni’s section on Dante in his *Vita di Dante e del Petrarca*, from 1436. Both of these biographies represent and reflect their own authors’ complicated personal relationships with Dante’s legacy – the *Trattatello* went through two recensions, where fawning praise of the poet becomes slightly more tempered in the second edition, while Bruni’s 1436 *Vita* is far more laudatory of Dante the citizen than the first book of his own 1406 *Dialogi ad Petrum Paulum Histrum* had been of Dante the poet (and especially Dante the Latinist). Bruni’s *Vita*, moreover, is explicitly positioned as a ‘correction’ of Boccaccio’s often fanciful, highly polemical, and romanticised *Trattatello*.

In the proem of the *Trattatello*, Boccaccio had established his work as an attempt at making amends to Dante for his exile from Florence, and throughout this introduction to the work his rhetoric is saturated with allusions to Dante’s stature not only as an eminent poet, but more importantly as a preeminent citizen of Florence (in the proem Dante’s ‘literary’ role is really a secondary one). Boccaccio accounts for his desire to make reparations for Florence’s terrible treatment of Dante by explaining that (*Trattatello* 8, prima redazione),

conoscendo io me essere di quella medesima città, avvegna che picciola parte, della quale, considerate li meriti, la nobilità e la virtù, Dante Alighieri fu grandissima, e per questo, sì come ciascuno altro cittadino, a’ suoi onori sia in solido obligato [...]

Boccaccio also later laments Dante’s exile with an apostrophe to the vain confidence of mortals, and pleads that, even if the examples of Camillus, Rutilius, Coriolanus and both Scipios have faded from memory, «questo ricente caso [i.e. that of Dante] ti faccia con più temperate redine correr ne’ tuoi piaceri» (*ibid.* 10). By Boccaccio’s comparison, here the figure of Dante becomes assimilated to the figure of Roman Republican heroes – three out of five of whom (Camillus and the Scipios) would find a place in Petrarch’s own *De uiris illustribus*, again the work generally credited with resurrecting for the Renaissance the *uiri illustres* model of biography. And although Leonardo Bruni’s *Life* differs from Boccaccio’s on many points, he nevertheless also paints Dante as the ideal Florentine, in what Gibson has called his «attempt to make Dante into an emblematic figure who embodies the ideal Florentine citizen – learned, politically active, and conscious of how all spheres of human activity may best serve the city»¹⁸. Bruni emphasises, for example, that Dante fought valiantly for his country against the

¹⁶ Gilson 2005, 198.

¹⁷ Gilson 2005, 1.

¹⁸ Gilson 2005, 123.

Ghibellines at the Battle of Campaldino, and also explains the nature of Dante's 'principal study' in terms of the «vera scientia» which it contained (*Vita di Dante*, p. 548 Viti):

Lo studio suo [i.e. di Dante] principale fu poesia, ma non sterile, né povera, né fantastica, ma fecundata et arricchita et stabilita da vera scientia et di moltissime discipline.

The praise of Dante found in his Bruni's *Vita* has often been seen as propaganda celebrating his city's cultural superiority, what had certainly been the case with Lycurgus' praise of Euripides in *Against Leocrates*, where the poet is cast as a reflection and emblem of Athenian 'cultural' pre-eminence. For Lycurgus, Athens' status as 'school of Greece' is inextricably intertwined with the character of the city and its finest citizens, those Athenians of the past possessed of great patriotic nobility. It was, moreover, Bruni himself who in 1430 sent a letter on behalf of Florence to Ravenna petitioning for the return of Dante's remains. In that letter Bruni explains to Nastasio da Polenta that *Gloria quippe huius uiri* [i.e. Dante] *talis est ut etiam ciuitati nostre splendorem et laudem procul dubio afferat et illustret patriam illius ingenii lumen*¹⁹. The people of Ravenna, like the people of Macedon, were nevertheless unmoved by the appeal from the *patria* that had failed to recognise the value of the poet (and the poet as citizen) during his own lifetime – an epitaph by Dante's contemporary Bernardo Cannacio on the poet's sarcophagus in Ravenna (in a convent on a street now called 'Via Dante') reminds the reader that, to Dante, Florence was a «mother of little love» (ll. 5-6):

Hic claudor Dantes patriis extorris ab oris
Quem genuit parui Florentia mater amoris.

Bruni and Boccaccio are only two of the men who, though they differed on many points of Dante's poetry and his life, would come to cast him as one of Florence's greatest historical citizens; Bruni in particular does so as part of a programme that, similarly to Lycurgus', was highly concerned with arguing for the long-established cultural supremacy of his own city. What is more, Florence also saw efforts made by its leaders to reconcile some of the less 'democratic' aspects of Dante's poetry with the ideals of the Florentine state (one is reminded of the way in which Lycurgus' Euripidean rhetoric entirely suppresses the representation of Euripides the 'encomiast' of tyrants found in Plato's *Republic*). For example, one of the parts of the *Commedia* that needed explaining by those who would assimilate Dante's own politics with Florentine Republicanism was his apparent condemnation of Brutus and Cassius, the assassins of Julius Caesar (*Inferno* XXXIV). How could a true Florentine Republican deplore men who had tried to save Rome from tyranny? In his *De tyranno*, however, the humanist Coluccio Salutati, Chancellor of Florence from 1375-1406 and an important teacher of Bruni himself, defends Dante (as he does elsewhere) with an argument denying the popular mandate of Julius Caesar's rule, all in an attempt to reconcile the poet with Florentine political ideals²⁰.

It is in fact Salutati himself who is generally credited with the series of *tituli*, or short (four-line) epigrams that accompanied each member of a frescoed series of *uiri illustres* that were painted in an *aula minor* of Florence's Palazzo Vecchio, most likely in the last years of the

¹⁹ Leonardo Bruni, letter of 1 February 1430 to Nastasio da Polenta of Ravenna (p. 78 Viti).

²⁰ See the discussion of Gilson 2005, 66-69.

fourteenth century²¹. While the cycle is lost the *tituli* have been preserved, and thus we know that among these Florentine *uomini famosi* there were in fact the four great ‘modern’ Florentine poets: Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Zanobi da Strada. Salutati’s epigram for Dante in particular, however, draws attention to the exceptionality of his inclusion in a cycle otherwise dominated by Florentine and other historical leaders:

Stirpis Alagheriae sublimis gloria Dantes
 Hic te permixtum ducibus Florentia tantis
 Exhibet, autorem, quo noscat quilibet illum
 Qui cecinit lapsos, surgentes atque beatos.

In his oration *Against Leocrates* Lycurgus’ rhetoric had amounted to a similar case for the inclusion of Euripides in the ranks of the city’s great historical leaders, great Athenians such as Solon and even the mythical king Erechtheus whom Euripides had so patriotically depicted. In the case of Dante, then, we also find justifications in a number of forms and spread over a number of years for the addition of the poet to the ambitious pantheon of Florence’s intellectual and political ancestry, a pantheon that ranged from Alexander the Great to Roman emperors and Republican heroes. In both instances the rhetorical promotion of the poet to the constellation of a city’s *uiri illustres* is justified through praise not strictly of his poetry, but rather of his success in conferring glory upon the city (with his poetry) and embodying that city’s best qualities; these two aspects are then presented as the essence of the poet’s capacity to inspire later generations of citizens to emulate his noble patriotism.

In the *Habit of Art* Carpenter tells Auden and Britten that ‘Death shapes a life’, yet in the full course of his lines he also suggests that the artist’s death is what provides the public with a mandate to impose their own sense of shape on that life – what Bennett calls the «cue for biography». For Euripides and Dante, death set in slow motion the processes of rhetorical ‘repatriation’ to the cities that had once cast them out (albeit more figuratively than literally in Euripides’ case), processes which at some points involved a radical reshaping of the historical relationship between the poet, his city, and his fellow citizens. The ‘reception’ paradigms provided by these cases therefore serve to illustrate just a few of the many ways in which a poet’s life might be ‘modified’ in the generations after his death. Furthermore, even though the work and biographies of these two very different poets otherwise exhibit few points of contact, the impulse that we find in both instances to reconcile the poet’s popularity with his history of fraught civic relations underscores an aspect of the relationship between poet and public that marks a certain *continuità* between antiquity and the present day. This is the tendency to try to forge a personal connection with an artist, whether that connection is defined by a shared native city, intellectual heritage, life experiences... Athens and Florence had strong reasons to lay claim to Euripides and Dante, yet readers from elsewhere would have found different terms on which to feel the personal presence of the author in his work. While Auden wrote dolefully of Yeats, «Now he is scattered among a hundred cities», there is an ancient epitaph for Euripides (supposedly by Adaeus of Mytilene) which rather seems to rejoice in just such a ‘democratic’ prospect: Euripides may be buried in Macedon = Adaeus *AP* VII 51,5-6 (= *GPh* 15-16 GP),

²¹ See Hankey 1959.

σοὶ δ' οὐ τοῦτον ἐγὼ τίθεμαι τάφον, ἀλλὰ τὰ βράκχου
βήματα καὶ σκηναὶς ἐμβάδι σειομένας.

However, I do not consider this your tomb, but rather the stages of
and scene-paintings of Bacchus that quake with the step of buskins.

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